

FAITH IN THE JOURNEY:  
PERSONAL MYTHOLOGY AS PATHWAY TO THE SACRED

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## ABSTRACT

Faith in the Journey:

Personal Mythology as Pathway to the Sacred

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This dissertation explores the idea of personal mythology as an approach for engaging in the search for a more personal relationship to the sacred. Underlying this work is a concern with the post-modern dilemma of how to approach religious renewal in an age dominated by a reductionistic, materialistically oriented secularism on the one hand and dogmatic religious fundamentalisms on the other. Seeking to avoid both the demythologizing tendency of secularism and the equally damaging tendency of fundamentalism to literalize archetypal and mythic material, this dissertation explores the possibility of a third alternative. That alternative approach requires an ongoing personal engagement with both the world's religious and mythological traditions and the sacred dimension of each individual's life story from a perspective that is inherently symbolic, metaphorical, archetypal, and imaginal.

This work is interdisciplinary in nature and draws on content from the fields of comparative mythology, religious studies, and depth psychology. It is hermeneutical in approach, exploring and synthesizing this varied content in order to explicate the concept of personal mythology as a religious endeavor. In doing so, this dissertation first focuses on the evolution of the concept of personal mythology over the past century. Secondly, it explores a range of contemporary theological approaches for understanding the nature of the sacred, of divinity, and of religious faith that make sense in relationship to the

concept of personal mythology. Thirdly, this work explores ways in which personal mythology effectively synthesizes insights drawn from both depth psychology and religion. Fourthly, it focuses on relevant aspects of the work of Joseph Campbell and C. G. Jung, two individuals who have played key roles in conceptualizing the contemporary mythological approach to the religious domain of life. Lastly, this dissertation proposes the concept of “faith in the journey” as a metaphor for the religious implications of exploring one’s personal mythology. In this context, it is argued that seeking the sacred through the mythic dimension of one’s life story fosters an evolving form of personal religious faith predicated on a profound sense on the inherent rightness and necessity of one’s unique life journey.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to William Bostrom, my beloved partner and companion on the journey of life for the past 26 years. Without his loving encouragement and generous support in so many ways, this work would not have been possible. Most of all, I thank him for always having faith in my journey even when my own faith falters.

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The style used throughout this dissertation is in accordance with the *Modern Language Association Style Manual* (second edition, 1998) and Pacifica Graduate Institute's *Dissertation Handbook* (2001-2002).

“My life is the text in which I must find the revelation of the sacred.”

– Sam Keen  
*Hymns to an Unknown God*



## Chapter 1 Introduction and Overview

### *Personal Mythology and the Search for the Sacred*

In the introduction to *Symbols of Transformation*, C. G. Jung asked the simple yet profound question, “What is the myth you are living?” (*CW* 5: xxiv). That fundamental question is one which, in their related yet different ways, both religion and depth psychology seek to address. In a larger sense, this question of finding symbols and stories through which one may discover the meaning of one’s life seems to be a perennial one as old as human consciousness itself. What makes the asking and answering of Jung’s question particularly significant and urgent today is that, unlike previous generations, many contemporary men and women find themselves living in a time when the collective culture offers little alternative to wrestling personally with this question and deriving answers from the core of one’s individual experience.

For the majority of people living in the modern, secular world, however, a more basic issue must be addressed before dealing with Jung’s question, namely “Why bother with myths at all?” For most people reared in a culture without obvious or clear mythological underpinnings, it would appear that they are living well enough without a mythological context and that, as a species, perhaps human beings have outgrown the need for mythic consciousness. What remains invisible to these men and women is the inevitability of living out unconscious and ill-fitting mythologies if a conscious psychic process has not imaginally and reflectively disclosed more meaningful ones to take their place.

Since collective mythologies no longer generate a sense of existential meaning for many people, one alternative has been to turn mythic consciousness inward and attempt

to find the mythic dimension of each person's life story. But just what is meant by this idea of a "personal mythology?" While much of the second chapter of this dissertation will focus on variations in the way contemporary scholars and practitioners define what is meant by this idea, Stanley Krippner offers an effective, basic sense of the value of this concept. "Personal mythologies," he writes, "give meaning to the past, understanding to the present, and direction to the future" (139). He goes on to observe that personal mythologies "perform the functions of explaining, confirming, guiding, and sacralizing experience for the individual in a manner analogous to the way cultural myths once served those functions for an entire society." Another basic definition of personal myth, one that directly addresses the religious dimension of this concept, is that proposed by Robert Atkinson. "The personal myth," he writes, "is the personally sacred story of one's beliefs and experiences that order, shape, and direct one's life, which is also linked to the story we all share" (207).

Joseph Campbell observes that myths serve four fundamental functions. In delineating these functions, he characterizes the first as being metaphysical and religious in nature, serving to express our relationship to divinity, "that ultimate mystery, transcending names and forms" (*Masks of God* 609). The second function of myth, according to Campbell, is a cosmological one, serving to help one comprehend the natural order of the cosmos. The third mythic function, notes Campbell, is sociological in nature and intended to express the proper relationship between the individual and the collective. The fourth and final function of myth, in Campbell's view, is psychologically oriented and seeks to "foster the centering and unfolding of the individual," thereby

enabling men and women to find the meaning inherent in the inner workings of their own psyches (6).

Of Campbell's four mythic functions, one might argue that the cosmological one is largely served in the modern world through the evolving and increasingly complex mythology of theoretical science and, as such, is inherently non-personal in nature. By definition, the social function of mythology is collective in nature and, in our world, the one most completely in disarray and confusion. Moreover, while one may speculate on the nature of any myths that might arise to serve this function in our increasingly global culture, a personal approach to mythic meaning can never be more than peripherally concerned with this function of myth. In contrast, the mythic function most inherently connected with the notion of personal mythology is the psychological one, since it is fundamentally concerned with the evolving psyche of each individual person.

Though the psychological function of mythology will necessarily feature prominently in the content of this dissertation, it is with the first of Campbell's functions, the metaphysical and religious one, that I will be most essentially concerned. This mythic function has traditionally been the province of organized religion and, as a result, has tended in the past to be collective in orientation and effect. While there has undoubtedly always been a personally felt aspect of the experience of religious mythologies, both the myths themselves and the rituals embodying them were contained within the collective constraints of tradition and officially sanctioned theologies. It has been increasingly clear throughout much of the last century that, for many Western men and women, this domination of the sacred function of myth by traditional religious authority is no longer tenable. Moreover, while the initial effect of this development has

often been the wholesale rejection of collective religious mythologies and the complete alienation of many people from the religious dimension of life, such an outcome ultimately seems to be as untenable as the previously unquestioning reliance on outside religious authority.

Describing the impact of the alienation that many Western people feel regarding the dominant mythological premises of the monotheistic traditions, D. Stephenson Bond writes:

We are suffering from a failure of religious imagination. The signs lie in the growing number of people who see behind the curtain of their childhood faith and are dismayed to find a patriarchal image of God which they can no longer worship, who discover the dark side of God that goes unspoken, who search for new traditions to meet often indescribable hunger, or live without any religious practice at all. (52)

Moreover, individuals who have come to experience the Western religious traditions as either irrelevant or insufficient for their spiritual needs are unlikely to find abiding sustenance via eastern religions, revivals of occult traditions, or New Age practices without having first evolved a more personal orientation to the religious dimension of life. The principal thesis of this dissertation is that personal mythology can provide a highly viable approach for engaging in the search for such a relationship to the sacred.

Engaging in personal myth-work from a religious or spiritual perspective means reflecting deeply and imaginally on the relationship of the sacred—however that concept might be defined—to one's own life experience, dreams, and fantasies. It equally means exploring one's emotional and intellectual response to both existing myths and symbols and those mythic images that arise spontaneously within the psyche of the individual. Regardless of whether such an archetypal engagement with the sacred dimension of one's personal mythology leads to the adoption of a purely personal orientation to the religious

aspect of life, or to a return to the religion of one's childhood blessed with a more personal relationship to that tradition, or to the embracing of another tradition more in keeping with one's innate religious sensibility, there is the real possibility of a more personally engaged and meaningful approach to religious life.

*Relevant Developments in Contemporary Religious Experience*

The potential religious implications of engaging in personal myth-work are particularly significant, since there is considerable evidence that many people are actively searching for new, more personally meaningful ways of relating to the sacred. For example, a major Gallup poll on religious issues conducted in 1998 asked "How much have you thought about the basic meaning and value of your life during the past two years—a lot, a fair amount, or only a little?" In response to this question, nearly seven out of ten Americans indicated that they had thought about such issues "a lot," while less than one in ten responded "only a little" (Gallup 42). In a similar vein, when respondents to that same survey were asked, "Do you feel the need to experience spiritual growth?" more than eight out of ten said "yes" (79). As Wade Clark Roof observes of this trend, "discourse on spiritual 'journeys' and 'growth' is now a province not just of theologians and journalists, but of ordinary people in cafes, coffee bars, and bookstores across the country" (*Spiritual Marketplace* 7).

In reviewing prominent recent literature on the subject of major trends in the evolution of religious life in the West, one may observe two important, interrelated themes associated with the contemporary search for the sacred that are directly relevant to the religious or spiritual aspect of working with personal mythology. The first of these general themes concerns a growing emphasis on the experiential dimension of the search

for the sacred, while the second relates to the increasingly pluralistic nature of the contemporary religious landscape in the United States and Europe and the effect of that pluralism on religious orientation.

While the importance of the idea of seeking an experiential basis for religious belief and practice has increased dramatically since the coming to maturity of the Baby Boom generation in the late 1960s and the 1970s, one can trace the roots of this development back to the start of the twentieth century and the work of William James. In the now-famous distinction between “firsthand” and “secondhand” religion described in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, James laid the theoretical seeds of the contemporary search for an experiential approach to religious life. For James, firsthand religion is always based on direct, personal experience of the divine in one’s life. That form of religious expression, James writes, encompasses “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (36). In contrast, secondhand religion, according to James, is based on a collective and traditional adherence to a canon of dogmatic precepts about the nature of the divine.

For James, as for many people today, the firsthand variety of religion is the primary and essential form of religious experience. For one thing, firsthand religion is ultimately the source of all religion, which only becomes secondhand when the initial revelatory experience of the initiator of a religious tradition bequeaths that revelation to his or her followers. From this point of view, as that initial revelation becomes more and more institutionalized and theologized, as it is transformed into a canonical and orthodox

form of religious teaching, it also tends to become more and more distant from a flesh-and-blood experience of the sacred.

Regarding the danger inherent in this tendency, particularly as it relates to the Western (and largely monotheistic) religious experience, Roof observes:

When the institutional forms of religion become fixed, objective entities—that is abstracted as a belief system somehow set apart from the everyday world, as has happened in the Western tradition—there is a real danger that they will get cut off from the inner meanings and feelings that gave them life to begin with. (*Generation of Seekers* 78)

The desire to experience the sacred directly, “to have an encounter with God or the divine, or simply nature and other people, without the intervention of inherited beliefs, ideas, and concepts,” observes Roof, “is understandable, not simply because secondhand religion can be empty of meaning, but because only personal experience is in some sense authentic and empowering” (67). While this perspective on the primacy of religious experience in many ways runs counter to the traditional view within the monotheistic traditions regarding the fundamental impossibility of direct human experience of the divine, it nevertheless remains an important concern for many contemporary religious seekers.

While one typically does not hear people outside of the academic study of religion refer to the distinction between “firsthand” and “secondhand” religion, one can easily see the enormous importance of this distinction for the general public in the very different connotations ascribed in common parlance to the terms “religion” and “spirituality.” Roof, who has extensively explored the role of religion in the lives of the Baby Boom generation, observes that almost all of the people interviewed by his team of researchers “had an opinion about the differences between being ‘religious’ and being ‘spiritual.’”

Even more interesting, Roof observes, while these interviewees did not always agree as to what the difference was, “they were sure there was one” (*Generation of Seekers* 76). Robert Wuthnow, who has also researched religious trends in America since the 1950s, concurs with Roof. With regard to his research, Wuthnow observes, “Many of the people we talked to had thus come to find special meaning in the contrast between spirituality and religion,” adding that “for them, spirituality was a broader term that signified the value of drawing insights from many sources, whereas religion was simply the particular institutional manifestation of different traditions” (74).

By definition, a key distinction between firsthand and secondhand religion relates to the relative importance within each orientation of personal experience of divinity or the sacred. For those seeking a firsthand connection to religion, of course, such personal experience is essential and foundational. In contrast, for adherents of secondhand religion, personal religious experience is viewed as essentially unimportant or, worse still, deeply suspect. As Harvey Cox observes, “professional theologians and ecclesiastical leaders will usually be skeptical of ‘experience,’ while lay people will tend to trust their experiences more than they trust theology” (316).

A particularly important aspect of this experiential approach to religion is the degree to which it encourages a conscious borrowing of symbols, beliefs, and practices from a wide range of sacred traditions, a trend that been greatly facilitated by the existence of an increasingly pluralistic religious environment in the United States and Europe today. Among the questions Roof asked in his research on Baby Boomer religiosity, was “Is it good to explore many different religious faiths and learn from them, or should one stick to a particular faith?” He found that 60 percent of his respondents



expressed a preference for exploring a range of sacred traditions, while only 28 percent chose the option of sticking to a single religious faith. Writing about the incredible breadth of this development within contemporary religious life, Roof observes:

A global world offers an expanded religious menu: images, rituals, symbols, meditation techniques, healing practices, all of which may be borrowed eclectically, from a variety of sources such as Eastern spirituality, Theosophy and New Age, Witchcraft, Paganism, the ecology movement, nature religions, the occult traditions, psychotherapy, feminism, the human potential movement, science, and, of course, all of the world's great religious traditions. (*Spiritual Marketplace* 73)

One result of this development is the increasing commonness of individuals simultaneously practicing differing forms of faith drawn from a global storehouse of religious traditions. “While there is nothing strange about there being many religions around for people to practice,” writes John H. Berthrong, “it is still considered shocking in some circles that it is less and less strange to find a Zen Catholic or a Confucian Methodist than it would have been twenty years ago (xv). One can see evidence of this growing trend toward mixing sacred traditions in the large numbers of Jews and Christians drawn to Buddhist theology and practice, of Christian women engaged in Goddess worship, of African-American Christians practicing Yoruba and other indigenous African traditions, and of Irish Catholics pondering ancient Celtic and contemporary Wiccan beliefs and practices. When one bears in mind the fact that such two-way religious mergings say nothing of the increasing tendency to mix elements from multiple sacred traditions, one can see that the range of possible inter-religious combinations is endless.

One obvious impact of this intense inter-religious exploration and borrowing has been a radical shift in the way many individuals have come to view the myths, symbols,

and rituals of the world's many distinctive religious traditions. As Daniele Hervieu-Leger writes, religious traditions have largely become “symbolic ‘toolboxes’ on which the men and women of today draw freely, without this necessarily meaning that they identify themselves with the comprehensive view of the world [. . .] that historically was part of the language of the traditions concerned” (141). Of course, leaders within the various religious traditions have tended to decry this development as leading to “religion a la carte” and predict that such mixing and matching of elements from widely different traditions are doomed to failure as sustainable religious orientations. Nevertheless, given its increasingly widespread popularity and acceptance in the Western world, this adoption of a “toolbox” approach to religion may well indicate a fundamental shift in religious consciousness in the West.

Harvey Cox suggests that the trend toward religious “bricolage” —quoting Hervieu-Leger’s term for this development—ultimately implies a shift toward to the notion of personal religion. Attempting to define this emergent concept, Cox describes personal religion as:

a radically personal style of piety in which, as it were, each person is constantly compiling his or her own collage of symbols and practices in the light of what coheres with their own changing experiences in the tortuous passage through life in a world where the old, allegedly comprehensive charts no longer command confidence. (305)

In his research on the religious life of Baby Boomers, Roof also sees considerable evidence of this movement towards personal religion. Describing this trend as “reflexive spirituality,” he observes this approach requires that individuals accept the responsibility “to cobble together a religious world from available images, symbols, moral codes, and

doctrines, thereby exercising considerable agency in defining and shaping what is considered to be religiously meaningful (*Spiritual Marketplace* 75).

These two interrelated religious developments—the one towards a more and more experiential orientation to religious life and other towards a more pluralistic approach to the evolution of one’s religious orientation—have great relevance to the idea of adopting personal myth-work as pathway to the sacred. With the regard to the former development, deeply working with the mythic and archetypal dimensions of one’s life story inherently asks one to reflect on the times in one’s life when he or she has personally confronted the sacred dimension of human existence. Moreover, such mythic reflection also leads one to contemplate the degree to which the sacred regularly intersects with one’s daily experience of being alive. Finally, working with personal mythology can help one become a more effective bricoleur of sacred symbols and stories, thereby providing individual religious and spiritual seekers with a more effective form of religious “glue” with which to construct more meaningful personal religious orientations.

#### *Neither Secularism nor Fundamentalism*

One of the most difficult problems faced by post-modernism has been the dilemma of how to approach the possibility of religious renewal given the consequences of three hundred years of enlightenment thought. Given the powerful emphasis within post-Enlightenment Western civilization on rationality, empiricism, and materialism, traditional approaches to religious life and belief have tended to become less and less tenable for most educated people. According to Peter Berger, the confrontation between this modern frame of reference and the largely literal approach to the understanding of mythology inherent within pre-enlightenment Western religion has left contemporary

individuals faced with three alternative—and equally untenable—ways of relating to the religious aspect of life.

The first alternative consists of a wholesale denial of the relevance of any possible religious dimension to life and the adoption to a completely secular orientation. The second requires the return to a strict and uncompromising fundamentalism that, in effect, denies the validity of all modern thought, as well as most social, scientific, and cultural developments since the seventeenth century. In addition to these two options, Berger observes, a third approach attempts to eliminate altogether the dilemma of having to choose between the reductionism of the secular approach and the dogmatism of fundamentalism. This third alternative seeks to steer a course between these two completely opposing frames of reference by stripping religious belief and practice of all those mythic or mystical elements potentially at odds with modernity. Many people, unable to adapt to the tremendously restrictive mindset of the fundamentalist alternative, have either adopted an entirely secular approach to life or have chosen adherence to a demythologized and demystified kind of secularized religion.

Developments during the past half-century in scientific disciplines as diverse as theoretical physics, environmental science, depth psychology, and mind-body medicine, however, have begun to impel a reconsideration of the validity and viability of any purely rational, empirical, and materialist vision of reality. These developments—along with new streams of thought in areas ranging from philosophy and sociology to linguistics and literary criticism—have resulted in the evolution of a post-modern frame of reference that has once again reopened the question of the possibility of a meaningful religious orientation to life which is open to both the mythic and the mystical.

Berger has characterized this post-modern option, opposed both to secularism and fundamentalism, as “the heretical alternative.” In this context, Berger observes that the English word “heresy” comes from the Greek verb *hairein*, meaning “to choose” (27). In essence, heresy implies choosing anything other than that which is considered orthodox by religious authority. As Berger further observes, in pre-modern times collective religious certainty in the orthodox vision would have been the norm and heresy the exception. Since the rise of the Enlightenment, however, such religious certainty has been harder and harder for most people to adhere to, making a heretical approach to religious matters more normative for us.

In Berger’s frame of reference, the fundamentalist approach to dealing with questions of religious orientation is called “the deductive option” (61). Berger writes that this option simply “reasserts the authority of religious tradition in the face of modern secularity.” As a result, he continues, tradition is “restored to the status of a datum, or something given a priori,” making it “possible to deduce religious affirmations from it more or less as was the norm in pre-modern times.” Berger calls the effort to reinterpret religious tradition in terms of modern secularity, which he sees as the only existing religious alternative to fundamentalism, “the reductive option.” This option, Berger writes, is “taken to be a compelling necessity” if one is to participate in both religious life and modern consciousness. In applying the reductive option, he continues, “modern consciousness and its alleged categories become the only criteria of validity for religious reflection” (62).

Against both the deductive and reductive options, Berger proposes what he calls “the inductive option,” the approach that forms the basis of the heretical imperative. In

describing this third alternative, Berger writes that the inductive option means relying on “experience as the ground of all religious affirmations—one’s own experience, to whatever extent this is possible, and to the experience embodied in a particular range of traditions.” Far from denying the validity of empiricism, Berger notes, this option implies “a deliberately empirical attitude, a weighing and accessing frame of mind” which is “unwilling to impose closure on the quest for religious truth by invoking any authority whatsoever—not the authority of this or that traditional *Deus dixit*, but also not the authority of modern thought or consciousness” (63). In opposition to fundamentalism, Berger observes, the adoption of the heretical imperative “means a reassertion of the human as the only possible starting point for theological reflection and a rejection of any external authority (be it scriptural, ecclesiastical, or traditional) that would impose itself on such reflection.” In opposition to the forces of reductionism, he continues, the inductive option “means a reassertion of the supernatural and sacred character of religious experience, and the rejection of the particularly oppressive authority of modern secular consciousness” (154).

Berger’s cogent reflections on the dilemma of having to choose between the soulless qualities of the purely secular frame of reference and the unrelenting dogmatism of fundamentalism have particular relevance to the notion of developing a personal sense of mythic consciousness as pathway to the sacred. Both Berger’s heretical imperative and personal myth-work are inherently reflective and experiential in their orientation to the experience of the sacred. Both eschew adherence to any form of traditional religious or spiritual orthodoxy in favor of individual inquiry. Indeed, personal myth-work

potentially offers a most effective means for adopting Berger's "heretical imperative" in the evolution of one's orientation to religious and spiritual life.

Another scholar who has written about the contemporary dilemma of finding a third alternative to both fundamentalism and secularism is Robert A. Segal. Segal describes this dilemma as one concerning "the relationship between modernity and religion" ("Is Analytical Psychology a Religion?" 547). Modernity is defined by Segal as the worldview that is "co-extensive with science, both natural and social." Religion, in contrast, is the older worldview supported by pre-modern mythological systems. Segal sees the relationship between modernity and religion as taking one of three forms, forms that he respectively characterizes as "fundamentalist," "rational," or "romantic" in nature (548).

The first of these three orientations, Segal observes, "pits religion against modernity and opts for religion," adding that fundamentalism either ignores or denies the "inescapability" of modernity (547). The second of these orientations, he continues, "is like the fundamentalist view in one key respect," since "it, too, pits modernity against religion." For both fundamentalists and rationalists, Segal writes, "there can be no modern religion," adding that for both groups, "the term 'modern religion' is a contradiction." But as opposed to fundamentalism," he continues. "rationalism opts for modernity over religion." In this regard, he writes, for rationalists "religion is not merely unnecessary for moderns but outright impossible." This is because, ironically like the fundamentalists, rationalists literalize the myths underlying religion and pit them against science as an explanation for the functioning of the physical world. Whereas fundamentalists cling to the explanatory functions of religious myths—as in the case of

endorsing the Biblical creation myth over the theory of evolution—for the rationalists, religion “can work only when its explanation is accepted, and science precludes the acceptance of that explanation.”

The third view, which Segal describes as the romantic approach, “breaks with both fundamentalism and rationalism in its refusal to oppose religion to modernity.” Rather than insisting on choosing between these two opposing views, the romantic view attempts to reconcile them. Like fundamentalists, Segal observes, “romantics prize religion as an eternal and invaluable possession” (548). However, in contrast to fundamentalists, he continues, “romantics do not prize religion as an explanation.” Indeed, for them, religion “serves to do almost anything but explain: to express, to advocate, to comfort, to harmonize, to give meaning.” Religion continues to serve these functions, Segal argues, by addressing the core existential questions of human life in symbolic, metaphorical, and imaginal terms.

In this way, Segal argues, for romantics “religion while an explanation until superseded by science, can still exist, and more, thrive even when no longer an explanation.” Moreover, he adds, according to the romantic view, the conflict between religion and science gives the former “an opportunity to rid itself of its explanatory baggage and to make explicit for the first time its non-explanatory core.” As a result, far from posing a threat to religion,” Segal writes, “science abets religion by obliging it to show that it has always been other than an explanation, even if its non-explanatory core is recognized only now” (549).

By adopting a symbolic and imaginal approach to religious life, the romantic orientation allows for a reconciliation between modernity and religion. Moreover, given



the inherently symbolic and metaphorical nature of mythic consciousness, such an approach is fully compatible with the idea of seeking the sacred through the vehicle of personal mythology. It is not surprising that Segal, who has written extensively on both C. G. Jung and Joseph Campbell, the two most influential figures in the evolution of both personal myth and a mythic orientation to contemporary religious life, describes both men as typifying the romantic approach (Joseph Campbell 264-71; “Is Analytical Psychology a Religion?” 549-550).

Both Berger’s heretical imperative and Segal’s romantic orientation to the relationship between modernity and religion are deeply relevant to the concept of approaching the religious dimension of life through the vehicle of personal mythology. Commenting on the significance of applying personal mythic consciousness to questions of religious meaning, Robert Ellwood observes that such an approach affords a middle path between the twin perils of fundamentalism and secularism. “In a semisecularized and rampantly pluralistic world in which the hold of objective religious truth is increasingly problematic, but in which religious questions and yearnings are certainly real,” he writes, “mythology is a viable and not ignoble alternative to a stark choice between dogmatic religion and sheer secularism (177).

### *Organization of the Study*

This study is interdisciplinary in nature and draws on content from the realms of comparative mythology, religious studies, and depth psychology. Hermeneutical in approach, the study will explore and synthesize this varied content in order to explicate the concept of personal mythology as a religious endeavor. In particular, this study takes as its interpretive jumping-off point Joseph Campbell’s observations that “Myths are

clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life” (*Power of Myth* 5). Bearing in mind that such mythic clues are always symbolic and metaphorical in nature, they require interpretation to become meaningful. Moreover, given the ambiguous and often paradoxical nature of the meanings of symbols and metaphors, this study takes as an assumption the recognition that ambiguity and paradox are, therefore, inherent to the nature of personal mythology. In addition, the interpretive frame of this study recognizes that, like collective myths in the life of a culture, personal myths—even conflicting or contradictory ones—are always “true” within the life of an individual and yet remain fundamentally subjective creations of the psyche open to constant reinterpretation.

During the course of its development, this study will explore five general areas of concern regarding personal mythology. The first of these concerns focuses on understanding the overall conceptual nature of personal mythology. The second of these areas of concern explores contemporary ways of thinking about the nature of the sacred that make sense in relationship to the idea of personal mythology. The third area of concern explores the ways in which personal mythology effectively synthesizes insights from both psychology and religion, thereby helping to bridge the gap between these two frames of reference. The fourth of these concerns focuses on the work of two individuals, Joseph Campbell and C. G. Jung, both of whom have played key roles in the evolution of personal mythology as an approach to the religious or spiritual domain of life. The fifth and final area of concern focuses on the concept of “faith in the journey” as a metaphor for the religious implications of personal mythology.

In the context of these five focuses, the next six chapters of this work will explore various aspects of the general theme of employing personal mythology as pathway to the

sacred. The first of these subsequent chapters lays basic groundwork for this study by considering the general nature of personal mythology as a concept and a practice.

Chapter Two begins with an overview of the history and evolution of personal mythology as a concept. After reviewing some of the ways in which personal mythology has been defined as an endeavor by its practitioners, this chapter then continues with a discussion of the idea of “personal mythwork” as an ongoing process of inner exploration and reflection focused on the evolving nature of one’s personal mythology. This chapter’s overall conceptual review of the field of personal mythology also explores the inter-relationship of the universal/collective and the particular/personal dimensions of personal myth, as well as the difference between “inductive” and “deductive” approaches to engaging in personal mythwork.

The third chapter sets a context for reflecting on the idea of “the sacred” as it relates to the religious or spiritual dimension of working with personal mythology. This discussion begins with a brief exploration of the larger religious function which mythology has always served. Following these introductory observations is a discussion of the dictionary definitions and etymology of the word “sacred” and the sense in which this term is used today. This chapter then considers the increasingly important role of the symbolic and metaphorical within contemporary theological discourse relating to the nature of divinity and the sacred. Next, this chapter considers the traditional opposition and separation of the immanent and transcendent aspects of the sacred and the paradoxical problem this opposition poses for contemporary religious experience. In a similar vein, this chapter also explores the relationship between the idea of the sacred and that of the “profane.” In the context of these dichotomies, this chapter also considers

how one's personal mythology might provide a container in which these opposing dimensions of the sacred might dialog with each other, resulting in an "ordinary" or "everyday" sense of the holy. This chapter also explores the concept of "narrative theology" and its implications for personal mythology as a tool for connecting with the sacred. Finally, this chapter contemplates the relationship between a mythically based experience of the sacred and the search for an existential sense of personal meaning.

The fourth chapter explores specific frames of reference for understanding both the specific qualities of the sacred, as well as the ways in which the sacred might be encountered. In particular, this chapter considers five distinct conceptual approaches to comprehending and apprehending the sacred, all of which are compatible with the idea of personal mythology as pathway to the sacred. Beginning with Rudolf Otto's concept of the numinous, this discussion also considers Mircea Eliade's idea of heirophany, Paul Tillich's notion of "ultimate concern," Martin Buber's concept of "I and Thou," and Maurice Friedman's idea of "touchstones of reality."

The fifth chapter focuses on the work of the comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell as it has shaped and inspired the creative application of personal mythological consciousness. Based on Campbell's ideas that myths must remain "transparent to transcendence" in order to function effectively as the "masks of god," this chapter begins with an exploration of the universalist and symbolic orientation of Campbell's work. Next, this chapter explores the profound relationship between Campbell's approach to myth and the particular mystical orientation known as the "perennial philosophy." This chapter then explores the critical, yet paradoxical, significance of Campbell's emphasis on the idea of the "symbol without meaning" when combined with his emphasis on the

fundamentally experiential nature of mythology. Finally, Campbell's concept of the "Hero's Journey," is explored as a metaphor for the evolution of the sacred dimension of an individual's personal mythology.

The sixth chapter explores the strong connection between the idea of personal mythology as pathway to the sacred and the work of the depth psychologist C. G. Jung. It begins with an exploration of the general relationship between depth psychology and both mythology and religion. In that context, this chapter briefly compares of the orientation of Jung regarding these matters with that of Sigmund Freud, the founder of depth psychology. This chapter then proceeds to an evaluation of the specific roles played by mythology and religion within Jungian psychology. Next, this chapter explores a variety of Jungian concepts and considers how these ideas relate to the theme of personal mythology as a religious endeavor. Concepts discussed in this chapter include the collective unconscious and archetypes, as well as the nature and role of symbolic and mythic consciousness within Jungian psychology. This chapter also explores how archetypal dreams, the Jungian technique of active imagination, and the occurrence of those meaningful coincidences called "synchronicities" can all provide insight into the religious aspect of one's personal mythology. This chapter concludes with an exploration of the concept of individuation and its relationship to the idea of personal mythology as pathway to the sacred.

The seventh and final chapter of this dissertation proposes the idea of "faith in the journey" as an overarching metaphor for the search for the sacred through the vehicle of personal mythology. In doing so, this chapter first explores a variety of ways of considering the phenomenon of faith that are potentially relevant to the concept of

personal myth. This chapter then examines the general nature of the archetype of the journey, followed by a discussion of three key forms of this larger archetype, namely the quest, the initiation, and the pilgrimage. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the concept of *amor fati*, or “the love of one’s fate,” as a framework for engaging a sense of faith in one’s life journey. Such a faith, this chapter argues, will be less concerned with embracing abstract concepts of the sacred and of divinity than with experientially engaging the mysterious, paradoxical, and mythic nature of the unfolding of one’s story throughout course of a lifetime.

## Chapter 2 On the Nature of Personal Mythology

### *On the Development of Personal Mythology as a Concept*

According to Stanley Krippner, the first recorded reference to the idea of a personal approach to mythology occurred in 1926, when art critic Carl Einstein described the worldview of painter Paul Klee as manifesting a “private mythology” (139). A case can be made, however, that the first work proposing a mythological foundation for individual human experience was actually published more than a decade earlier. In 1912, C. G. Jung published his seminal work, *Symbols of Transformation*, the work that initially postulated his vision of an inherently mythological basis to the operation of the human psyche. In the introduction to the fourth edition of this work, Jung asks the question, “What is the myth you are living?” He goes on to observe that, in the process of writing this book, “I took it upon myself to know ‘my’ myth, and I regarded this as the task of tasks” (*CW* 5: xxiv-xxv).

In 1961, near the end of his life, Jung repeats this theme of the mythic nature of personal experience, writing in the prologue of his memoir, *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*, “I have now undertaken, in my eighty-third year, to tell my personal myth.” Commenting on the inherently subjective nature of the process of telling one’s story in mythic terms, he also observes that he can only “tell stories.” Continuing in this vein, Jung goes on to declare, “Whether or not the stories are ‘true’ is not the problem,” finally concluding, the “only question is whether what I tell is my fable, my truth” (3).

Krippner additionally notes that the first use of the term “personal myth” within psychoanalytic literature was by Ernst Kris in an article published in 1956. In this article, Krippner writes, Kris employs this term to “describe certain elusive dimensions of the

human personality that he felt psychoanalysts need to consider if their attempts to bring about change were to be effective and lasting” (139). In applying the term “personal myth,” Kris himself refers to individuals whose “personal history is not only [. . .] an essential part of their self-representation,” but also “a treasured possession to which the patient is attached with a peculiar devotion.” “In this sense,” he continues, “I propose to speak of [their personal history] as a ‘personal myth,’ which, as all living myth, extends from the past into the future” (654). Kris then discusses the case histories of two individuals who, he believes, manifest this sense of a personal myth, finally concluding that they “do not borrow their autobiography from cultural tradition, or any general mythology. They are the creators, and their myth is a personal one” (680). Unlike later Jungian, humanistic, and transpersonal psychological views on personal mythology, however, Kris’s earlier psychoanalytic position generally does not consider the personal myth to be a form of personal adaptation, but rather a kind of “screen” blocking integration of unconscious, repressed material (681).

Along with Jung, another key figure in the development and promotion of the idea of personal mythology was the comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell. From his earliest writing onward, Campbell wrote about the ways in which the study of the various mythologies of the world are directly relevant to the lives of contemporary men and women. In 1949, his first major work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, introduced the now-famous concept of the “Hero’s Journey,” a concept which he repeatedly suggested is as much a model of life today as for our distant ancestors. Indeed, that volume ends with a chapter entitled “The Hero Today” and considers the contemporary significance of the heroic journey for contemporary people. In 1965, Campbell went on to introduce the



term “creative mythology” in the last of his four-volume *Masks of God* series, thereby describing the process by which modern individuals might reinterpret and revitalize the core myths of the world’s mythological traditions and, as a result, reclaim them for themselves. “Creative mythology,” he writes, “springs not, like theology, from the dicta of authority, but from the insights, sentiments, thoughts, and visions of an adequate individual, loyal to his own experience of value” (6-7).

In 1965, Arthur Warmoth introduced the concept of personal mythology to the literature of the newly emerging humanistic school of psychological thought. At that time, Warmoth employed the term “personal myth” in a brief article commenting on the way certain personal mystical experiences—in particular, those falling under the category of what Abraham Maslow termed “Peak Experience”—might take on a mythic quality for those individuals undergoing such episodes. Warmoth also specifically noted the possibility that such personal myths might fulfill on a personal level the function once performed by collectively shared cultural or religious mythologies. “The valuable peak experience,” he writes, “can be seen as fulfilling on a personal level a function that myths have historically performed for whole peoples” (18). Indeed, he goes on to suggest, the transformations brought about through such experiences may be all the more powerful because during such events “the role of powerful communal symbols is minimized, and the experience itself becomes a personal symbol” (19-20).

The first reference to the idea of personal mythology in the writings of archetypal psychologist James Hillman occurred in 1971, in what is described as a “psychological commentary” on the autobiography of the Hindu teacher Gopi Krishna. In that commentary, Hillman suggests that the various archetypal events reflected upon within

Krishna's recollections might be understood as aspects of his "personal myth." Hillman further observes that the mythic quality of Krishna's narrative is comparable to that employed by Jung in the creation of the latter's *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* (43).

In 1973, Sam Keen and Anne Valley-Fox published the first comprehensive self-help text on working with personal mythology, a volume entitled *Your Mythic Journey: Finding Meaning in Your Life Through Writing and Storytelling*. In the introduction to this work, Keen and Valley-Fox observe that, despite the continuing existence and power of collective mythologies, "finally, the entire legacy and burden of cultural and family myths comes to rest on the individual." Being content with neither an unconscious or unconditional adherence or rejection of the myths of one's family and one's culture, these authors write, is an essential aspect of claiming a mature orientation to one's life. "We gain the full dignity and power of persons," they continue, "only when we create a narrative account of lives, dramatize our existence, and forge a coherent personal myth that combines elements of our cultural myth and family myth with unique stories that come from our experience" (xiv).

Keen traces the origin of his involvement with the concept of personal mythology back to his own mythic reflections on the death of his father in 1964. Later, "after experimenting with my own stories," he writes in *Your Mythic Journey*, "I began in 1969 to conduct seminars around the United States and Europe on 'Personal Mythology'." Keen subsequently went on to interview Joseph Campbell for the popular magazine *Psychology Today* in 1971 ("Man and Myth"). While in the midst of that interview process, Keen further relates, the Esalen Institute called and asked Campbell if he would do a seminar there and Campbell suggested doing the workshop together with Keen.

From that point onward, Keen writes, he and Campbell did seminars together “combining the methods of recovering personal mythology with reflection on classical mythical themes” (Keen and Valley-Fox, *Your Mythic Journey* xviii).

In both 1979 and 1989, the Humanistic Psychology division of the American Psychological Association sponsored national symposia on the topic of personal mythology organized by Stanley Krippner. The papers presented in the latter symposium were edited by Krippner in the summer of 1990 and published in a special issue of the journal *The Humanistic Psychologist* entitled “Personal Mythology: Psychological Perspectives.” With titles ranging from “Our Inner Cast of Characters” to “Life Stories and Personal Mythmaking,” the articles in this volume explored a range of approaches to the application of the idea of personal mythology within the humanistic psychological model.

One of the contributors to that special issue was David Feinstein, a psychologist who had already joined with Krippner in 1988 to co-author a self-help volume entitled *Personal Mythology: Using Ritual, Dreams, and Imagination to Discover Your Inner Story*. Based, in part, on workshops employing a guided process for helping laypersons to discover the mythic dimension of the personal and interpersonal conflicts in their lives, this volume was substantially revised and enlarged in 1997 and republished under the title *The Mythic Path*. “Because of a convergence of developments including the speed of social change, the breakdown of community, the ascendance of the individual in Western society, and electronic media that portray the culture’s diverse and rapidly shifting mythic imagery,” write Krippner and Feinstein in this revised work, “myth making has become an intimate matter, the domain and responsibility of each person” (14).

In 1990, a third self-help volume employing the concept of personal mythology was published. Written by Stephen Larsen, another close associate of Campbell and his official biographer, this work is entitled *The Mythic Imagination: Your Quest for Meaning through Personal Mythology*. Employing the term “conscious mythmaking” to describe his approach to the concept of personal mythology, Larsen suggests a twofold purpose for engaging consciously in personal mythwork. Regarding the first of these purposes, Larsen observes, consciously working with myth potentially offers a “needful kind of immunity to destructive [...] myth forms,” adding that “by willingly entering to dialogue with myth we forestall being taken unaware by it in the neediness of our mythic deprivation.” The second purpose, he continues, involves “the ‘living’ nature of myths and the necessity for them to address the circumstances of our lives” (232). For this to happen, Larsen writes, “the myths must arise out from within us in moments of genuine need—‘crying out for a vision,’ as the Plains Indians would say, or seeking the Asclepian sanctuary of the ancient Greeks” (233). Combining Jungian material on the archetypal nature of the unconscious with Larsen’s earlier work on the shamanic nature of psychotherapy, this work also directly employs Campbell’s concept of creative mythology.

Another key development in the evolution of the concept of personal mythology was the publication in 1993 of *Living Myth: Personal Meaning as a Way of Life*, by D. Stephenson Bond. In this work, Bond, a Jungian analyst, offers a framework for applying symbolic and imaginal consciousness to recognize the mythic dimension of everyday life. Describing his approach to personal mythwork at the start of this volume, Bond writes:

A living myth is in many ways a fantasy that has become a way of life. To me, the most vital aspect of mythology is not found in the stories of gods

and goddesses of long ago, nor in the psychological truths those stories reflect, but rather in the contemporary framework of images and meaning that are found in our own lifestyles. There is an intimate connection between our way of life—the rhythm and structure of our weekly, monthly, and yearly cycles—and the myth that informs our life. (1)

By far the most thoroughly Jungian treatment of this subject, *Living Myth* was also inspired by the work of Campbell, since Bond acknowledges in its introduction that the book initially evolved out the experience of leading a discussion group on Campbell's television series with Bill Moyers, *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*.

Also first published in 1993, Dan McAdams's *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* reflects the first work to directly employ the concept of personal myth within the context of developmental psychology. Also influenced by the psychological orientation or school that has recently come to be known as "narrative psychology," McAdams describes the ways one's story tends to evolve through the various stages of life, from childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, through midlife, and finally into elderhood. "I must come to see in all its particulars the narratives of the self—the personal myth—that I have tacitly, even unconsciously, composed over the course of my years," McAdams observes, adding "it is a story I continue to revise, and tell to myself" (and sometimes to others) as I go on living" (11).

Most recently, William G. Doty introduced the term "individual mythostory" to the field of personal mythology. Doty defines this concept as "the self-crafting of autobiography" which incorporates a "mythostoried account of the personal origins, strongest and weakest suits, and individual features" (*Mythography* 43). Doty further observes that "each of us develops a personal set of mythostories, a means of relating our own existence to the larger cultural and universal meanings that have been treasured in

the past.” In commenting on the significance ascribed to one’s mythostory, Doty notes that its importance “doubtlessly is related to the sense of important ‘history’ conveyed in myths.” Further considering this idea of an inherent sense of history in both the personal mythostory and collective myths, Doty writes, “I do not refer to history-as-chronicle but to meaningful history, the historic rather than the historical” (44).

*On the Nature of Personal Mythology*

To comprehend the nature of personal mythology more fully as a concept, it is also important to consider its relationship to the larger discipline from which it has evolved, namely that of the general study of mythology. Complicating this initial question is the profound difficulty one faces in concretely delimiting the meaning of terms like “myth” and “mythology” in the first place. The recognition of this difficulty, a key observation of postmodern scholarship in the study of mythology, is clearly expressed in an observation of Eric Gould:

Myth is now so encyclopedic a term that its means everything or nothing. We can find in it whatever we want to say is essential about the way humans try to interpret their place on earth. Myth is the synthesis of values which uniquely manages to mean the most things to most men. It is allegory and tautology, reason and unreason, logic and fantasy, waking thought and dream, atavism and the perennial, archetype and metaphor, origin and end. What a burden myth has to carry as a portmanteau term!  
(5)

Effectively working with this simultaneously nebulous and all-inclusive quality of mythology as a concept has required contemporary mythologists and mythographers to develop what Doty describes as “polyphasic” definitions of this subject. Aspects of Doty’s own comprehensive effort to derive such a definition offers an excellent vantage

point from which to consider the relationship between mythology and personal mythology. Doty writes that:

a mythological corpus consists of (1) a usually complex network of myths that are (2) culturally important, (3) imaginal (4) stories, conveying by means of (5) metaphoric and symbolic diction, (6) graphic imagery, (7) and emotional conviction and participation (8) the primal, foundational accounts of (9) aspects of the real, experienced world and (10) humankind's roles and relative statuses within it. Mythologies may (11) convey the political and moral values of a culture and (12) provide systems of interpreting (13) individual experience within a universal perspective, which may include (14) suprahuman entities as well as (15) aspects of the natural and cultural orders. Myths may be enacted or reflected in (16) rituals, ceremonies, or dramas, and (17) they may provide material for secondary elaboration, the constituent mythemes (mythic units) having become merely images or reference points for a subsequent story [. . .]. (*Mythography* 33-4)

While the more collective and communally oriented of these seventeen elements may be less relevant to the idea of personal mythology than to cultural mythology, a surprisingly high percentage of the components of Doty's definition apply equally well to both the collective and personal forms of mythology. As will be seen, both consist of networks of stories that employ metaphor, symbol, and graphic image. Both encourage and stimulate participation and engagement at a deeply emotional level. Both cultural mythology and personal mythology speak of the origins of worlds, albeit the world we share for the former and the personal world of the individual human being for the latter.

As will also be seen, since personal mythologies do not exist in isolation from collective, cultural, and societal mythologies, but rather grow out of and within them, even the seemingly non-personal elements of Doty's definition bear some relevance to the idea of personal mythology. For example, personal mythologies often incorporate references to collective political and moral values, even if those references are as likely to be antagonistic or skeptical of such values as to endorse them.

In particular, a primary concern of personal mythology is Doty's idea of interpreting "individual experience within a universal perspective." That such an interpretation of personal experience may engage not only the relationship of the individual human to the natural world and the world of culture, but also one's relationship to the transpersonal dimension of human existence is a particular focus of this dissertation. With regard to this religious dimension of mythology, it can be argued that one's personal mythology might become the basis of personal ritual or ceremony or affect one's individual relationship to collective rituals and ceremonies. Finally, like collective mythologies, personal mythologies are comprised of multiple mythic elements that can become the basis of new or variant stories.

Another contemporary attempt to define the purpose of myth and mythology is Campbell's often-cited fourfold classification of the functions served by myths and mythological systems, namely those of metaphysics, cosmology, sociology, and psychology. While the last of these functions clearly has the greatest inherent relevance to the idea of a personally derived sense of the mythic, it is also evident that the metaphysical function has largely devolved from the domain of organized religion to the personal sphere for many people in today's world. Regarding Campbell's sociological function of myth, as was noted above, while the evolution of myth at this level is outside the purview of personal mythology, how one adopts or adapts such myths is relevant to the development of one's personal mythology. Even the cosmological function of myth might be said to have personal implications in terms of how much or little one explores scientific paradigms within the context of one's mythology, as well as in how much one's mythology is open to working imaginally with the implications of such paradigms.



Perhaps one might go so far as to observe that all new scientific paradigms, from Darwin's evolution to Einstein's relativity, somehow emerged out of the mythic dimensions of these scientists' life stories.

With regard to Campbell's four-way classification scheme, Larsen appears to have taken these four functions and collapsed them into a twofold distinction regarding the role of myth in human life. Ignoring Campbell's cosmological function, Larsen differentiates two dimensions of myth, namely the collective and personal. "We have two dimensions of mythology which must be distinguished," Larsen writes, "the culture-bound aspect, which has a primarily socializing function and which I shall define as *orientation*, and the psychological aspect that lends depth and richness to human existence, whatever its setting, which I shall call *guidance*." Although Larsen refers to the guiding function of myth as "psychological," its role in imparting "depth and richness" to life clearly connects this function to that of metaphysical reflection (*Shaman's Doorway* 12). Of Larsen's two dimensions of the mythic, the idea of personal mythology largely falls under that of guidance, though one must also take into account the individual's attitude toward and relationship to myth's collective orienting function in the understanding of how personal mythologies evolve.

Ian G. Barbour has also suggested several reasons why myths are potentially useful guides for both the practical living of daily life and the search for metaphysical understanding. The first of these reasons is that "myths offer ways of ordering experience." In this sense, myths have relevance to daily life because they take as their subject perennial problems of human existence in the world. Another reason why myths are able to offer meaningful guidance is that "myths inform man about himself." This is

because humans derive their sense of self-identity, in part, from reflection on significant past events, and consideration of myths relevant to our experience can aid in that reflective process. A third way in which myths are relevant to the living of life, according to Barbour, is that “myths express a saving power in human life” (17-18). Importantly, Barbour observes, this salvational quality of myth is derived from the experiential nature of an encounter with mythology rather than from any intellectual or theoretical insights one might derive from a mythic narrative.

Psychologist Rollo May has also proposed a set of functions which are served through the application of mythic consciousness within the context of our individual life stories. The first of these functions relates to myth’s potential as a framework for the discovery and unfolding of a sense of personal identity, proposing answers to the question “Who am I?” The second of May’s functions of myth is interpersonal in nature, helping us to find an appropriate and meaningful sense of community in the world. The third function of mythic consciousness is concerned with the development of and support for a personal sense of moral values. May’s final function of myth, similar in nature to Campbell’s first function, is that of providing a framework for dealing with “the inscrutable mystery of creation” (30-1).

Another important distinction regarding the nature of both collective and personal mythologies relates to the narrative or storytelling dimension of myth versus its underlying belief-oriented dimension. Referring to this latter aspect of the mythic, Michael Pieracci observes, “the beliefs lying just below the surface of the narrative text must be reflected in any definition of myth” (212). Pieracci coins the term “ontic myth” to describe this belief-laden substrate of mythologies. Pieracci writes that he employs the

term ontic, “because it refers to how one understands what is and should be in the world.” In this sense, he notes, “one’s world view defines the ontology (‘the being’) of that person in the world.” As a result, he continues, ontic myths might be described as “beliefs concerning how one should ‘be’ in the world.” As Kirwan Rockefeller observes, “people tell their life stories, certain symbols, images, and metaphors arise which contain patterns and/or configurations which themselves, in turn, convey guiding truths and principles which shape that person’s life” (193). Further supporting this idea of the interrelationship of narrative and underlying belief structure, Feinstein and Krippner observe that “personal myths are circular in their effects—a personal myth is a constellation of beliefs, feelings, images and rules of behavior that influences your experiences, which shape your mythology, which further shape your experiences” (6).

Among the most telling observations regarding the attempt to define the meaning of the term personal mythology is that nearly all of the authors who have written to date about this topic, with the notable exception of Campbell, have academic and professional backgrounds in psychology. Indeed, Larsen goes so far to state, “the terrain of personal mythology [. . .] has its near boundaries in academic and clinical psychology and its far boundaries in ancient cultures, in storytelling, and fable” (*Mythic Imagination* 14). In this regard, it is also important to note that the differing psychological orientations of these authors significantly affects the ways in which they both define personal mythology as a concept and view the purpose of exploring one’s personal mythology.

One of the key differences in the general orientation of these authors toward the concept of personal mythology grows out of their differing stances toward the idea of using personal mythology as an approach to psychological integration. For example,

Krippner and Feinstein, whose psychological orientation is largely that of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, tend to see personal mythology as a tool for helping individuals achieve a greater sense of wholeness and continuity in their lives. “Your personal mythology,” they write, “is the loom on which you weave the raw materials of daily experience into a coherent story” (3). Supporting this view, Dan P. McAdams, whose background is in both narrative and developmental psychology, observes of personal mythology “First and foremost, it is a special kind of story that each of us naturally constructs to bring together the different parts of ourselves and our lives into a purposeful and convincing whole” (12).

In contrast, authors whose psychological orientation reflect the Post-Jungian Archetypal school tend to view the function of personal mythology in terms of its ability to counteract the limitations of a singular and unifying vision of one’s inner life. Thomas Moore, for example, states “The personal myth is not your own story: not a story of your external life, not a story that explains the events of your life, not a story that holds together and has a beginning, a middle and an end” (*Rituals of the Imagination* 22). As a result, he continues, “We get at this myth, not by telling the story of a life, but by telling its stories, over and over again, with all their many versions and contractions” (26).

A point on which many of the theorizers and practitioners of personal mythology largely seem to agree, however, is the idea that, like collective mythologies, personal mythologies are inherently impermanent, unpredictable, and evolving in nature. Remarking on this point, Feinstein and Krippner write that one’s personal mythology “is continually evolving,” adding that it “is a map that forever needs to be updated because its territory is always changing” (5). There also seems to be, according to these authors, a

kind of cyclic quality to the evolution of a person's mythology. "Over a lifetime," notes Bond in this regard, "we don't so much live out of a personal myth as live out the death and rebirth of a personal myth." Commenting on the largely discontinuous quality of the experience of the mythic as it manifests in our personal lives, Bond further observes "We fall into and out of myth several times over the course of a lifetime" (73-74). Relating this inherently unpredictable and erratic nature of personal myth to the overall nature of the mythological, Moore writes:

Mythology is extremely unstable and fluid. A mythological story readily decomposes, so that we find many contrasting versions, great variety in the names of characters, changes in locations, variations in plot and even contradictory outcomes. But this is the nature of experience: facts may seem to remain the same, while our stories are always changing. ("Developing a Mythic Sensibility" 23)

Another quality of personal mythology that has been widely commented upon by those writing on the subject relates to its inherently fragmentary nature. This quality is sometimes described in terms of the difference between "myth" and "mythology," where the former refers to a discrete mythic story (e.g., the myth of Eros and Psyche) and the latter to an interconnected mythic web or system to which any number of myths belong (e.g., Greek mythology). In a similar manner, for example, what one might call "the myth of my first love" is distinguishable as a particular mythic story within the totality of one's personal mythology.

In this sense, writes Moore, "We are all bundles of stories that are interlaced, embedded in each other and connected to stories of greater scope" (*Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life* 243). Also remarking on the inherently fragmentary, incomplete quality of a personal mythology, Hillman writes, "As all myths fold into each other, no single piece can be pulled out with the statement: 'This is my myth'" (*Re-Visioning Psychology* 158).

Commenting further on the significance of the multiplicity of mythic elements in our stories, Hillman continues, “Living one’s myth doesn’t mean simply living one myth.” In this sense, he concludes, “As I am many persons, so I am enacting pieces of various myths.”

Moore also observes that this fragmentariness is intrinsic to all myth and, therefore, is an inevitable aspect of personal myth. “As myth travels through time it seems as loose as a cheap necklace,” he writes, “broken apart here and there and pasted together haphazardly.” As a result, he suggests, “Maybe we should stop treating these holes and contradictions in myth as anomalies and see them as being of the essence of myth.” Connecting this suggestion to the concept of personal mythology, Moore proposes that “when entertaining the idea of a personal myth, we should keep in mind this tendency of myth toward fragmentation, this nonlinear, loose, unending, broken quality of myth” (*Rituals of the Imagination* 21).

Another way of speaking about the essentially fragmentary, inconsistent, nonlinear nature of the mythological relates to the concept of “mythologems,” a term describing the various mythic themes and images contained within the totality of a given mythic narrative. As Stephen Larsen writes, personal mythology is concerned with “our awakening to the presence of [such] mythic themes in our lives—those ‘fragments of the gods.’” Likening such themes to bricks used in the construction of an edifice, Larsen goes on to observe “We may find these structural components in a great edifice, such as a world religion, or in a far more personal dwelling, such as an individual human psyche” (*Mythic Imagination* xxxii).

Still another way of considering the internal inconsistencies contained within one's personal mythology relates to the idea that, as within traditional mythologies, there is no one single authoritative, official version of any mythic narrative. In this sense, there is no such thing as a "pure" myth, a myth unchanged by the very process of its recounting. As Dabney W. Townshend comments, "All there are are stories, and not even one single story can claim absolute primacy." Instead, he continues, every myth can appear in numerous variations in which "all are related, but none are exactly the same" (195). In this sense, a person relating a version of some aspect of their personal mythology today needs to bear in mind the possibility of other versions of that story, versions which will evolve and emerge in keeping with the psyche of that individual.

*On the Nature of Mythic Consciousness and Its Relationship to Personal Mythology*

While individual personal mythologies most clearly manifest in the form of mythic narratives and their underlying belief structures, personal mythology itself is equally concerned with a unique kind of story-making consciousness as with the particular stories that are generated by means of that consciousness. Various described as "archetypal," "symbolic," and "imaginal" in nature, the form of consciousness that gives rise to an awareness of the mythic is also inherently non-objective, non-rational, non-analytical, and nonlinear in nature.

In this regard, writes Moore, mythic consciousness evokes "the world of invisibles—the spirits, thoughts and emotions that crowd our imaginations and yet are untraceable by [...] mechanical methods of detection" (*Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life* 233). Engaging in this form of awareness, he adds "keeps our imaginations at a level where emotion and meaning have a home but where rational analysis has no entry."

Moreover, Moore continues, “One of the purposes of mythology is to transport our imagination to a level beyond the factual, giving full articulation to matters that can’t be measured—things like love, hate, death, fear, and evil—and noticing themes that underlie surface events and understandings” (234).

A number of theories have been advanced in the attempt to differentiate mythic consciousness from consciousness that is inherently non-mythic in orientation. Some of these theories relate to the purpose or intention of engaging a mythically oriented framework, while others focus on distinctive qualities of mythic consciousness. One such quality of the mythic that differentiates it from non-mythic forms of discourse is its inherently narrative dimension. A theory that is particularly useful in contemplating the narrative nature of working with personal mythology is psychologist Jerome Bruner’s distinction between two opposing ways of knowing and constructing reality, modes of consciousness which Bruner designates as the “paradigmatic” and the “narrative”. According to Bruner, the paradigmatic mode “attempts to fulfill the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation.” Paradigmatic consciousness, Bruner writes, “employs categorization or conceptualization,” as well “the operations by which categories are established, instantiated, idealized, and related one to the other to form a system” (12). It is this type of consciousness that gives rise to all logical and scientific discourse. The paradigmatic mode, McAdams observes, “is not able to make much sense of human desire, goals, and social conduct” because “human events are often ambiguous and resistant to paradigmatic efforts to understand them” (29).

The alternative and opposing form of consciousness to the paradigmatic, according to Bruner is the “narrative mode.” While the paradigmatic mode has clearly



come to increasingly dominate western consciousness from the classical period into the modern age, Bruner observes that the narrative mode is far more ancient. As compared to the paradigmatic, he writes, narrative consciousness “leads instead to good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not necessarily ‘true’) historical accounts.” In addition, he adds, narrative “deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course” (13).

Perhaps most importantly, Bruner observes, while paradigmatic writers try to “say no more than they mean,” narrative writers know that their stories inevitably “mean more than they can say” (15). For those concerned with personal mythology, this overflow of meaning inherent in narrative consciousness is essential. Fundamentally, narrative consciousness arises in and through the telling of stories about oneself to oneself and to others. “By telling these stories we start to construct a meaning with which our experiences gains sense,” writes Alfredo Ruiz regarding the significance of Bruner’s conception of the narrative mode. “The construction of meaning arises from the account,” Ruiz concludes, “from the continuous actualizing of our story, of our narrative plot.” Indeed, Bruner’s work suggests, it is precisely the narrative nature of mythic consciousness that provides its unique ability to impart an experience of meaning to one’s life.

In his observations about the nature of mythic consciousness, Bond offers a conceptual framework that considers symbolic consciousness to be a bridge between a purely subjective and a purely objective frame of reference for interpreting the world, a bridge which may, in turn, give rise to personal myth. For Bond, mythic consciousness is directly related to Jung’s concept of projection. Projection, according to Jung, concerns

the manner in which one understands one's interactions with emotionally charged images and experiences. As Bond describes Jung's concept of projection, it "is the basic confusion between object and subject, inner and outer" (7). In this case, the content of the projection has to do with any felt sense of intense meaning or significance connected with an external object or an event.

As Bond observes, the purely subjective frame, which characterized the pre-rational age of human development, viewed the mythic as literal truth. To live within a purely subjective frame of reference, writes Bond, "means living in a projection," assuming that the object or the event is the sole source of the significance of the experience (18). On the other hand, writes Bond, purely objective consciousness, which characterizes the modern frame, "means knowing a projection for a projection," thereby removing the possibility of perceiving the world as inherently meaningful.

For Bond, there needs to be a third state of consciousness, one that might allow a modern person to engage in a mythic frame of reference. That intermediary form of awareness, Bond suggests, needs to engage a symbolic frame of reference as a way of avoiding the twin perils of both a purely subjective *participation mystique* with the mythic and a consciousness that has become completely demythologized. "Symbolic consciousness is [...] a mode of awareness focused on the play of imagination, rather than the subjective and objective aspects of the experience itself, he writes, adding that symbolic consciousness "lives in a myth while knowing it as a myth: it experiences the fantasy process neither as 'reality' nor 'illusions,' but rather as meaning" (17-18).

In Bond's conceptual framework, symbolic consciousness gives rise to mythic consciousness. While the "symbol shows the way," he writes, "it is not yet a myth,"

because “what is heard from psyche does not become a myth until it becomes a way of life” (97-98). In Bond’s view the “movement from symbolic to mythological consciousness comes from the need to live in a context” (25). By “context,” Bond means “the vital necessity of discovering a functional relationship to the environment,” both inner and outer (32). For Bond, human beings cannot live without myth because “we need a vital functional relationship to the environments in which we live” (41). Most especially, he contends, one needs a personal myth because it “expresses a functional relationship to the psyche, a pattern of adaption to the internal world” (48).

Like Bond, Larsen is also concerned with the relationship between the mythic, the symbolic, and the imaginal dimensions of human consciousness. For Larsen, the fundamental source of mythic consciousness is what he calls the “mythic imagination.” Derived in part from the aesthetic theory of the English Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Larsen’s concept of mythic imagination is based on the distinction between two modes of imaginal consciousness, forms which Coleridge called “primary” and “secondary” imagination. For Coleridge, primary imagination is the driving force of all creativity. This elemental form of imaginal awareness, according to Coleridge, is “the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception” and functions “as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (379). In other words, in Coleridge’s view, this form of imagination in humans is essentially an extension of divine consciousness and creativity.

Primary imagination, Larsen proposes, is an ancient, pre-cognitive, pre-conceptual form of consciousness. Nevertheless, he writes, this faculty “which is susceptible to and also generates myths is more than merely an archaic stage of cognitive

development.” Indeed, he continues, “it is rather an alternative mode of consciousness, with an a-priori, instinctive impulse toward this different, sacred mode of comprehension” (*Shaman’s Doorway* 28). Most importantly for Larsen, it is due to the engagement of primary imagination that what he calls “primary meaning” emerges into conscious awareness. While primary meaning often attaches itself to particular symbols or images, it is neither defined nor delimited by them. Indeed, observes Larsen, once one begins to differentiate or explain such a symbol or image, one is already referring to a secondary order of meaning.

“It is this faculty of perception informed by primary meaning” Larsen writes, “that I shall define as the mythic imagination” (29). Though not itself susceptible to conscious control, he proposes that mythic imagination can be employed in a process he calls “conscious mythmaking.” He describes this process as one in which an individual consciously creates a container—which he describes as both a “ritual form” and a mythic “frame of reference”—into which images and symbols evoked by the process of primary imagination might be invited and engaged (*Mythic Imagination* 232-3).

Larsen writes about four stages of “mythic engagement,” which he also describes as four “typical patterns of relationship between man and his primary, mythic imagination” (*Shaman’s Doorway* 34). Larsen calls the first of these stages “Mythic Identity,” a form of *participation mystique* during which the mythic imagination “is activated with little or no relationship to the actual properties of ‘outer reality.’” The second stage of mythic engagement, according to Larsen, is that of “Mythic Orthodoxy,” in which “the mythic imagination and ‘outer reality’ are held to a fixed relationship.” In

this stage, Larsen writes, “Revelation hardens into dogma,” as a result of which, “a given mythic hypothesis is accepted and alternative points of view are unwelcome.”

The third stage of this process, according to Larsen is the “Objective Phase,” in which “man imagines he can eliminate the mythic imagination from his involvement with outer reality” (35). During this stage, writes Larsen, “there is a determination to accept no mythic hypothesis without empirical verification,” as a result of which “the relationship to the ‘reality principle’ is systematized.” While the third stage leads to demythologization, the fourth and final stage of the evolution of mythic consciousness, according to Larsen, leads to true “Mythic Engagement,” a stage in which “the creative capacity of the mythic imagination is activated and engaged.” In describing this stage, Larsen observes: “Assertions about the ultimate nature of outer reality are not made; rather learned truths are recognized as psychological. The ability to return to the world of ‘common sense’ and normal experiencing is retained.” Employing a kind of descriptive shorthand, Larsen alternatively names these four stages respectively as “possession,” “religion,” “science,” and “dialog, transformation, and renewal” (36).

Religious studies scholar Walter Gulick has suggested another useful concept for understanding the nature of mythic consciousness. In an essay exploring the source the Joseph Campbell’s effectiveness as a mythologist, Gulick observes that Campbell encouraged his readers and listeners to approach mythic narrative with a particular kind of intention, an approach described by Gulick as “mythical intentionality” (36). Regarding this idea, Gulick observes, “in appreciating a story through mythical intentionality one must look beyond the literal (visible) meaning of the story to its deeper (invisible) existential meaning” (40). Mythical intentionality, therefore, is concerned

with the purpose of consciously engaging a mythic perspective. That purpose, Gulick suggests, is the search for a sense of personal, existential meaning contained within the narrative. “A person engages a story with mythical intentionality,” he writes, “when a self-involving normative meaning is sought in and through the narrative” (36).

Describing that sense of meaning further, Gulick observes that mythic intentionality is invoked “when a person seeks and finds within a story self-involving clues as to why life is as it is or directions concerning how it should be lived” (38).

Directly applying this idea to personal mythology, Gulick suggests that one might “utilize mythical intentionality in reviewing the important events of one’s own life and assessing what they reveal about the direction and purpose of that life.”

For Gulick, a story “becomes a myth only when the items and events in the story are seen via mythical intentionality as revealing a deeper message.” Such items and events must cognitively “be seen as existentially meaningful items, as having an allegorical, analogical, or metaphorical weight,” Gulick continues, thereby connecting mythical intentionality with the invoking of symbolic consciousness (37). Moreover, according to Gulick, while the intention to invoke mythic consciousness must engage cognition in the pursuit of existential meaning, the process of doing so also inevitably and necessarily must engage one’s emotions. The experience of the mythic “involves both feeling and cognition, for both are necessary to experience existential meaning.” Nevertheless, he observes, “Only if a story has the power to evoke in the reader or listener an emotional interest bearing upon meaning in life, does it function as a myth.” While “a story entertains one’s mind and fills one’s time,” Gulick concludes, “a myth touches one’s heart and enriches one’s life” (41).

Importantly, Gulick does not view mythic intentionality as a goal of some kind, but rather always as a process. “If our linguistic habits permitted it,” he adds, “it would be desirable to regard ‘myth’ as a verb in order to emphasize that the power of myth resides in an activity it induces in its readers or auditors.” Such a process requires a shift from ordinary, everyday awareness. As a result, Gulick observes, “all myths have to deal with transformations of consciousness in the sense that a transformation to mythical intentionality from everyday pragmatic consciousness is required if the story is to be appreciated as myth” (37).

Related to Gulick’s concept of mythic intentionality is another idea, namely, the notion of “mythiccity.” Originally introduced by the literary scholar Eric Gould, this latter term is defined by Doty as “a generalized orientation to the experienced world based upon a myth or series of myths.” As Doty observes, “it is helpful to distinguish between myth in the sense of ‘narrative,’ that is mythic story or thematic pattern, and mythicity” (*Mythography* 15). The reason why the distinction between myth, in the sense of particular mythic narratives or mythic themes, and mythicity is useful, Doty observes, is that the concept of mythicity describes a fundamental quality of what makes a narrative or theme truly mythic in nature.

Like Gulick’s mythic intentionality, Gould’s concept of mythicity is primarily concerned with the inherently open-ended quality of mythic narrative and of the need, therefore, for ongoing interpretation of the symbolic and imaginal content of mythic narrative. Both concepts are also concerned with the desire to seek a sense of meaning from the story content encountered and recounted in a mythic narrative. For Gould,

however, the focus is on the inevitable interpretive gap that always exists between mythic content and the meaning sought in relation to it.

“Myths apparently derive their universal significance from the way in which they try to reconstitute an original event or explain some fact about human nature and its worldly or cosmic context,” Gould writes, “but in doing so, they necessarily refer to some essential meaning which is absent until it appears as a function of interpretation.” For Gould, “There can be no myth without an ontological gap between event and meaning.” As a result, he argues, “Myth’s meaning is perpetually open and universal only because once the absence of a final meaning is recognized, the gap itself demands interpretation, which, in turn, must go on and on” (6). In this way, mythicity points to the inherent impossibility of arriving at some ultimate or permanent sense of meaning from a mythic narrative. At the same time, however, Gould’s concept proposes a dialogical, interpretive framework for approaching what must remain an ever-evolving sense of the meaning of mythic narrative. Ultimately, the concept of mythicity suggests that mythic consciousness requires both a profound openness to perpetually re-imagining one’s story as a mythic narrative and an equally firm resistance against the desire to derive a conclusive sense of meaning from that narrative.

*On the Relationship between the Personal and the Universal within Personal Mythology*

Any attempt to consider the relationship between the general study of mythology and the evolution of the concept of personal mythology needs to recognize that personal myths derive much of their power from the fact that they refract historically common images and symbols through the lens of individual life stories. Indeed, one of the most compelling qualities that the mythic perspective offers as a framework for refracting



one's life experience is the access that myth provides to a larger—perhaps even universal—context for comprehending one's personal story, thereby facilitating what Doty calls “individual experience within a universal perspective” (*Mythography* 33).

Regarding this concept, Doty observes:

Myths provide a sense of a person's role in the universe, a centering upon ourselves as located within a cosmic as well as a local context [. . .]. Part of what it means to study myths and rituals of other peoples, other times and places, is that one recovers aspects of personal identity, the personal microcosm re-created from the impersonal macrocosm. (73)

One of the key reasons given by writers on personal mythology for this concern with the relationship between the personal and the collective or universal dimensions of myth is the desire to see and experience more clearly the nature of the human condition itself. “The colorful and soulful images that pervade myth allow us to step back from our experiences,” writes Phil Cousineau, “so that we might look closer at our personal situations and see if we can catch a glimpse of the bigger picture, the human condition” (*Once* 6). This ability to connect with a larger vision of humanity is especially important in light of the particular emphasis accorded the role of individual consciousness within both modernity and psychology. “The premium placed on the uniqueness of self-understanding has alienated us from universal and archetypal symbols found in the stories of others,” cautions Charles E. Winquist, “but we have found that our story has no content without first having available the language of all stories” (103).

Commenting on this need to seek the universal in our stories, James Hollis writes of what he calls “the cosmic drama,” defined by him as “a metaphoric schema which permits us to see the patterns amid the plethora of mythic material.” If one were able to assemble such a schema, he suggests, combining myths across all cultures and periods,

“one would have, in effect, the human story in all its permutations.” The advantage of envisaging such an overall narrative, he writes, would be to “allow us to identify where each mythic motif, including those from our own traditions, fits into the larger scheme of things.” As a result, Hollis continues, “we would also be able to see where our individual lives enter into this timeless drama” (*Tracking the Gods* 109). Furthermore, such a conceptual vantage point might assist one “in identifying the recurrent patterns, the motive and movement that informs each myth, and how those suprahistorical patterns are replicated in the life of the individual” (110).

Another important reason for connecting universal patterns and themes with the particular mythic experience of the individual is the need to ground the non-temporal, non-historical features of one’s personal mythic narrative within the context of a specific and individual sense of time and place. In this sense, writes Robert A. Segal, “a myth is not merely a myth in its own right,” but instead must be seen in context as “a myth for someone.” As a result, Segal continues, “the meaning of a myth is more than its general meaning for all humanity” (Introduction 13). If myths are to become more than mere stories and archetypes and more than idealized images, they must be encountered and engaged through one’s experience of one’s own life and of the world in which one lives.

Also commenting on the need to ground the mythically universal in and through the personal and the particular, Philip Wheelwright writes of an aspect of archetypal thinking he calls the principle of “concrete universality,” a concept which emphasizes the idea that only through the particular manifestation and experience of the universal can the universal be known at all. In this sense, he observes, the universal “exists only in and through the particular and hence can be known only by opening our eyes and ears and

hearts to the sensuous living world” (*Burning Fountain* 88-9). Moreover, Wheelwright suggests, even the attempt to consider the universal apart from the uniqueness of its particular manifestations tends to subvert the mythopoetic experience of universality into meaningless abstraction.

Regardless of whether one initially seeks to find a sense of universality in one’s personal experience or instead reflects on the ways one personally relates to the great themes of world mythology, a goal of personal mythology in the end must be to dynamically interconnect the personal and the universal dimensions of our stories. “Concrete particulars become universalized through myth,” writes Hillman, while “myths [. . .] tell of universals in specific images of figures and places” (*Re-Visioning Psychology* 154). In this way, he continues, “Myths make concrete particulars into universals, so that each image, name, thing in my life when experienced mythically takes on universal sense, and all abstract universals, the grand ideas of human fate, are presented as concrete actions” (155). As a result, the potency of the universal quality of experience is simultaneously grounded within a personal context for the individual reflecting on the mythic nature of his or her story.

For most writers on personal mythology, intrinsic to this interrelationship between the particular/personal and the universal /collective within mythic narrative is the concept of archetype, an idea first introduced into the language of psychology by Jung. While a discussion of this idea in the larger context of Jung’s work is reserved for Chapter 6, the general concept of archetypes is so central to any discussion of personal mythology that it is necessary to at least introduce it here. Though the concept of archetype is characterized or defined using varying language by these authors, the basic idea that myth

derives its universal and collective meaning from some form of underlying and inherently symbolic patterning is widely assumed among them. Commenting on this close interrelationship between the mythic and the archetypal, Pieracci writes, “Narrative myths are the stories that explain the archetypes” (212). As to the particular connection between archetype and personal mythology, Winquist observes “the archetypal story is a foundation for my personal story” (109). Deepening this link between the mythic and the archetypal dimensions of personal mythology, Robert Atkinson defines “personal mythmaking” as the process of “recognizing and understanding the archetypal images and traditional motifs in one’s life story” (205).

In the entry on “archetype” in the recent *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, Feinstein writes that Jung developed this concept “to explain the corresponding themes he identified among dreams, waking imagery, private ideas, myths, religious symbolism, occult disciplines, and tribal lore.” Feinstein further observes that Jung attributed these “apparently universal patterns of human cognition” to “preexisting psychological motifs,” motifs conceived of as “underlying templates that shape subsequent perception, imagination, and understanding (232). These primordial patterns, Jung suggested, are shared by all human beings and emanate out of the communal substrate of consciousness that he called the objective psyche or the collective unconscious. Perhaps most importantly, these universal patterns cannot be experienced in their pure forms, according to Jung, but are known only through their particular manifestations in particular cultural or personal forms, among the most significant and powerful of which are myths.

Regarding the relationship between archetype and myth, Jung saw the latter as a manifestation of the former. “The archetype is a kind of readiness to produce over and

over again the same or similar mythical ideas,” he writes (*CW* 7: 69; para. 109). Further commenting on the archetypal source of myth, Steven F. Walker observes that “from the treasure house of archetypal images are drawn the elements, the archetypal motifs, of mythology.” Whether such motifs “are represented visually, dramatically, musically, or verbally,” he continues, they “are usually found linked in a sequence which we call a myth” (4).

Nevertheless, Segal cautions, myths can never simply be reduced to archetypes. “Myths are more than archetypes,” he writes, further noting “they are stories that, read symbolically, contain archetypes.” In this sense, he continues, “an archetype is not merely a motif within a myth but a motif within many myths,” since “a motif found in only one myth would not be an archetype.” In addition, he notes, “The plot of myth is not only the manifestation of one or more archetypes but also the development of them and their interaction” (Introduction 43).

While many writers on personal mythology tend to assume Jung’s conceptual model of archetype in their work, others either adopt variant approaches or try to define archetype in terms that are more general. “At the most abstract level,” writes Doty, employing a broader framework than Jung’s for understanding the idea, “we speak of archetypes represented in action, or embodied, as ultimate symbols of interior life and human interaction” (*Mythography* 74). In this regard, Doty also observes, “The archetypal usefully names ways in which the repetitively useful, the traditionally significant, makes its appearances: archetypal figures are those whose [. . .] structures recur repeatedly in many generations and across many different societies,” (“Exploring the Manifold Spheres” 122).

It is worth noting that, despite Doty's desire to minimize the potentially mystical implications of the classically Jungian conception of archetype, he nevertheless recognizes the metaphysical implications of the archetypal, noting that archetypes name "recurring patterns by which homo sapiens knits together the ways life has ultra- or super-meanings" (*Mythography* 74-75). Commenting on this deeper level of meaning implicit in the archetypal dimension of myth, Atkinson observes that the recognition of the archetypal patterns in one's mythology can "become an awareness that we are participating in the same mystery as our ancestors before us and our descendents after us" (206). As a result, he adds, "the experience that is archetypal for us in this sense is lifted out of the occasional and transitory and into the realm of the ultimate and ever-enduring."

Because both the local/universal and personal/collective are always present within mythic and archetypal discourse, reflecting on one's personal mythology can be approached from either end of this dialectic. For example, one can start by focusing on those mythologems and archetypal images arising from the contemplation of some aspect of one's life story. In employing such an approach, one would then amplify or enlarge upon the mythological themes and symbols in one's story, comparing them to similar themes and symbols in myths, legends, fairy tales, and archetypal stories. This method of starting with one's own life story and amplifying the mythic and archetypal content emerging from within that narrative is the principal approach employed in many of the texts on working with one's personal mythology, including Keen and Valley-Fox's *Your Mythic Journey*, Feinstein and Krippner's *The Mythic Path*, and Larsen's *The Mythic Imagination*.

Alternatively, one might engage in the process of working with personal mythology by first carefully reading and imaginatively reflecting on existing mythic and archetypal literature and then contemplating how the images and themes in these stories relate to the story of one's own life. As to how one most effectively might identify personally relevant and meaningful stories and images from the historical and cultural storehouse of myth, James Hollis suggests being attentive to an archetypal resonance between such mythic material and our innermost sense of who one is. "When something is *of* is, is *for* us, it sets off the tuning fork inside us," he writes, resounding within one "because it has always been there archetypally" (*Creating a Life* 61). Remarking on the value of this approach, Jean Houston writes "In the mythic and symbolic dramas of Psyche, Prometheus, Parsifal, Oedipus, Antigone, Odysseus, Isis, Rumi, Jesus, Buddha, Faust, and Coyote, we can discover the broad patterns of our own lives, finding ourselves changed and charged" (*Search for the Beloved* 93). Wendy Doniger also comments on the idea that one might encounter a way of meaningfully engaging one's own myths through the careful study the myths of other peoples. "Taking other people's myths seriously," she observes in this regard, "means recognizing that they are *our* myths, which means not only that they have general meaning for us, but they narrate the story of our own lives" (139).

Authors employing this approach to working with personal mythology have based works on a very wide range of mythological literature drawn from many historical periods and cultures. Examples include: *Healing the Wounded King*, by John Matthews, which employs aspects of the Grail Legend to work with wounded aspects of the inner masculine; Jean Houston's *The Passion of Isis and Osiris*, which uses the Egyptian myth

of Isis and Osiris to explore the mythic aspects of intimate human relationships; Jean Shinoda Bolen's *God's in Everyman* and *Goddesses in Everywoman*, which explore male and female psychological differences and concerns through archetypal portraits of the Greek divinities; and Carol Pearson's *Awakening the Hero Within*, which focuses on twelve archetypes, ranging from Orphan and Warrior to Ruler and Fool, as a means to explore issues of psychological and spiritual development.

Of course, neither the personal-to-universal or universal-to-personal approach to exploring one's mythology can really exist in isolation. The work of understanding the mythic and archetypal implications of one's life story is really a process of alternating between the two focuses. Sometimes one might begin by directly reflecting on the mythic or archetypal themes and images one encounters in one's own life experience, while at other time one's reflections might be triggered by the sense of a mythic or archetypal connection between a story one is reading and some event in one's life. Regardless of which end of the process one starts from, however, in the end the touchstone of one's personal mythology must always proceed from and return back to the narrative of one's own experience. As Jean Houston astutely observes regarding this primacy of the personal within personal mythology:

What had been part of the collective as the shared myth or archetype is now finding new rivers of unique stories flowing from out of the passion play of individual lives. This does not mean the dismissal of traditional myths, but rather that now as the maps of the ancient traditions no longer fit the personal territory to the degree they once did owing to the radical change of our time, we must live our stories with the mythic vibrancy of those who inhabited the ancient stories. ("Joseph Campbell and Changing Times" 42-3)

To conclude this chapter, in considering all of the above material, it becomes possible to propose broad conceptual definitions of both personal mythwork and personal



mythology. In this context, the practice of personal mythwork can be characterized as encompassing any activity that engages one in deep imaginal, symbolic, metaphorical, and archetypal reflection on the story of one's life. In addition, the concept of personal mythwork can also be said to include imaginal reflection on any pre-existing mythic material from the perspective of one's own deeply felt life experience. To become personal, it does not matter whether mythic material erupts spontaneously in the form of dreams and synchronicities of profound personal significance or through the experience of being gripped by mythic material that one imaginally encounters in the many cultural and religious forms that mythic consciousness has inspired. Continuing in this vein, personal mythology can be defined as the evolving and collective outcome of all such encounters. Such outcomes inevitably alter underlying belief structures regarding oneself, the others in one's life, one's relationship to the larger environments in which one lives, and one's relationship with that realm of human experience called sacred or holy. The ultimate result of such a personal encounter with mythology is nothing less than a fundamental and profound alteration of the way in which one envisions one's life and engages the world.

Chapter 3  
On Considering the Sacred in the Context of Personal Mythology

*On Establishing a General Framework for Exploring the Nature of "the Sacred"*

"What characterizes religious behavior," writes William E. Paden, "is that it takes place with reference to things that are deemed *sacred*." Replacing the concept of a supreme being as the "defining referent of religion," he continues, "the modern, cross-cultural term is *the sacred*." The use of this term by contemporary religious scholars, Paden is careful to observe, "assumes neither the reality nor the unreality of what is considered sacred, but simply the fact that people do take certain beings, traditions, principles, or objects to be sacred and these serve in turn as the organizing points of reference for defining their world and lives." As a result, he concludes, "The sacred can have any content, though to the adherent it is always something of extraordinary power and reality" (11).

In the broadest possible context, therefore, this idea of "the sacred" can be said generically to describe the focus and object of all religious activity. While most people would probably assent to use of this term as a general descriptor for the focus of religious behavior, however, it is also true that few concepts have had their specific meanings argued about longer or with greater passion. Given the both the nebulous nature of this idea and the centrality of its position within any discussion of religious concerns, it is critically important to acknowledge the absence of a truly objective stance from which to inquire about the nature of the sacred. As a result, since any discussion regarding the nature of the sacred will retain an inescapable and inherent quality of subjectivity, it becomes essential to define as carefully as possible the frame of reference to be employed in the exploration that follows.

First, since this study focuses on the use of personal mythological reflection as a means of religious or spiritual investigation, it will intrinsically focus on the significance of such engagement for the individual religious or spiritual seeker. As a consequence, any observations made or cited in this study regarding the nature of the sacred should not be assumed to bear any particular relationship to communal conceptions of the sacred, particularly as such conceptions reflect the theological assumptions of established religions. Indeed, since this study intentionally seeks ways of comprehending the sacred outside the bounds of organized religion—or, at the very least, ways that do not require adherence to any particular form of organized religion—it will emphasize approaches that tend to be open-ended, ecumenical, and universalist in orientation.

Secondly, this study assumes that any exploration of religious or spiritual concerns through the vehicle of one's personal mythology will be inherently experiential in nature. The choice of theological approaches employed in this study, therefore, emphasizes those frameworks that can accommodate and even facilitate an experiential orientation toward the sacred. For the same reason, the following discussion will also tend to emphasize ways of considering the experience of the sacred that are inherently phenomenological in approach.

Thirdly, given the essential role of symbolic and metaphorical consciousness in working with personal mythological material, this study highlights those theological frameworks that emphasize a symbolic and metaphorical approach to encountering the sacred. Similarly, this study seeks to underscore those religious orientations that encourage the use of imagination and engagement with the imaginal realm as valuable pathways for encountering and reflecting upon the experience of the sacred. In this same

vein, conceptual approaches to religious experience that are compatible with an archetypal frame of reference will also be emphasized.

In searching for an exemplar of the kind of orientation to the sacred that this chapter seeks to delineate, is doubtful that one could do better than to cite the following passage by Keith Ward. Part of a chapter entitled “A Feeling for the Gods,” Ward describes in this text the personification of a morning mist on the sea as the rising of the nymph Thetis, a shape-shifting goddess of oceans and streams. In this remarkable passage, Ward manages to unify the universal, particular, experiential, phenomenological, symbolic, archetypal, and mythic dimensions of the sacred into a single, highly evocative perspective:

When instead of simply seeing a misty morning by the sea, we see Thetis rising through the swell of the sea at early morning, going up to the vast sky and to the presence of Zeus, the gatherer of clouds, then we discern in the morning sea-mist a disclosure of unbounded infinity and mystery, power and beauty, but we also see something more. (31)

*On the Religious Dimension of Mythology*

Before proceeding with a discussion of various ideas about the sacred that might relate to the notion of personal mythology as religious or spiritual pathway, it would be worthwhile to explore in broader terms the perennial and profound relationship that generally exists between mythology and religion. Indeed, the religious dimension of mythology is arguably the most ancient and potent of the roles it has played in the evolution of human consciousness. Commenting on this aspect of the mythic, Joseph Campbell writes that the first and foremost function of a living mythology, “its properly religious function, is to waken and maintain in the individual an experience of awe, humility, and respect, in recognition of that ultimate mystery, transcending names and

forms” (*Masks of God* 609). Similarly remarking on the profound relationship between mythology and religious awareness, Philip Wheelwright observes, “The very essence of myth is that haunting awareness of transcendental forces peering through the cracks of the visible universe” (“Poetry, Myth, and Reality” 10). In a similar vein, William Doty suggests that myths are “narrative fictions whose plots read first at the level of their own stories and then often as projections of immanent transcendent meanings” (*Mythography* 42). Because some myths can also function at this second level of meaning, he observes, such narratives “are not little but big stories touching not just on the everyday, but sacred or specially marked topics that concern much more than the immediate situation” (15).

In considering uniquely contemporary approaches for engaging the religious aspect of mythology, it is important to bear in mind the difference between such methods and older, more traditional approaches to interpreting religious myths. For example, while the latter focus exclusively on the relationship between two inherently different kinds of beings, namely divine figures and human beings, modern mythologists like Campbell and Doty propose adopting a more creative, mythopoetic stance to engaging the sacred dimension of myth. Employing such an approach, Doty writes, “permits speaking of the sacred not purely or exclusively in terms of deific figures disclosing, revealing themselves to mortals,” but also as “an aspect by which figures of the lived world are marked out as especially significant” (*Mythography* 75). Most importantly, by adopting a creative, mythopoetic approach to sacred myth, one begins to open up the possibility of considering the religious dimension of myth in terms of personal mythological consciousness.

Regarding the idea of encountering the sacred through a more traditional religious perspective on myth, Doty candidly observes that such an approach should “be left behind only when more meaningful individual patternings of the resources and significances of human existence are found in the personal mythostory” ( 201). Recognizing the enormous challenge of seeking the sacred entirely through one’s own mythology, however, Doty suggests that one might facilitate this process by also attempting “reconnection with the energy systems” represented in existing religious myths “in such a way as to lead to a personal affirmation of one’s own mythic system and hence to a meaningful personal universe” (202).

In addition to Doty and Campbell, a wide range of others writing on the subject of personal mythology have also commented on the religious or sacred dimension of personal mythic consciousness. For example, Dan P. McAdams observes that one’s personal myth “is not a legend or fairy tale, but a sacred story that embodies personal truth,” adding that “to say that a personal myth is ‘sacred’ is to suggest that personal myth deals with those ultimate questions that preoccupy theologians and philosophers.” He goes on to suggest that a core challenge for modern humans involves creating “personal myths that will serve to sanctify our lives” (34). In a similar vein, Robert Atkinson describes one’s personal myth as “the sacred story of the beliefs and experiences that order, shape, and direct one’s life” (207). Yet another writer addressing the question of the religious dimension of personal mythology, Stephen Larsen observes that until modern times, “mythic orthodoxy has dictated [. . .] what forms it shall revere as holy, which mental imagery shall constitute an epiphany, and which a trip to the stake” (*Mythic Imagination* 231). In the absence of such orthodoxy, he continues, one must now

learn to trust the inner mythic world of dreams and visions and the outer mythic world of archetypal coincidences (181).

*On the Etymology of “the Sacred” and Related Questions*

Before exploring particular approaches for understanding and interpreting the nature of the sacred, it would be useful to first consider the derivation and usage of the word “sacred” itself. In doing so, one also finds that the history of the usage of this word is intertwined with that of another term often associated with it, namely the word “holy.” In his article on “The Holy” in the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Willard Gurdon Oxtoby writes “By ‘the holy’ and ‘the sacred’ we in the twentieth century denote what partakes of qualities ascribed to the divine,” adding that “in some current contexts the two terms appear virtually interchangeable” (511).

The first point worth noting with regard to this statement is that it attempts to define sacredness or holiness in terms of another idea, that of divinity. Indeed, one implication of the idea that the sacred “partakes of qualities ascribed to the divine,” is that those qualities first belong to a divine being or energy and are subsequently shared or passed on to the person, object, or event considered to be sacred. The second noteworthy point in Oxtoby’s statement is the observation that the terms “sacred” and “holy” have largely become synonymous in contemporary English.

Saving discussion of the first point for the moment, consideration of the second point suggests that, despite the modern tendency to view sacred and holy as largely synonymous, the history of their usage nevertheless reveals some significant distinctions that—at least connotatively—persist in their usage today. In this regard, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “holy” derives from the Anglo-Saxon and Old

English term *halig*. This dictionary further states that *halig* is related to the Old English adjective *hailo*, meaning “free of injury, whole, hale.” In addition, the *Oxford English Dictionary* is careful to observe that “the pre-Christian meaning [of *hailo*] is uncertain, although it is with some probability assumed to have been ‘inviolable, that which must be preserved whole or intact, that cannot be injured with impunity.’ ” As a result, the *Oxford English Dictionary* continues, “the adjective would naturally be applied to the gods and all things pertaining to them.” Indeed, given that the English words “whole,” “heal,” and “hallow” all are derived from the same root as “holy,” one may sense a much richer range of meaning connected with the pre-Christian usage of this word.

In his article on “The Sacred and the Profane” in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Carsten Colpe notes that the English word “sacred” is derived from the Latin noun “sacrum.” For the Romans, Colpe writes, “sacrum meant what belonged to the gods or was in their power” and “was primarily concerned with the temple and the rites performed in and around it” (511). The word “sacred,” states Colpe, is also related to the Latin adjective “sacer,” referring to the particular quality of the innermost portion of a temple, that section “walled off or otherwise set apart” from ordinary use. Colpe further observes that, for the Romans, the meaning of “sacrum” and “sacer” was interconnected with the term “profanum,” the word that described both the literal area outside the sacred precinct of a temple and the ordinary, everyday activities that take place outside of any space consecrated to a divinity. As a result, the word “sacred” tends to connote a quality of objects and events that is inherently different and set apart from that of ordinary life and everyday consciousness.



Interestingly, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the use of “holy” (initially in the form of *halig*) predates the usage in written documents of any form of the word “sacred” by more than five centuries. While it is not particularly surprising that the Anglo-Saxon term appears in British documents as early as 825 A.D., it is noteworthy that use of the Latinate term can be documented back only as far as the late fourteenth century. For whatever the reason, the older term seems to have been sufficient to describe that aspect of experience connected with divinity for a considerable period of time before authors felt it useful to begin using its Latinate counterpart.

Moreover, as Oxtoby observes, with the arrival of ‘sacred’ into the language, “a partial separation of functions between the two words took place.” The linguistic separation of the meaning of these words, he notes, came to suggest “a difference in the degree to which the user of these words is willing to imply participation in the religious traditions under discussion.” In other words, while “sacred” gradually came to take on a more generic descriptive quality regarding things and experiences concerned with divinity, “holy” came to connote a specific sense of affirming personal belief or affiliation with the sacredness of the thing or event in question.

In this context, Oxtoby observes that in English usage “to refer to something as holy implies [. . .] a commitment to the proposition that the thing in question is in fact holy, that it has been hallowed by God.” On the other hand, he continues, “to call something sacred [. . .] may or may not imply a commitment to its sacredness on the part of the speaker, for the term is descriptive of the veneration [generally] accorded by men”. To clarify this point, Oxtoby adds “The general contrast between the semantic fields of the two words is obvious if one pairs the Holy Bible with the Sacred Books of the East; in

the first case, one's own tradition affirms the writings' holiness, while in the latter the title is descriptive of others' reverence for them" (511).

Noting yet another important distinction regarding the comparative English usage of the words sacred and holy, Oxtoby observes that, as compared to the word sacred, "the word holy has been not so much a key term for independent reflection as it is has been an attribute of the divine" (512). In that regard, Oxtoby argues, while the term "sacred" refers to a particular quality that may be ascribed upon reflection to especially meaningful or significant *experience*, the term "holy" more accurately refers to the divine or transpersonal *source* of such experience.

It is largely because of this difference in connotation between the terms holy and sacred that the latter word was chosen for use in this study to refer to the goal of engaging in personal mythwork as a religious or spiritual activity. While this study is primarily focused on the use of personal mythology as a tool for both engendering and reflecting upon religious or spiritual experience, it is nevertheless true that for many people such experience remains intrinsically bound up with some concept of divinity, the implied referent of holiness.

Contemplating the conceptual relationship between an individual's experience of the sacred and the ultimate source of such sacredness often leads, in turn, to the posing of questions about the nature of divinity. Such questions traditionally have been a key concern within the study of theology, a discipline whose name derives from the Greek word for divinity. Of course, approaching the sacred through the vehicle of personal mythology does not require contemplating the concept of divinity, since one's mythology may ultimately draw one toward non-theistic approaches to the sacred. It is also true,

however, that questions relating to the concept of divinity are often likely to arise when one engages in the process of religious or spiritual inquiry.

Not surprisingly, all such theological inquiry and discussion will be constrained by a range of issues, including both the limitations of language when describing the ineffable and the impossibility of objectively validating propositions concerning the nature of divinity. Contemplating theological questions from within the context of personal mythology, however, is complicated still further by the need to find approaches to god-talk that are also fundamentally open-ended and capable of accommodating a very wide range of theological orientations. If one's experience of the sacred is based on the archetypal significance of dreams and synchronicities combined with one's deep, personal attraction to particular images and symbols in myths and sacred stories, one accordingly needs to be able to conceptualize the source of such experience in many ways.

The desire to develop broader and more open-ended frameworks for theological discussion is not a new one and has been a growing within religious studies for much of the last half of the twentieth century (Bratten). Much of this ferment and development has been fueled by the need to find theological approaches large enough to accommodate broadly based interfaith and ecumenical dialogue (Merrigan; Wells). This trend toward seeking broader frames of reference for theological discussion has also been driven by the intellectual challenges of postmodernism (Griffin; Griffin and Smith). Expressing the broader implications of this movement toward more inclusive frames of theological reference, David L. Miller observes that theology "is not what we in the west have come to think it is—at least it is not necessarily the abstract, dogmatic, doctrinal, and creedal business of Occidental monotheistic thinking alone." Instead, he suggests, "Any thinking

and speaking about ultimate matters of human meaning and being is theologia” (New Polytheism 48).

Indeed, over the past several decades, challenges from both ecumenism and postmodernism have led to the evolution of a range of new theological approaches unconstrained by many of the old conceptions about the nature of divinity, notions long deemed outmoded, ineffectual, and irrelevant by the modern perspective. While these new theological developments were not specifically intended for the purpose of working with the religious implications of personal mythology, two trends emerging as a result of these efforts seem particularly relevant to the idea of personal mythwork as sacred practice. These two evolving trends within contemporary theology include a focus on the inherently symbolic and metaphorical nature of religious discourse and a growing interest in the role of imagination as a tool for theological reflection.

*On the Symbolic and Imaginal in Contemporary Theological Inquiry*

Among the most dynamic and influential theological developments of the past several decades has been a growing focus on the complex role of symbol and metaphor within religious discourse. The idea that theology is concerned with symbols and metaphors is not, of course, a new idea. As a result of challenges arising from both postmodernism and religious pluralism, however, some theologians have chosen to explore the deeper implications of the ways symbol and metaphor have been applied within theological discourse. These scholars have also begun to consider the role of symbolic and metaphorical consciousness in the evolution of a postmodern, pluralistic understanding of the nature of divinity.

Among the individuals who have played a key role in this process is the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich. In his book *The Dynamics of Faith*, Tillich addresses the particular problem posed by the tendency to literalize religious symbols and metaphors. In this work, Tillich also intentionally broadens the meaning of the term “myth” to include the totality of the symbolic and metaphorical content of religion, regardless of whether that content takes the form of narrative, visual image, or ritual. Regarding the concept of myth in this wide-ranging context, he notes that all myths can take one of two forms, forms described by Tillich using the terms “unbroken” and “broken” (50). Most importantly, the particular quality that distinguishes one form of myth from the other is the degree to which myth is viewed as literal truth.

According to Tillich, since the peoples of the pre-modern world believed in the literal truths of their myths, myth remained unbroken for them. For the vast majority of people living in the modern world, however, such literal belief in myth cannot be sustained without the repressive qualities of some form of fundamentalism. That myth is no longer viewed as literal truth, Tillich argues, does not mean that the need for myth is something that humans have somehow outgrown. Rather than discarding all myth as meaningless or false, he continues, one needs instead to reflect consciously on the symbolic significance of any particular myth. According to Tillich, if one is able to do this—recognize and embrace the symbolic significance of a myth without any effort to literalize that significance—then that myth “can be called ‘a broken myth’ ” (50).

While Tillich’s concept of living within an unbroken myth tends to be associated with ancient and indigenous religious traditions and the idea of living within a broken myth is associated with a contemporary orientation to religion, a particularly insightful

instance of the latter exists within the religious tradition of the Hopi people of the American Southwest. This example of consciously breaking a previously unbroken myth concerns a critical stage of the ritual process for initiating Hopi children in adulthood. Central to this ritual process are the kachinas, the pantheon of divine figures central to the Hopi religion. For the Hopi, the kachinas represent the spiritual energy of both ancestral and historical figures, as well as of all of the natural forces and elements of the physical world. In the performing of Hopi rituals, these sacred figures are embodied by masked and costumed dancers.

As Sam D. Gill observes, Hopi children “are lead to believe that the kachinas visit the village at certain intervals throughout the year, and they come to expect gifts from them.” Until the age of initiation, Hopi children are “very carefully protected” from seeing either these impersonating kachina figures without their masks or the masks when not being worn. Then, “just prior to their initiation in adulthood and their formal participation in adult religious life,” Gill continues, adolescents undergo a religious ritual lasting several days. “During the kachina cult initiation rites,” he writes, these adolescents “are frightened by the ogre kachinas,” “entertained by numerous kachina dances,” “come into close contact with a great many kachinas,” and “are told secret stories about the origin of the kachinas.” But the most lasting impression, Gill observes, is purposely saved for the final night of this ceremony.

That night the youths are taken into to a kiva, an enclosed ritual space dug into earth, to await a particularly important kachina dance. Describing this stage of the initiatory experience, Gill writes that the adolescents initially hear the kachinas calling out as they approach the kiva. They then witness the invitation extended by the elders

from within the kiva for the dancing gods to enter the ritual space. Gill emphasizes that everything in the ritual up to this point is now entirely familiar to the initiates. What happens subsequently, however, is totally unexpected because “to the children’s amazement, the kachinas enter without their masks, and for the first time in their lives, the initiates discover that the kachinas are actually members of their own village impersonating the gods” (9). Describing the effect of this unprecedented turn of events, Gill observes:

With the unmasking of the kachinas, the naiveté of the children is shattered once and forever. The existence of the kachinas, the nature of their own destiny, the trust in their parents and elders, and the very shape of reality itself are all, in a flash, brought into radical question. The children can either accept the world as bereft of meaning, with the Hopi religion a sham, or find some deeper sense in the ceremonies and objects which had come to mean so much to them. Necessarily, they begin their religious life in a state of serious reflection and in quest of understanding the sacred profound enough to sustain their new life. (8)

Further commenting on the effect of this initiation ritual, John Shea observes that for the young Hopi this “experience of disenchantment is the beginning of mature religious consciousness.” For all the years leading up to this ritual, he continues, Hopi children “naively believe the masked dancers are really the Hopi gods.” Living in an unbroken myth, these children assume the symbols of the sacred, namely the masked dancers, are the sacred itself. “The unmasking conclusion shatters this childish faith,” he continues, pushing the initiate “into adult life with a profound religious question.” Knowing what these young people now know, he suggests, they must ask themselves if the *kachinas* “are to be left behind with childhood or is there a way of bringing them forward into adult life?” If the latter is the answer, he argues, the kachinas “must be appropriated in a new way.” Now living in world of broken myths, these young people

must acknowledge that while the sacred expresses itself through the figures of the kachinas, “any simple identification of symbol and the sacred is naïve” because the sacred “is infinitely more than the masked dancers” (33).

While this process of “breaking the myth” admittedly induces an element of profound uncertainty for the person who has made its symbolic character conscious, Tillich argues, learning to live with such uncertainty is the only hope we have today for connecting to the sacred dimension of existence. Commenting on the paradox of the power of the broken symbol, Robert Cummings Neville writes, “a broken symbol is one that effectively engages us yet whose limitations are also known” (*Truth of Broken Symbols* x). Expressing the ongoing theological challenge posed by the pressing need to reject all unbroken myths, Neville writes: “The question is, if we know that all the symbols are wrong, how can any be effective for us? In this secular age in which every transcendent reference is demythologized and everything else is deconstructed, how can people be gripped by the infinite toward which finite symbols so brokenly point?” (xii). At the very least, Neville suggests, contemporary theologians need to open themselves to the possibility of the emergence of as-yet unknown symbols capable of imaging the sacred, “to cast nets of new representations to know the divine more deeply” (*Behind the Masks of God* 169).

A theological concept related to Tillich’s differentiation between unbroken and broken myths and symbols is the distinction made by Paul Ricoeur between two different kinds of consciousness for responding to any myth or symbol. Designated by Ricoeur as “primitive naïveté” and “second naïveté,” these two types of consciousness correspond, respectively, to the distinction between living in an unbroken relationship to a myth or a



symbol versus living in a broken one (351). Much as living in an unbroken relationship with myths and symbols requires that one remain in a pre-rational state of consciousness, so too does sustaining Ricoeur's state of primitive naiveté. Moreover, just as Tillich recognizes that modern, rationally oriented people cannot consciously embrace unbroken myths and symbols, so too does Ricoeur acknowledge that they can no longer approach myths and symbols from the perspective of a first naiveté.

Describing what happens within the state of consciousness characterized as primitive naiveté, David E. Klemm observes, a symbol "remains unquestioned and unquestionable in its self-evident meaning and truth," as a result of which "the expression of the symbol and the reality it signifies remain undivided." In contrast, he continues, entering into a second naiveté "requires the full emergence of reflexive consciousness," thereby resulting in the breaking of the symbol (72). However, this secondary kind of naiveté, he cautions, is not simply the dismissal by rational consciousness of symbols as meaningless, but rather a kind of reappropriation of them in a more mature form.

In this way, Klemm suggests, the response of second naiveté engages the symbolic by simultaneously retaining the directness of the instinctual and emotional response of primitive naiveté, while invoking the analytical and interpretive qualities of the rational mind. Describing this process, Ricoeur observes that the conscious engagement of second naiveté results in "a creative interpretation of meaning, faithful to the impulsion, to the gift of meaning from the symbol, and faithful also to the philosopher's oath to seek understanding" (348). As a result, he continues, even if "we can no longer hear the great symbolisms of the sacred in accordance with the original

beliefs in them, we can [still] aim at a second naiveté in and through criticism.” In this way, he concludes, “by *interpreting*, we can hear *again*” (351).

While one aspect of the current theological interest in the symbolic and imaginal is concerned with encouraging the creation of new symbols and metaphors for the sacred, William C. Shepherd emphasizes the importance of including the widest possible range of such symbols and metaphors in the development of a postmodern religious orientation. This melding of disparate and even contradictory religious symbols into a dynamic individual religious framework is a phenomenon Shepherd terms “polysymbolic religiosity” (78). Polysymbolic religiosity describes a religious framework that disputes the value—and perhaps even the validity—of maintaining an internal purity, consistency, and exclusivity of religious symbols, beliefs, and practices within religious traditions. Just as the necessarily limited and localized cultural perspectives of the past made it appropriate and necessary for people to limit their lifelong religious adherence to one tradition, Shepherd suggests, given the growing diversity of an emerging global culture, it is now preferable for one to “consider and formulate one’s own eclectic synthesis of available religious vehicles of meaning” (79).

Engaging the sacred through the context of personal mythology, recognizing the sacred as it manifests in the diverse and ever-evolving realm of personal experience, is a process very much in keeping with a polysymbolic form of religious orientation. Perhaps the most important quality of polysymbolist religiosity in this regard is its intrinsic relationship to the imaginal. Commenting on the significance of this relationship, Lonnie D. Kliever writes, “Polysymbolism’s brazen subordination of the religious traditions to the individual [. . .] implicitly asserts the priority of the religious imagination.”

Moreover, he continues, “Polysymbolism’s exuberant experiments with individualized symbol systems (‘man makes himself by making his own gods and that is poetry’) indirectly reflects the plasticity of the religious imagination” (193).

Further supporting this relationship between theology and imagination is John C. Meagher’s conception of “God as an imaginative option” (40). In an article entitled “God as Imaginative Option, God as Truth,” Meagher argues that it is only through the agency of imagination that any personally meaningful conception or belief about divinity can arise. Regarding the primary role played by imagination in the conceptualizing of divinity, however, Meagher is careful to observe:

That does not make God imaginary; it makes God imagined. So, admittedly are elves and banshees and bandersnatches and Middle Earth; but so are the quarks of subatomic physics, the workings of the psyche, the essential personal reality of the person one loves most, and how tomorrow will be spent. God can be brought into consciousness only by an act of imagination, but what is there in consciousness that got there by another route? Imagined is not imaginary. Imagination imports goods lavishly, and cannot pay the required duty on it all; what can’t be afforded must be sent back, devalued, or confiscated. But the goods arrive the only way they can, on the wharves of the imagination, and the inspections and decisions must take place in the course of their slow and careful unpacking. (45)

While asserting the imaginal nature of any conception or belief about God, however, Meagher also shares Neville’s concern for seeking the “truth” of theological propositions. In the second half of Meagher’s proposal regarding divinity, that God is also truth, he begins by observing that whatever one’s conceptions and beliefs about god may be, they are not truth, but are instead illusions. Still, he argues, “they are illusions capable of bringing about truth” or, employing truth as a verb, “able to true.” If this proposition appears contradictory, he reminds the reader that truth is “often brought about

through the instrumentality of illusions, some of them instinctive and some of them deliberately chosen.”

According to Meagher, “truth is essentially the power of truing, or the power that makes reality true” (52). As such, it is simultaneously that which “holds the real together in coherent, ordered, and intelligible relatedness” and that which “brings us into harmony and right relationship with it.” Meagher also suggests that the power that defines and sustains reality for each of us is a “power in which we participate” (55). This is so, he continues, because “it is ultimately identical with the power that holds us together and makes us who we are, since the two are, as far as we can know, reflexes and reciprocals of one another.” Moreover, Meagher proposes, “the power in which and by which this truing is brought about is named God” (56).

Because humans widely differ in terms of cultural background, temperament, upbringing, and other attributes, Meagher writes, “The God who is truth will differ accordingly, at least in its provisional illusory but truing forms.” Moreover, even within the experience of any particular human being, the process of truing is not consistent or unchanging. As a result, Meagher willingly acknowledges, “my truth is not uniform, because I am not. What is true for me at this moment is of temporary authority, and differs from other phases of myself in age, setting, health, mood, and time of day. My imagination encompasses them all, more or less, but their variability has an important bearing on my address to God” (59). In other words, the God that one initially conceives of through imagination becomes the God that reveals to one that which is true, that which “trues” one relationship to life. For one’s relationship to truth to remain continuously valid, Meagher argues, one must continually re-imagine one’s vision of God.

*On the Role of Narrative in Contemporary Theology*

Another trend in contemporary theological discourse directly related to the idea of personal mythology as a religious endeavor is the emerging recognition of the central place of narrative and story in modern religious understanding and experience. This growing emphasis on the importance of narrative and story-telling within the field of religious studies is paralleled by similar developments in fields as diverse as depth, narrative and social psychology, cultural anthropology, literary criticism and hermeneutics, philosophy, oral history, documentary filmmaking, and patient-directed healthcare (*Narrative*). The sheer depth and breadth of these developments also resoundingly testify to what James B. Wiggins has described as “the collapse of the story to end all stories,” meaning the failed attempt on the part of post-Enlightenment human beings to “live entirely without stories” (3).

Specifically within the realm of theological discourse, a primary manifestation of this burgeoning interest in narrative and storytelling has been the rise of a new field called “narrative theology.” Also known as “story theology,” this new approach to theological reflection can be traced back to an essay, entitled “The Story of Our Lives,” written in 1941 by H. Richard Niebuhr. According to Gary L. Comstock, while Niebuhr’s “theme lay undeveloped for several decades, it burst forth onto the theological scene in the early 1970s.” Defined as “reflection on religious claims embedded in stories,” narrative theology is, as Comstock further observes, “one of the most significant currents in late twentieth-century thought” (687).

While theology has always been concerned with religious stories, Andrew Greeley observes, the focus of that concern has tended to be on the interpretation of such stories rather than on their intrinsic communicative power as carriers of meaning. More

recently and in contrast to this theological tradition, he continues, many religious scholars:

have come to believe that the story is the truth and that the exegesis of the story, however necessary it may be, invariably deprives the story not only of its wonder and its fascination but also of some of the resonances and nuances that lurk in the periphery and the penumbra of the tale. (39)

Within the approach to religious understanding called narrative theology, Greeley writes, religion is understood fundamentally to be concerned with story. In this regard, he argues, religion is “story before it is anything else, story after it is everything else, story born from experience, coded in symbol, reinforced in the self, and shared with others to explain life and death” (40).

The narrative approach to theology recognizes that the power of story as a vehicle for encountering the sacred derives from narrative’s inherently symbolic, metaphoric, and imaginal qualities. Starting with the premise that key theological ideas are symbolic and metaphorical in nature, Dae Sung Lee observes that such symbols and metaphors “can be meaningful only within the context of a story which encompasses the world of these symbols and metaphors.” In this sense, Lee suggests, “Theological truth is more like the truth of a poem” (123). Rather than arguing, as does much of traditional theology, that poetic language obscures religious truth, narrative theology recognizes that such language might actually offer an innate asset over that of logical discourse. In this sense, Lee observes, narrative theologians “take the polyvalent and metaphoric character of language as an advantage to explore the deeper meaning in theology, which cannot be attained by simple propositional statements” (124).

While the metaphorical nature of narrative makes it well suited for reflection on the symbolic core of theological ideas, the experiential quality of hearing and telling

stories affords narrative approaches to theology an advantage in terms of understanding how such ideas might actually apply the lives of people. Commenting on this experiential dimension of sacred narrative, Terrence Tilley observes that the metaphors “which might fit our lives” are contained within “the stories which form the traditions in which we live, be they humanist, Christian, therapeutic, etc.” In this regard, Tilley continues, “to say what that root metaphor means for us is to tell or retell, to adopt or adapt, the story carrying that metaphor from the tradition into one’s own life (5).

Megan McKenna and Tony Cowan extend this argument by suggesting that, within a religious frame of reference, “the primary prerequisite for a story, if is to be true and worth telling, is that it be lived” (63). Indeed, they continue, such a story “is given to be transformed into experience, into reality, into something that has the power to transform people.” In the end, they write, a sacred story “calls on us to obey, to respond by making the story true, through living it, through making the words take flesh in us” (64).

Paul Brockelman also writes about both the experiential aspect of sacred stories and the religious imperative such narratives imply regarding their enactment in life. In this context, he contends, “religious life entails understanding in two ways.” The first way, he writes, is through “the narrative disclosure of the ways of seeing life as a meaningful whole,” while the second is “actually coming to live-out such an interpretation of life as a personal story.” As a result, he continues, “stories that inform us about how we ought to live can lead us to transform and deepen the way we actually do live.” Deepening Brockelman’s sense of the existential power of sacred stories is his contention that all such narratives are fundamentally mythic in nature. In this regard, he

contends, “there is no mythology without concrete ways of being which reflect it,” and “no concrete ways of living without a mythological vision to inform and support them.” Moreover, he argues that these “are not two different kinds of religious understanding,” but rather “different aspects or steps in the total process of actively living a narrative vision of what reality demands of us” (101).

Related to the idea of narrative or story theology is the concept of “biography as theology” (McClendon 87). This concept focuses not on the personal implications of sacred stories, but rather on the sacred implications of personal ones. “People become theologians,” observes Peter Gilmour, “when they tell their story or write their memoir, a particularized form of narrative theology” (70). Such a personally derived approach to theology, he suggests, “is not an abstract, research-oriented mode of studying the holy, but a democratized, holistic, postmodern approach to knowing God” (71). Commenting generally on the idea of biography-as-theology, Greeley suggests that “the stories you tell about what endows your life with meaning are your religious stories” (40).

Regarding the implications for organized religion of this development within narrative theology, Tilley observes that the “process of story-telling—especially that of autobiography—provides the bridge for canonical images and metaphors from the community or tradition to the individual” (5). Even for those, however, “who no longer find in the stories and myths of orthodox religion the power to inform life with creative meaning,” Sam Keen suggests, seeking the sacred dimension of one’s personal story “points to a locality and a method which may be useful in discovering a sacred dimension of life.” Engaging this approach to religious life, he continues, requires asking a critical question of oneself: “Is there anything on the native ground of my own experience—my



biography, my history—which testifies to the reality of the holy?” If so, he argues, “we have every right to use the ancient language of the holy, and therefore, to mark out a domain for theological exploration” (*To a Dancing God* 100).

A variation on the idea of “biography as theology” is Maurice Friedman’s concept of “theology as event.” Regarding this approach to theological inquiry, Friedman writes that to speak of theology as event “changes radically the meaning of theology.” In such a context, he observes, theology “no longer rests upon a set of traditional beliefs and presuppositions nor even upon a traditional interpretation of ‘sacred history’ and biblical events.” Rather, he continues, “it is the event itself that again and again gives rise to religious meaning, and only out of that meaning, apprehended in our own history and the history of past generations that we made present to ourselves, do religious symbols and theological interpretations arise” (*Heart of Wisdom* 86). Further commenting on the significance of adopting such an approach to the comprehending the sacred, Friedman writes that the idea of theology-as-event “makes a staggering claim, namely that it is in our lives that we apprehend the divine—not through sacred times and places and rituals alone but in the everyday happening, ‘the days of our years’ ” (*Via Humana* 87).

One obvious manifestation of the idea that the sacred might be found in the stories of individual people’s lives is the genre of autobiographical writing comprising religious or spiritual memoirs. While few examples of this genre are overtly mythological in focus or approach, it has been suggested that, at their core, such writings have an inherently mythic quality. In this sense, Shea suggests that whenever biographies are deeply probed, “a root metaphor appears, a myth which gives unity and meaning to our lives” (56). In this vein, Maureen Murdock observes, “Memoir, like myth, is a quest for

meaning.” Further commenting on the relationship between myth and memoir, she observes that myth “owes its persistence to its power to express or symbolize typical human emotions that have been experienced throughout successive generations,” while memoir “owes its popularity to its poignancy in portraying these enduring patterns of behavior or archetypal themes in an individual’s life” (130). In this way, she suggests, myth “is an ordering principle that gives coherence to the way memoirs unfold,” in that a myth “is the pattern or blueprint or structure upon which we hand the remembered incidents of our lives” (133).

In the context of this dissertation, a particularly interesting sub-set of writings within the genre of religious or spiritual memoir are those works that might be uniquely characterized as “mythic memoir.” What distinguishes mythic memoir is the memoirists’ overt focus on archetypal and mythological themes and figures in the recounting of and reflection on their life experiences. Examples of such works include Jung’s *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*, key segments within many of the writings of Christine Downing (for example, *The Goddess, Gods in Our Midst, The Long Journey Home*, and *Psyche’s Sisters*), numerous portions of Keen’s *To a Dancing God* and *Hymns to an Unknown God*, and Jean Houston’s *A Mythic Life*.

*Of Immanence and Transcendence, the Sacred and the Profane, and the Ordinary Sacred*

A particular theological dilemma that tends to arise in the attempt to re-imagine divinity concerns the relationship between the concepts of transcendence and immanence. These two approaches to conceptualizing the source of sacred have traditionally been seen as endorsing opposing, mutually exclusive points of view. Expressed in somewhat simplistic terms, the transcendent orientation presumes divinity to be inherently separate

and distinct from the world, while the idea of immanence takes for granted the inherent inseparability of divinity and the world.

Considering the latter of these two extreme perspectives, George Brantl observes that when the divine becomes totally immanent, associated completely and literally with finite objects and values, it is reduced to some form of what traditional religion might call idolatry. On the other hand, Brantl cautions, when the divine is viewed as totally transcendent, religious experience become divorced from the everyday world of lived experience (623). Meaningfully dealing with the dilemma posed by the opposition of the transcendent and immanent dimensions of divinity, he suggests, requires that humanity paradoxically seek “a new way of experiencing the transcendent [. . .] in the full immanence of experience” (907).

Describing the efforts made by contemporary theologians to deal with the paradoxical relationship of immanence and transcendence, Roger Hazelton writes, “What has really been going on might be called an effort to relocate the meaning of transcendence.” This process, he observes, involves abandoning “thinking about transcendence as confined to ‘God,’ as though this name pointed to an entity distinct and distinguishable from ‘man’.” Such a re-visioning of the idea of transcendence, he adds, would require an acknowledgement that the “God-question” is bound up with the “humanity-question” to such an extent “that they became the same question” (101). As a result, Hazelton concludes, “if either immanence or transcendence are to mean anything, their meanings must be seen to interlock and interpenetrate [...] one another” (108).

Paralleling the paradox of the relationship between the transcendent and immanent dimensions of divinity is a second, equally paradoxical relationship. That

relationship exists between those aspects of the phenomenal world considered sacred or holy and those considered profane (derived from the Latin term for the unhallowed space outside of a temple or sacred precinct), mundane (derived from the Latin term for “world” and referring to that which is worldly), and secular (derived from the Latin term for a particular generation or age and referring to that which is “of the temporal” or, more colloquially “of time”). In particular, although the exclusively transcendent view assumes that divinity is separate from the world, it has tended to suggest that the world of everyday activities, material things, and chronological events, the world of time and space, is inherently *not* sacred.

Directly addressing this paradox, Lynda Sexson asks “How is it then that thinking and things are made holy or sacred?” She suggests that exploring the etymologies of the latter two words will help to answer this question. In this context, she reminds her readers that the word holy is etymologically related to “wholeness” and that the word sacred carries connotations of “consecrated, set apart and purified.” She then argues that the “dualism that divides the world into the sacred and the profane, or the holy and the ordinary, actually undercuts or eradicates the holy (wholeness) since all reality must be—or is potentially—sacred (consecrated)” (8). The assumption of the potential sacredness of all things, Sexson further suggests, implies that the proper task of religion is “the consecration of experience or person, so that the person or experience is made whole (holy)” (9).

Regarding the relationship between the sacred and the ordinary, Sexson also introduces a concept she describes as “improvising the sacred.” In this context, she observes:

Inventories from children's hiding places and from religious holy places bear a remarkable similarity: bones, bright stones, beads, fur feathers, bits of writing, nuts, a pictures; or relics, *urim* and *thummim*, the borrowed power of the totemic animal, the regenerative grain, the sacred text, the host, the icon. (5)

Sexson rhetorically asks “Why do children collect feathers, hide gold paper, delicately perch a marble in the arms of an unresisting house plant, or stick shells under their beds or stones into their mattresses?” The reason, she answers, is that “the ‘junk’ that is precious to children—and to adults—is precisely the stuff of the sacred.” In this sense, Sexson suggests “the holy is made up of words and works identical to all the stuff in the profane world” (8).

Also commenting on this interrelationship between the sacred and the profane, Lawrence J. Hatab writes “the sacred does not mean exclusively the supernatural or otherworldly, but simply the *extraordinary*, the uncommon, both wondrous and terrifying.” According to Hatab, the profane, therefore, “does not mean something sacrilegious but simply the *ordinary*, the common.” For Hatab, the distinction between sacred and profane “does speak of two worlds, but rather a single, two-dimensional world.” In this sense, the sacred can be said to show itself “whenever something affects the existential situation in important ways—exciting terror, hope, joy, or awe” (23). In contemplating the ultimate personal implication of such a coming together of the sacred and the profane dimensions of experience, Sam Keen writes, “If there is some sacred ground and meaning for my life, it must be discovered here and now” (*Hymns to an Unknown God* 41).

At the beginning of his book on personal mythology, D. Stephenson Bond provides a sort of case study on both the peculiar interrelationship of the sacred and the

profane and on the imaginal and perceptual process by which the profane becomes sacred. That case study takes the form of a meditation on the particular small stone that Bond carries in his pocket as a sort of talisman. At the beginning of this account, Bond describes how he inadvertently came upon the stone one day while working in his garden. It attracted his attention, he writes, because it was shaped like an arrowhead, “not the fancy kind you see in the museums, but a very primitive arrowhead.” He carefully notes that the stone “could have been an arrowhead,” an arrowhead “shaped by a bony hand long before the white man’s era.” On the other hand, he realizes, it also “*could* be utterly natural, carved by nature, in a way that seems eerily conscious.”

Bond observes that the key to his fascination with his particular stone was in the ambiguity of its nature. He writes that his stone “cannot make up its mind to be of human or natural origin, conscious or unconscious” (4). By engaging Bond’s imagination in a process mythic reflection, the stone’s ambiguous character actually becomes the source of its sacred or religious quality for Bond. In that process of imaginal reflection, for example, Bond’s mysteriously ambiguous stone comes to be associated with the prehistoric standing stones of northern Europe and aboriginal stone fetishes. It also becomes imaginally linked to the river stone Jung carried in his pocket as a boy and the stones from Lake Zurich that he played with as a form of unconscious therapy during his famous midlife breakdown.

Bond recounts the small ways in which he begins to act ritualistically with regard to his mythological stone, attributing a kind of sacred power to his relationship with it. At the same time, he is careful to note his realization that the attribution of such power to a stone is, in actuality, a projection of some quality inside of him. Bond observes of his

pocket stone, “One minute it was a rock, and the next a talisman, a charm, a fetish, a relic.” Describing the ultimate outcome of this process of imaginal transformation, he concludes, his stone was “made sacred by human imagination” (8). Bond’s stone and his relationship to it are also an example of what Tillich calls a “broken myth,” a myth that retains its power in spite of—or perhaps because of—one’s conscious awareness that one is engaging something mythic. In this regard, Bond is also manifesting the form of symbolic and imaginal consciousness that Ricoeur calls second naiveté. Most importantly, it should be noted that Bond’s recounting of this story provides a simple demonstration of the manner in which the sacred is made manifest through one’s personal experience of the mythic.

*On Myth, Meaning, and Mystery*

While religious scholars tend to define the idea of the sacred in conventionally religious terms, it is also possible to contemplate the sacred in the larger and more philosophical context of the “search for meaning.” For many people, particularly those who consider themselves “non-religious,” it is this latter sense of what constitutes or makes something sacred that is particularly important. Given its role as a mediator of the sacred, mythology is intrinsically involved in this search for a personal sense of meaning.

Commenting on this idea, Thomas Moore observes that myth “gives a person the sense of living in a meaningful story, the feeling that one’s life makes sense and has value” (*Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life* 238). Further emphasizing this meaning-making role of myth, Rollo May has observed that myth is a tool for “making sense in a senseless world,” adding that myths are essentially “narrative patterns that give significance to our existence” (15). Writing more specifically about the relationship

between a personal encounter with myth and the experience of meaning, Bond observes, “What we experience as our own individual life as well as what we experience as universally human can only be expressed—which is to say can only become a meaning—through personal myth” (59).

While most of those writing about personal mythology explicitly consider this ability of mythic consciousness to convey a sense of both existential and universal meaning to life experience, it is important to note that many of these authors also take pains to focus on the inherently symbolic, metaphorical, and imaginal nature of mythic meaning. “When someone has an ‘Aha!’ response to an interpretation of a myth,” writes Jean Shinoda Bolen in this context, “the particular myth is symbolically addressing something that is personally important to him or her” (*Goddesses in Everywoman* 6). In emphasizing the intrinsically imaginal nature of meaning construed mythically, Mark Schorer goes so far as to define a myth simply as “a large, controlling image that gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life” (355).

In addition to being inherently symbolic and imaginal, it is also important to recognize that meaning understood in mythic terms is also fundamentally experiential in nature. In other words, the mythic meaning of a life experience is not something to be found separate and apart from either the experience itself or the memory of the experience. Commenting on this existential quality of myth, Eric Gould observes, “the sacredness of myth... is not an abstract point, but a living principle, dependent on the phenomenological fact that the world is what we perceive—not an idea, but an event which is lived through” (198).



Because of its inherently existential, experiential nature, Bond writes, a mythic sense of meaning “does not come ready-made,” as a result of which “our problem is [. . .] not so much to preserve the meanings we inherit, as to participate in the process of meaning unfolding” (59). Moreover, as Stephen Larsen observes, since a mythic sense of meaning will necessarily manifest as an integrated aspect of the unfolding of one’s experience, one cannot anticipate or control when one will encounter such meaning in one’s life. As such, mythic meaning “cannot be compelled or defined,” he observes, but “simply presents itself to the receptive consciousness” (*Mythic Imagination* 31). In this sense, writes Hatab, mythic meaning “is not invented but rather *revealed*” (21).

In systematically contemplating the relationship between mythic consciousness and a sense of the meaningfulness of life experience, Robert J. Hater has proposed a three-tiered model of mythic meaning. Describing the least powerful, though most common, of these levels of mythic meaning as “secondary mythic meaning,” Hater observes that this level of mythic meaning can be engaged through one’s most mundane and unreflective interactions with the material world (5). While such activities and things, he notes, are largely concerned with the functional aspects of life, they also potentially can assume “a deeper mythic meaning” (60). This happens, Hater suggests, when these mundane activities also serve some significant mythic, archetypal, symbolic purpose. As an example of experience manifesting secondary mythic meaning, Hater cites the parent who toils away at an otherwise meaningless job to support his or her family. Secondary mythic meaning is often present, Hater observes, even when the mythic significance of the activity remains completely or largely unconscious. At its strongest, however, secondary mythic meaning manifests as a sort of dim awareness of

the symbolic or metaphorical significance of one's engagement in mundane, functional activities.

The next most powerful level of mythic meaning, which Hater calls "primary mythic meaning," is generated when more powerful experiences in one's life are "filtered through memory, imagination, and reason." As an example of an experience capable of engendering secondary mythic meaning, Hater suggests the sense of meaning encountered in the reflection of a mother contemplating the love she feels for her child. Not surprisingly, there is a deeper emotional charge connected with primary mythic meaning as compared with the secondary level and, as a consequence, a greater sense of imperative connected with consciously engaging this level of mythic meaning. While we may comfortably remain emotionally and intellectually unconscious of the significance of secondary mythic meaning, "when confronted by primary mythic meaning," he writes, "we cannot remain neutral," adding that such an encounter "demands a response" (6).

The most powerful dimension of mythic meaning, according to Hater, is "core mythic meaning," the level connected with the most transpersonal or universal dimension of consciousness (7). Unlike both secondary and primary mythic meanings, which are largely centered on a sense of that which is meaningful on a purely personal level, this third category is primarily concerned with such ultimate and universal concerns as the "quest for identity, life's purpose, ultimate destiny, a reason for living, an explanation for suffering, and the desire for transcendence" (63). When one becomes aware of the transpersonal and universal significance of particular personal experiences, Hater suggests, the dimension of core mythic meaning is engaged. Moreover, while this level of mythic meaning is focused on concerns that transcend the purely personal, Hater

emphasizes the idea that “the dynamics surrounding core mythic meaning also root all primary and secondary mythic responses” to life experience (10).

In his discussion of both the primary and core levels of mythic meaning, Hater emphasizes that a fundamental aspect of meaning when conceived in mythic terms is its relationship to what has commonly been referred to as “mystery.” “Meaning is framed in mystery,” he writes, which is why both “core and primary mythic meaning elude full rational comprehension” (20, 23). Contemplation of the complex relationship that exists between myth, meaning, and mystery is a frequent theme in the literature on both myth in general and on personal mythology in particular. Writing on this relationship, James Hollis observes that a fundamental function of myth has traditionally been to serve as a bridge “from the unknown to the knower,” helping “the human stand in some sort of meaningful relationship to mystery” (*Tracking the Gods* 8). Writing specifically about sacred myths, Hatab proposes that the “basis of myth is neither the human self nor the objective world but a sacred, extraconscious mystery which arrives” (42).

Among the key indicators of the depth and resilience of a particular religious or spiritual frame of reference is its relationship to the particular aspect of the mystery of existence that might be described as the “dark sacred.” Referring to such painful yet inescapable life issues as suffering, grief, and despair, the dark sacred has always been a key focus of concern for religious traditions. Commenting on this dimension of the sacred, John E. Nelson and Andrea Nelson write about the need to “embrace sadness, emptiness, and despair as powerful teachers of life’s most profound lessons,” as well as of the importance of returning “a sense of sacredness to all human experience, especially those sorrows that most try our souls” (2). Also writing about this concept of the dark

sacred, Greg Mogenson observes, “Whether a divine being exists or not, the psychological fact remains that we tend to experience traumatic events *as if* they were in some sense divine.” In this regard, he continues, “Just as God has been described as transcendent and unknowable, a traumatic event is an event which transcends our capacity to experience it” (1).

Among the most ancient and prevalent of mythic images connected with the idea of the dark sacred are those connected with wounds and wounding. Citing the abundance of instances of wounding in Western mythology—from Adam’s rib, Achilles’ heel, and Jesus’ stigmata to Prometheus’s liver, Jacob’s thigh, and Dionysus’ dismemberment—Jean Houston suggests that “all of these myths of wounding carry with them the uncanny, the mysterious, the announcement that the sacred is entering into time” (*Search for the Beloved* 105). Also writing about the potentially sacred dimension of personal psychic wounds, Lionel Corbett writes, “By contemplating the painful aspects of one’s story in the context of the great mythic stories of suffering [. . .] the sufferer’s pain is located within a much larger drama and is not an isolated event” (*Religious Function of the Psyche* 163). This process, he adds, uses ancient myth “as a way of amplifying and deepening one’s own condition,” as a result of which “the myth has become a personal myth” (164).

The interweaving of myth, meaning, and mystery would seem to lie at the core of any attempt to encounter a sacred dimension of consciousness through the vehicle of personal mythology. The process by which this interweaving transpires is profoundly existential in nature, requiring a deep personal engagement of the symbolic and the imaginal, as well as a sustained tolerance for paradox and uncertainty. Regarding this

perennial relationship between mythology, the quest for meaning, and the enduring mystery at the core of both, much can be said, but perhaps the most evocative observations on the subject are those contained within the following passage by Conrad Hyers:

Myth arises out of a profound sense of the mystery of existence—the mystery of existence as such and the mystery of every existing thing. Yet though an attempt may be made to respond to this mystery by offering interpretations of life that somehow ‘reveal’ this mystery, the mystery is never exhausted or overcome. [...] We are not confronted with mystery in the sense of a problem to be solved, a puzzle to be put together, or a detective story that discloses the culprit on the final page. This mystery stands at the beginning and end of all thought. It represents the limit, the final reaches, of every reason and system. Insofar as myths offer themselves as the ultimate answer or truth, it is properly so in the sense that they function on the horizon of the last understanding, where all understanding proceeds from and is returned to the mysterium out of which it has come. (128-9)

Chapter 4  
Five Conceptual Approaches to the Sacred  
Compatible with the Idea of Personal Mythology

*On Seeking Frames of Reference for Encountering the Sacred through Personal Myth*

While one may usefully consider the idea of the sacred in general theoretical terms, as was largely attempted in the previous chapter, at some point one's search for a personally relevant religious or spiritual orientation can be greatly enhanced through encounter and engagement with specific theological frames of reference relevant to the sacred dimension of one's own story. Of the innumerable theological approaches that have been advanced to define the nature and/or significance of the sacred, five particular frames of reference seem to have special relevance to the idea of personal mythology as religious or spiritual pathway. These five theological frames are Rudolf Otto's concept of the numinous, Mircea Eliade's concept of hierophany, Paul Tillich's concept of "ultimate concern," Martin Buber's concept of the I-Thou relationship, and Maurice Friedman's concept of "touchstones of reality."

All of these approaches to conceptualizing the sacred dimension of human experience share several common qualities and defining characteristics. First, all five are broad enough in their conception of the sacred to accommodate a variety of general religious orientations, as well as to be compatible with a wide range of particular religious beliefs and practices. In addition, all five tend to view the sacred as a phenomenon that is highly dynamic and/or continuously evolving in nature. Significantly, all five also acknowledge and embrace the ability of symbolic or metaphorical consciousness to serve as a conduit for the experience of the sacred. Perhaps most importantly, all five frames reflect a fundamentally existential and

phenomenological orientation to understanding the engagement with the sacred dimension of life. In this regard, all five emphasize the personal and experiential—as opposed to the collective and the doctrinal—dimensions of religious experience. Finally, while all five of these approaches share these general characteristics, it is also worth noting that only Otto and Eliade directly focus on the nature of the experience of the sacred. In contrast, Tillich, Buber, and Friedman are largely concerned with the implications of such experience for the shaping of an orientation to life and way of being in the world.

*Otto's Concept of the Numinous*

In 1917, Rudolf Otto, a German theologian and scholar of religion, published *Das Heilige*, later translated and published in English as *The Idea of the Holy*. This slim volume, with its vivid description and detailed analysis of the experience of the sacred, has been recognized as a defining work in the shaping of modern theological thought. As Philip C. Almond writes, both Otto and his vision of the sacred “are familiar items of discussion in the modern study of religion” (ix). Moreover, he continues, “contemporary accounts of the nature of religious experience invariably and necessarily contain references his best known work *The Idea of the Holy*.” Most importantly, with regard to the concept of personal mythology as sacred practice, it is noteworthy that virtually every author addressing this subject routinely refers to Otto’s ideas as a useful paradigm for comprehending the sacred.

It is noteworthy that, before writing *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto traveled extensively in North Africa, the Middle East, India, and the Far East and explored a wide range of religious traditions during the course of his travels. Otto’s personal encounters

with such a wide range of religious practices and symbols and his ability to observe their impact at first hand left him with a profound recognition of the enormous power such practices and symbols held for their various adherents. In the course of his travels, observes his English translator, John W. Harvey, Otto sought to understand “what in the religious experience which [the great traditions of the East] enshrine is specific and unique and what on the other hand is common to all genuine religions” (x).

In this regard, Otto noticed that, unlike many of his Protestant European contemporaries, the individuals he encountered on his travels in the East seemed to experience the sacred in ways that were both immediate and deeply affective. He also came to understand that such experiences were a kind of primary religious phenomenon and that, for their practitioners, the power of the direct experience of the holy always preceded the sorts of moral or ethical concerns what were emphasized within Protestant Christian religious theology and practice. Based on his observations regarding the experience of sacred in other traditions, Melissa Raphael observes, Otto set out “to isolate the mysterious, awesome, fascinating, and overwhelming essence of the holy for analysis without the moral and rational elements it has accrued” (62).

To describe this phenomenon of directly apprehending—or perhaps, more accurately, of being seized by—the sacred, Otto coined the word ‘numinous’ from the Latin *numen*, referring to a local divinity or the spirit of a particular place. According to Almond, Otto first briefly used the term *numen* to describe the source and object of religious experience in 1898. Later, in 1921, Otto extends his usage of the singular noun “numen” to coin the term “numinosum,” a word referring to the collective source of all numinous experience.



As Almond observes, Otto sought to distance his approach for comprehending the sacred from the attempts of early psychologists and anthropologists to explain away religious experience in rationalistic and reductionistic terms (59). In this regard, Raphael writes, Otto's work forcefully presents the case that "the numinous is no mere projection, but an objective datum of experience belonging to a 'wholly other' metaphysical reality whose presence can alone give rise to a numinous state of mind" (62). Since the numinous presence is experienced as an encounter with "something," Otto observes, "The numinous is thus felt as objective and outside the self" (11). Describing the quality of this "wholly other" dimension of the numinous, Keith Ward suggests that one experiences it as "quite outside normal experience, completely alien." Ward further suggests that numinous "encounters us in some sort of experience—we might say, it is apprehended but not comprehended and not even comprehensible" (25-6). Not surprisingly, Otto states, a key effect of this strange and alien quality of the "wholly other" dimension of the numen is to induce in one a state of "stupor," signifying "blank wonder, an astonishment that strikes us dumb, amazement absolute" (26).

In *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto originated the now-familiar Latin phrase "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*" to describe the numinosum as it manifests in the form of numinous experience. Specifically choosing the ambiguous term *mysterium* as the key descriptor for the object of religious experience, Otto writes that the mystery experienced in the form of the numinous is "like every absolutely primary and elemental datum," in that "while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined." Commenting further on the mysterious nature of numinous experience, Ward observes that it relates

directly to the sense that the numinous “is rationally incomprehensible, extraordinary and beyond any concepts” (25).

Because the experience of the numinous is a pre-rational phenomenon apprehended via one’s visceral and affective responses to it, it must inevitably precede any theological or philosophical conceptions about divinity. As such, writes Raphael, the numinous moment “is not a supernatural person, ‘God’, but a set and class of emotions evoked by a sense of the transcendent power and value of the divine.” As a result, she notes, “for Otto, God is not a rational object of knowledge,” as “only the feeling of holiness can (indirectly) yield a sense of what God is like” (17). Equally importantly, as a result of Otto’s emphasis on the direct experience of the numinous, Larsen observes, he separates the general “*experience* of the sacred from any of its specific, particular inflections” (29).

Similarly, Otto takes pains to distinguish the numinous from ideas such as goodness, ethics, and piety, since the acceptance of such concepts does not require or presume the experience of the numinous. By recognizing the inherently non-rational, non-moral nature of the numinous, however, Otto does not mean that the experience of the sacred or holy is either irrational or amoral. “Rather,” writes John L. Gresham, “Otto is reaching for an understanding of the hidden depths of religion beneath the rational and moral aspects.” In this regard, Raphael observes, “Otto’s work can only be understood if it is recognized that he considered all theoretical discussion of God and religion to be entirely redundant unless it is underpinned by, and derived from, religious experience” (65). In Otto’s vision of the sacred, she concludes, “Religion can begin only where there

is immediate communion with the divine in the direct individual witness of the soul to the revelation of the will and presence of the divine in the *sensus numinis*” (66).

In describing the manifestation of the numinous, Otto delineates a number of distinguishing qualities characteristic of such experience. After discussing the inherent incomprehensibility, strangeness, and otherness of the initial experience of the *mysterium*, Otto next considers the concept of *tremendum*, a term etymologically related to the word tremor. According to Otto, the experience of *tremendum* incorporates a sense of shuddering or trembling with a kind of primordial fear or dread in the presence of the sacred.

Otto describes three constituent elements of the experience of the numinous which, when manifested together, produce of this sense of *tremendum*. The first of these elements, which Otto names “awfulness,” is a quality of overwhelming awe experienced in response to the fear or dread experienced in the presence of the numinous (13). Otto describes the second element of the *tremendum* aspect of the numinous as a sense of “overpoweringness,” an awareness of overwhelming majesty inducing in one a profound humility (19). This quality of overpoweringness is further characterized by Otto as a “consciousness of the absolute superiority or supremacy of a power other than myself.” The third and final quality of *tremendum* is the element of “energy” described by Otto as “the sense of a force that knows not stint or stay, which is urgent, active compelling, and alive” (23). Summarizing the effect of the *tremendum* aspect of the numinous, Gresham observes that in the presence of the terrifying sense of awe, overpoweringness, and urgent energy of the sacred, “one draws back, retreats or falls prostrate in fear before it.”

In stark contrast to his depiction of *tremendum*, Otto's description of the *fascinans* aspect of the numinous evokes an energy that "allures with a potent charm" and "entrances" and "captivates and transports [one] with a strange ravishment" (31). In further characterizing this aspect of the sacred, Otto uses words like "wonderfulness," "rapture," "bliss," and "beatitude," noting that the affective quality of *fascinans* goes beyond more mundane and psychologically comprehensible terms like "love," "mercy," "comfort" (31). "Only words with religious connotations," Gresham observes of the Otto's concept of the *fascinans*, "can convey the sense of incomparable joy and fulfillment to be found in union with the numinous presence." Regarding the most mature forms of the experience of the *fascinans* aspect of the numinous, Otto writes that it is "experienced in its essential, positive, and specific character, as something that bestows on man a beatitude beyond compare, but one whose real nature can neither proclaim nor conceive in thought, but may know only by direct and living experience" (33).

Fundamental to the nature of the numinous is the paradoxical experience of being terrified by the *tremendum* of the mystery while simultaneously drawn toward its *fascinans* dimension. Otto describes this "dual character of numinous consciousness" as the experience of "daunting 'awefulness' and 'majesty' " combined with "something uniquely attractive and fascinating" (30). Suggesting another description of the bipolar character of the numinous, Philip C. Almond observes, "The moment of awe and terror is, as it were, balanced by a simultaneous moment of longing and desire (70). Perhaps the most evocative description of the paradox of numinous experience is Ward's

observation that “If you feel puzzled, paralysed and simultaneously intoxicated, you have a sense of the numinous” (29).

Commenting on the overall effect of the experience of the numinous, Larsen writes, “consciousness changes tracks and begins to operate in a different way.” In the face of the *mysterium*, he continues, individual consciousness is “no longer concerned with labeling, categorizing, or manipulating the universe that surrounds it,” but rather “is speechlessly content to behold, in reverence and awe, the cosmic mystery of which it too is a part” (*Shaman's* 30). Moreover, writes Bond, the “feelings and images that seize us in the experience of numinosity, compelling remarkable states of consciousness and behaviors, impose the vital necessity of finding some form of adaptation to their power” (49). Through this process of adaption, he continues, through “careful and scrupulous observation of the *numinosum* in his or her own life,” a renewed form of personal religious expression may emerge in the individual (51).

Describing the overall impact of experiencing the sacred in the context of the numinous, Ward observes:

We may [. . .] recognize the awe that fills the mind before the vast immensities of space, and the catastrophic power of planetary earthquakes and stellar supernovae. We may feel our helplessness before famine, plagues and inevitable death, as they rage through our human world. And we may sometimes sense the intoxication of beauty, almost too intense to bear, as we suddenly, in a miraculous moment, discern the world in all its intricate order and subtle intensity. Such moments of ‘divination’ open up depths to reality that are not normally seen or sensed. It may be that when we truly have that sense of astonished silence, of fearful awe and ecstatic rapture, then we come near to sensing what it was that the Greek gods expressed. (29)

Moreover, and with particular regard to the idea of personal mythology as pathway to the sacred dimension of life, Ward writes that even for people living today there will “be

those whose chosen god resonates with their own history and personality, but which points beyond its symbolized form to the hidden mystery of the numinous” (30).

Such a process of observing the manifestation of the numinous within one’s life story is one of the most frequently suggested approaches for exploring the religious dimension of one’s personal mythology. In Jungian psychology, for example, the experience of the numinous is intrinsically associated with both the manifestation of archetypal consciousness and the unfolding of the lifelong process of individuation. Indeed, in a broader sense, the idea of the numinous is core to the entire corpus of Jung’s work. Jung expressed that deeper connection with Otto when he observed late in his life that “the main interest of my work is not concerned with the treatment of neurosis but rather with the approach of the numinous” (*Letters* 377).

It is perhaps Joseph Campbell, however, who most clearly and directly addressed the profound interconnection between the ideas of the numinous and of personal mythology as a religious endeavor. “The first function of a living mythology,” he states, “the properly religious function, the sense of Rudolf Otto’s definition in *The Idea of the Holy*, is to waken and maintain in the individual an experience of awe, humility, and respect, in recognition of that ultimate mystery, transcending names and forms” (*Masks of God* 609). Most importantly for Campbell, as collective religious mythologies have lost their ability to express the numinous for many people, this religious function of mythology has necessarily devolved to the level of personal encounter and celebration in the mythology of the individual.

#### *Eliade’s Concept of Hierophany*

Mircea Eliade, one of the key figures in the evolution of the modern discipline of

religious studies, introduced a large number of influential terms and concepts into the contemporary discourse about religion. Among the most important of these concepts is “hierophany,” a term describing any particular manifestation of the sacred in the mundane or profane world. As Bryan S. Rennie observes, the term “hierophany” is derived from the Greek *hieros*, meaning “holy” or “sacred,” and *phainein*, meaning “to show” (*Reconstructing Eliade* 8). Defining hierophany in the most generic of contexts, Eliade writes, “the term in its widest sense means anything which manifests the sacred” (*Patterns in Comparative Religion* xviii). Further commenting on the significance of this term, Rennie describes hierophany as “any element of the experiential world of humanity which is perceived in such a way as to constitute a revelation of the sacred” (*Reconstructing Eliade* 15).

Where Otto’s concept of the numinous focuses on describing the affective qualities connected with the manifestation of the sacred, Eliade’s concept of hierophany centers on the complex interrelationship between the sacred and the non-sacred, or profane. As a general concept, hierophany refers to the process by which the sacred becomes manifest, as well as to the normally profane objects, places, or events through which or in which that manifestation occurs. Moreover, the concept of hierophany assumes sacredness to be both a quality inherent in the particular object, place, or event at the center of a hierophany, as well as an aspect of the direct, perceptual experience of such a manifestation. In this sense, during hierophany, the sacred is both an immanent presence in the world and a particular quality of the experience of that presence.

For Eliade, the revelation of the sacred as hierophany is inherently paradoxical in nature. “Each hierophany expresses an incomparable paradox,” he writes, “arising from

the great mystery upon which every hierophany is centered: the very fact that the sacred is made manifest at all.” Core to an appreciation of that paradox is the realization that, despite their constituting two fundamentally different and opposing forms of consciousness, the sacred and the profane nevertheless are brought together in the mystery of each hierophany. Commenting on this enigma, Eliade notes, “this paradoxical coming-together of sacred and profane, being and non-being, absolute and relative, the eternal and the becoming is what every hierophany, even the most elementary reveals” (“Hierophany” 314). Further remarking on the implications of this interpenetration of the sacred and profane, Rennie describes hierophany as a “subtle, paradoxical conception of the coincidence of the real and the unreal in the experience of human life” (*Reconstructing Eliade* 11).

Though Eliade’s conception of hierophany assumes a profound coming-together of the sacred and the profane, it is important to remember that, for Eliade, sacredness and profaneness nevertheless reflect inherently different and opposing forms of perception. Indeed, Eliade describes them as “two modes of being in the world,” adding that an “abyss [. . .] divides the two modalities of experience.” In the same vein, he also writes that “Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane (*Sacred and the Profane* 11-14).

As a result, the concept of hierophany precludes the possibility of the simultaneous perception of the sacred and profane, of the co-existence of the sacred and profane at the same time in the same place. In other words, according to Eliade, in the moment that an object or event becomes the locus of a hierophany, that object or event, having taken on a transcendent nature, ceases in some elemental sense to exist at the level



of profane or mundane reality. Then, with the passing of the hierophanic manifestation, perception returns to the profane mode and the object or event is once again seen in its ordinary, everyday, non-sacred dimension.

While Eliade views the sacred as a fundamentally different dimension of reality from that of the profane or mundane, he also recognizes that another paradoxical aspect of the nature of hierophany relates to the ability of the sacred to manifest “under any sort of form, even the most alien.” Commenting on the ubiquity and multiplicity of profane forms through which hierophanies manifest, Eliade writes, “We must get used to the idea of recognizing hierophanies absolutely everywhere, in every area of psychological, economic, spiritual, and social life.” Indeed, he continues, “we cannot be sure that there is *anything*—object, movement, psychological function, being or even game—that has not at some time in human history been transformed somewhere into a hierophany” (*Patterns in Comparative Religion* 29). Eliade goes to observe that while we may not know why something should have become or ceased to have been a hierophany, “it is quite certain that anything man has ever handled, felt, come in contact with or loved can become a hierophany (11).

Perhaps the most mysterious quality of hierophany is the extent to which the sacred is both revealed and concealed as it manifests through the profane. “When something sacred manifests itself as a hierophany,” Eliade observes, “at the same time something ‘occults’ itself, becomes cryptic. Therein is the true dialectic of the sacred: by the mere fact of showing itself, the sacred hides itself” (*Journal* 268). This hide-and-seek quality of the sacred as it manifests in hierophany is further complicated by the often enigmatic nature of the significance that might be ascribed to some hierophanic

experiences. “Some hierophanies are not at all clear, are indeed, almost cryptic,” Eliade writes, “in that they reveal their sacred meanings [. . .] in part or, as it were, in code (*Patterns in Comparative Religion* 8).

Part of the enigmatic, cryptic aspect of comprehending the meaning of a particular hierophany is related to the connection between hierophany and symbolic consciousness. “The study of hierophanies,” Eliade writes, “penetrates the meaning of symbolic life and uncovers the function of symbolism in general.” In this regard, he observes, some symbols become sacred because they constitute the actual, material form through which a hierophany has previously manifested (e.g., a particular stone takes on a symbolic quality because it once was directly experienced as the locus of the manifestation of a divine energy or entity). Other symbols, notes Eliade, acquire or borrow a religious or sacred quality because of their location within a system of symbolic references. In this way, Eliade suggests, the pearl is experienced as hierophanic when human beings become aware of the symbolic relationship between pearls and “the cosmological pattern of water, moon, women, birth, and change.” This second way in which an object acquires its power as a sacred symbol, he writes, suggests the critical “role of human reflection in the origin of certain hierophanies” (“Hierophany” 316).

Given the powerful interrelationship of hierophany and symbol, Eliade observes, “hierophanies can become symbols” and “can sustain and even substitute for hierophanies” (317). Moreover, he continues, symbols play an even more startling and creative role in religious life” in that they can “carry on the process of hierophanization.” In this way, “the symbol itself is sometimes a hierophany” because “it reveals a sacred quality of reality which no other manifestation can uncover.” Through the process of

symbolization, a process described by Eliade as “hierophany in its own right,” any “worldly item may become a sign of transcendent reality and an embodiment of the sacredness of an entire symbolic system” (318). In this context, Lionel Corbett writes, “For those awakened to it [ . . . ] the symbol is one of the commonest forms of hierophany” (*Religious Function of the Psyche* 97).

These observations of the interrelationship of hierophany and symbolic consciousness highlight the critical role of human perception and interpretation in the complex process by which the sacred is experienced in hierophany. As Rennie observes, Eliade viewed “normal everyday experience [ . . . ] as illusory, unreal, profane” (*Reconstructing Eliade* 10). Nevertheless, Rennie continues, for Eliade, “that same experience, *when apprehended in a specific way, when interpreted in a certain manner,* becomes authentic, real, sacred: it becomes a hierophany” (11).

As opposed to the overwhelming, directly affective, non-rational qualities that Otto ascribes to the experience of the numinous, Eliade’s vision of how the sacred manifests requires the engagement of human perceptual and interpretative faculties. While the sacred as manifested in hierophany is “immediately present to our senses, Rennie observes, “its meaning, its significance, is not accessible prior to the perceptual processes of interpretation which identify experience as either sacred or profane” (12). Indeed, he emphasizes, the essential role played by human discernment in the manifestation of hierophany become apparent when one considers the idea that “if all existence is capable of becoming a hierophany, a ‘manifestation of the sacred,’ then the difference which separates a profane from a sacred event is—must be—the perception of that event as such” (14-5).

Moreover, since both perception and interpretation are always to some extent conditioned processes, Rennie also observes that one must be prepared by personal and/or collective experience before one can apprehend a hierophany. In this way, he continues, it is our personal experience and religious backgrounds that shape “our experience of certain phenomena as hierophanic” (69). Nevertheless, Rennie writes, “It is an indispensable element of Eliade's analysis that any phenomenal entity could be apprehended as an hierophany with the appropriate preparation” (“Eliade, Mircea” 261).

As an example of the important role played by perception and interpretation in the experience of hierophany, one might consider the case of a particular form of hierophany called “theophany.” The term theophany, derived by Eliade from the Greek *theo*, meaning “god,” describes situations where the sacred manifests in such a way as to reveal the presence of a particular divinity. Since each divinity makes its appearance known by means of specific qualities and attributes associated with that particular divinity, ability to perceive a theophany is dependent upon familiarity with the nature of the divinity in question.

The example of theophany as a form of hierophanic experience is particularly relevant to the concept of seeking the sacred through a personal approach to myth. Theophany's special connection to personal mythology stems from the key role played by the concept of archetypes within personal mythwork. In this regard, since particular divinities tend to possess specific archetypal qualities and powerful personal archetypal figures and energies tend to have a feeling of divine “otherness” about them, the manifestation of archetypal material often feels theophanic. However, as with all

examples of theophany, the capacity to appreciate the manifestation of any particular archetypal entity depends on one's ability to perceive its distinctive symbolic qualities.

Equally relevant to the topic of this dissertation as the relationship between the sacred-as-hierophany and symbolic consciousness is the powerful connection between hierophany and the mythological. "Myth," Eliade writes, "describes the various and sometimes dramatic irruptions of the sacred into the world" (*Sacred and the Profane* 97). Because it recounts humankind's collective experience of hierophany, myth retains the power to connect humanity to the most ancient and primal experiences of the revelation of the sacred. "Myth narrates a sacred history," writes Eliade, in that "it relates events that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the 'beginnings' " (*Myth and Reality* 5). Because of mythology's linkage to that ancient past, the recounting and imitating of the events captured in myth allows one to detach "from profane time and magically re-enters the Great Time, the sacred time" (*Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries* 23). In this way, any immediate, personal encounter with the images and themes of perennially powerful myths offers one the possibility of being imaginally and emotionally transported back to the realm of "once-upon-a-time."

In addition to conveying a sense of the primordial experience of the sacred, myth also functions for Eliade as a living presence in that "it supplies models for human behavior and, by that fact, gives meaning and value to life" (*Myth and Reality* 2). In that regard, comments Robert Ellwood, Eliade "taught that myths were from out of [. . .] the timeless time when the gods were strong and made the world, and when the primordial 'gestures' of the heroes set the pattern for what is still sacred in our fallen 'profane' world" (6).

Not only does Eliade connect the hierophanic quality of myth with the experience of mythic time, but also with the idea that profane space, when encountered through the lens of mythic awareness, can become imbued with a sense of sacredness. Moreover, the sense of sacredness with which place may become permeated as a result of hierophanic experience is not limited to spaces of a communal or collective nature. In this regard, Eliade writes of “privileged places, qualitatively different from all others—a man’s birthplace, or the scenes of his first love, or certain places in the first foreign city he visited in youth.” For even the most “the most frankly nonreligious man,” Eliade suggests, “all these places still retain an exceptional, a unique quality; they are the ‘holy places’ of his private universe, as if it were in such spots that he had received the revelation of a reality other than that in which he participates through his ordinary daily life” (*Sacred and the Profane* 24).

Another important mythological implication of Eliade’s conception of the relationship between the sacred and the profane relates to the way he perceives the nature and role of myth vis-à-vis that of history. “For Eliade, myth and history were opposite and antagonistic ways of understanding reality,” writes Amanda Porterfield. “While history represented the chronological sequencing of more or less distinct events,” she continues, “myth represented the underlying dynamics of human experience that human events always recapitulated.” Unlike historical concerns with the events of the profane and mundane world, continues Porterfield, for Eliade “myths that recounted the persisting dynamics of life were deeply tied to experiences of the sacred” (216).

Echoing this idea, Thomas J. Altizer writes, “The word and action of myth can open man up to communion with the sacred only by turning him away from the actuality

and concreteness of his historical existence.” As a result, he continues, “The sacred can be actualized only by means of a dissolution or sublimation of profane existence.” For Eliade, Altizer writes, “by its very nature myth dissolves the profane world of reality and opens its participants to the transcendent world of the sacred Reality” (93). In this way, as in the experience of the numinous, he concludes, the experience of hierophany “should be understood as a response to the sacred Reality—re-presented by myth—which is so compelling in its power as to shatter, at least momentarily, all normal conscious experience” (94).

According to Eliade, however, the modern Western dependence on rational consciousness as the only reliable arbiter of reality has resulted instead in the rejection by many people of the possibility of hierophanic experience. The principal consequence of this rejection of the hierophanic within the modern worldview, observes Eliade, has been a widespread and profound sense of meaninglessness. Describing the effect of the absence of a sense of the sacred at the core of modernism, Eliade observes that “the modern world is in the situation of a man swallowed by a monster, struggling in the darkness of its belly; or of one lost in a wilderness, or wandering in a labyrinth which is itself a symbol of the infernal—and so he is in anguish” (*Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries* 237).

Commenting on Eliade’s prescription for how this modern sense of despair might be ameliorated, Porterfield writes, “the terrible sense of meaninglessness that modern people suffered could be remedied by imaginative experiences that simulated the archaic capacity for mythic experience” (216). Nevertheless, even with the passing of the constraints of modernism and the rise of postmodern models, the challenge posed by the

seeming eclipse of hierophanic experience remains a daunting one. “For those who embrace postmodern thought, in order to escape the whale’s belly,” writes Rennie, “we must be willing to embrace the imagination in our own sacred history—to accept the reality of that imagination, and the construction of that reality, to accept our involvement in the cosmogony through creative imagination” (*Reconstructing Eliade* 241). In addition, he suggests, we must emphasize the importance of developing “an attitude to general revelation in which the contents of personal experience (the scientists’ experience of particle accelerators as well as the mystics’ experience of ecstasy) are open to creative interpretation capable of uncovering real and valid meanings” (248).

*Tillich’s Concept of “Ultimate Concern”*

Paul Tillich, one of the most renowned theologians of the twentieth century, was also concerned with defining and describing the nature of the sacred. While deeply influenced by Otto’s vision of the numinous quality of the sacred, Tillich’s conception of the sacred is less concerned with its particular experiential qualities than on the sense of the meaningfulness and significance of the sacred as it manifests within the fabric of human existence.

For Tillich, that sense of the meaningfulness of the sacred or holy centers on the personal realization of what he calls the “ultimate concern” of each individual’s life (*Dynamics of Faith* 1). “The ultimate for which we ask when we ask the question about the meaning of our life,” Tillich writes, “is manifest to us in an experience which I believe every human being has, namely, the experience of the holy.” Significantly, Tillich emphasizes the idea that the experience of the sacred or holy as ultimate concern does not require an engagement with any form of traditional religion. Instead, he



suggests, the manifestation of the sacred as ultimate concern implies the simple yet profound personal realization that there is “something in life for which you would give your life,” something that, as a result, “you take with ultimate seriousness” (“God as Reality and Symbol” 102). Deepening this sense of the personal significance of ultimate concern, he also observes that being ultimately concerned engages one with “the meaning of one’s life” (*Ultimate Concern* 6). Indeed, even the nature of divinity is defined in terms of ultimate concern by Tillich. Commenting on the relationship between ultimate concern and the divine, Tillich writes:

God [ . . . ] is the name for that which concerns man ultimately. This does not mean that first there is a being called God and then the demand that man should be ultimately concerned with him. It means that whatever concerns a man ultimately becomes god for him, and conversely, it means that a man can be concerned ultimately only about that which is god for him. (*Systematic Theology* 211)

Tillich also links his concept of the holy as ultimate concern with Otto’s description of the numinous. Referring to Otto’s two functions of the “fascinating and shaking character of the holy,” Tillich writes, “the reason for these two effects is obvious if we see the relation of the experience of the holy to the experience of ultimate concern” (*Dynamics of Faith* 15). Tillich suggests that the finite nature of the human heart is drawn with a kind of ecstatic fascination toward the infinite possibility manifested through ultimate concern at the same time as it is overwhelmed by the magnitude and all-consuming quality of being concerned ultimately.

Also in keeping with Otto’s conception of the numinous, Tillich writes of the immediate and personally affective dimension of the experience of the sacred as ultimate

concern. In this sense, the things or values that become mediators of the holy for one take on a personal quality when one “consider[s] them not as objects of a cognitive approach but elements of an encounter, namely the encounter with the holy.” Moreover, Tillich argues, “they are parts of this encounter, not as things or values, but as bearers of something beyond themselves.” This “something,” Tillich concludes, “is the holy, the numinous presence of that which concerns us ultimately” (*Essential Tillich* 206).

Not only does the concept of ultimate concern define the nature of the sacred for Tillich, but it also serves as the central defining element of religious life in general. In this context, Tillich distinguishes between a “universal or large” concept of religion, defined as “a state of being grasped by an ultimate concern,” and “our usual smaller concept of religion which supposes an organized group with its clergy, scriptures, and dogma, by which a set of symbols for the ultimate concern is accepted and cultivated in life and thought” (*Ultimate Concern* 4). Tillich further suggests that religious experience in the larger sense of that term can and does appear in many forms. Commenting on the significance of this re-visioning of religion by Tillich, Porterfield writes, “His definition of religion as ‘ultimate concern’ freed the essence of religion from any particular doctrine or culture.” Moreover, she continues, Tillich’s “definition of religion as ultimate concern also encouraged seekers to look for spiritual life outside of churches and other customary institutions and to find it in art, literature, and anyplace else where human beings express their vitality, passions, and deepest emotional commitments.” It is in the realm of ultimate concern, she writes regarding Tillich’s vision of the religion, “that the ground of being and the God beyond theism were to be found” (212).

Another key aspect of Tillich's concept of the sacred is the idea that ultimate concern forms an inevitable part of human life. In this regard, he writes:

If people tell you, 'I have no ultimate concern,' then ask them, 'Is there really nothing at all that you take with unconditional seriousness? What, for instance, would you be ready to suffer or even die for?' Then you will discover that even the cynic takes his cynicism with ultimate seriousness, not to speak of the others, who may be naturalists, materialists, Communists, or whatever. They certainly take something with ultimate seriousness. (*Ultimate Concern* 7-8)

Commenting on this aspect of Tillich's sense of the sacred, Richard Holloway observes, "That is why even atheism can be religious, because it is also about that ultimate concern, that final question we ask about ourselves." In these terms, he continues, "What we call faith, of one sort or another, is unavoidable here, since "faith is our response to that which we cannot establish with certainty." Though "atheists express their attitude to these final or ultimate matters in a God-denying faith," Holloway writes, "there is no doubt of their passionate concern over the matter." As a result, for Tillich, real atheism would amount to professing a complete lack of concern for the meaning of one's existence. "Indifference toward the ultimate question," he writes, "is the only imaginable form of atheism" (*Dynamics of Faith* 45).

As with Otto's idea of the numinous and Eliade's idea of hierophany, Tillich also emphasizes the autonomous nature of ultimate concern as it manifests in the life of an individual. In this sense, Tillich observes, ultimate concern is not something that one chooses, but rather something by which one is "grasped." He goes on to observe that one's ultimate concern cannot be chosen, nor "produced by active, reflective, voluntary processes," but instead "has already grasped us when we begin to reflect on it." Moreover, he adds, for a person who takes some aspect of life with the seriousness of an

ultimate concern, “as his life developed, the seriousness... came to him, perhaps very early, and never left him” (*Ultimate Concern* 8).

Nevertheless, though one cannot choose to be grasped by a particular ultimate concern, the sense remains that one must open oneself to reflect on what already, however unconsciously, might be of ultimate concern to one. Failure to open oneself to an awareness of the concerns that call one ultimately, Tillich suggests, leads to a profound sense of personal anxiety and meaninglessness. “The anxiety of meaninglessness is anxiety about the loss of an ultimate concern, of a meaning which gives meaning to all meanings,” he writes, adding that such existential anxiety “is aroused by the loss of a spiritual center, of an answer, however symbolic and indirect, to the question of the meaning of existence” (*Courage to Be* 47).

As is true of both the numinous and hierophanic, Tillich sees the manifestation of ultimate concern in a person’s life as inherently possessing the power and significance of religious revelation. “Revelation,” he writes, “is the manifestation of what concerns us ultimately,” (*Systematic Theology* 110). While describing the actual experience of the revelation of ultimate concern in terms of Otto’s idea of the numinous, Tillich also considers such experience in terms of the Eliadean conception of sacred and profane.

Connecting Eliade’s view of the relationship between the sacred and the profane with Tillich’s concept of ultimate concern as revelation, Carl J. Armbruster notes “The medium of revelation, the object which enters into the miraculous event, can be anything whatsoever—a person, a thing, or an event” since “everything [...] is capable of conveying ultimate concern” (73). As a result, for Tillich, sharply distinguishing between the sacred and mundane dimensions of existence does not make sense within the

context of ultimate concern. In this regard, he writes, manifestations of ultimate concern are “also present in what we usually call the secular or profane” (*Ultimate Concern* 5).

Echoing Eliade’s sense of the paradoxical nature of the relationship between the sacred and the profane, Tillich observes that the experience of the manifestation of the sacred as ultimate concern is always “mediated by some piece of finite reality.” In this sense, he continues, “Everything can become [. . .] a bearer of divine power.” Moreover, he continues, “everything” in this context not only includes “all things in nature and culture, in soul and in history,” but also “principles, categories, essences, and values.” Most importantly, Tillich observes, because ultimate concern inevitably also engages one with the mundane, “in the moment in which something became a carrier of the revelation of ultimate concern, it also received a personal face” (*Essential Tillich* 205).

Another quality shared by both Eliade’s idea of hierophany and Tillich’s concept of ultimate concern is an emphasis on the importance of symbolic consciousness in the apprehension of the sacred dimension of existence. As John P. Dourley observes, “Tillich was primarily concerned with redefining the nature of religious experience and restoring its connection with an inherently symbolic form of consciousness” (9). For Tillich, engaging the symbolic dimension of consciousness is essential for the recognition of the sacred as ultimate concern. “Man’s ultimate concern must be expressed symbolically,” he writes, “because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate” (*Dynamics of Faith* 41).

Also as with Eliade, Tillich recognizes the existence of an essential connection between his conception of the sacred and the realm of myth. In this regard, he writes, symbols expressing a sense of ultimate concern “do not appear in isolation,” but rather

“are united in the ‘stories of the gods.’ ” Referring collectively to these stories, he observes, “This is the world of myth, great and strange, always changing and always the same: man’s ultimate concern symbolized in divine figures and actions.” The reason that the mythic is ever evolving, he notes, is because myth “uses material from our ordinary experience,” putting “the stories of the gods into the framework of time and space” (49).

As with the inevitability of ultimate concern, Tillich’s vision of the sacred also assumes the mythic to be a permanent and intrinsic aspect of human existence. “The important thing to remember here,” writes Holloway, “is that we cannot do without myths; they are the way we express and give form to our transcendent longing, our ultimate concern.” Because symbols and myths “are forms of human consciousness which are always present,” Tillich observes, “the attempt to “demythologize” symbol and myth are futile.” Since “myth is the combination of symbols of our ultimate concern,” he writes, “one can replace one myth by another, but one cannot remove myth from man’s spiritual life” (50).

A final aspect of Tillich’s approach to the sacred that may be relevant to the concept of personal mythology is his notion of *kairos*. An ancient Greek word, *kairos* originally referred to a divinely sanctioned and inspired kind of sacred time, as opposed to the ordinary or profane sense of chronological time. Originally used by Tillich to describe the special quality of monumental events effecting large numbers of people (such as the birth of Jesus), *kairos* also came to be associated in his work with certain kinds of profound individual experience. “When I try to interpret the meaning of the *kairos*,”

writes Tillich, “I refer to biographical experiences in which something new, unexpected, transforming, breaks into our life” (*Ultimate Concern* 150).

Describing such experiences as “kairotic,” Tillich emphasizes that this term be reserved for happenings that are “fundamental for the meaning of our existence.” Despite the magnitude of the significance of such events, however, Tillich does not see them as the exclusive province of mystics, noting “most people have the feeling that they have had experiences like this in their own lives.” Summarizing this idea of personal *kairos*, Tillich writes, “whether we call it the eternal or the divine or whatever, if something happens to us which has to do with the ultimate meaning of our life, I would call it an individual *kairos*” (151).

Tillich’s vision of ultimate concern is profoundly useful in the practice of personal mythology as pathway to the sacred. Indeed, without some sense of how one’s story symbolically and imaginally might guide one toward an awareness of the core concerns of one’s life, one’s personal mythology would lack a critical dimension of what a religious or spiritual orientation to life ideally implies. In addition, since one’s ultimate concerns also carry profound implications for the shaping of core values and principles, seeking a sense of the sacred as ultimate concern within one’s mythology represents an important step in the process of turning that mythology into a meaningful way of life.

#### *Buber’s Concept of I-and-Thou.*

Martin Buber, one of the most renowned Jewish philosophers and religious scholars of the twentieth century, created yet another framework for comprehending and engaging the sacred that is potentially relevant to the idea of personal mythology as religious endeavor. This vision of the sacred was first directly addressed in a brief

volume published in German just six years after Otto published his influential work on the nature of the holy. Entitled *I and Thou*, this work poetically details a very different sort of framework than Otto's for understanding and encountering the sacred. Unlike Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, Buber's work does not attempt to describe the quality of the encounter with the sacred, but rather focuses on the inherently relational nature of sacred experience.

Fundamental to Buber's vision of the sacred is the distinction between two opposing frames of reference respectively described by Buber as "It" and "Thou." It is important to note at the outset of this discussion of Buber's vision that the term "Thou"—an early translation of the informal, affectionate second-person German pronoun *du*—has often been rendered in English-language commentary on Buber's work, as well as in the most recent translation of *I and Thou*, simply as "You." This change from "Thou" to "You" in the most current translation reflects the fact that the former pronoun, while originally connoting the same intimate quality as the German *du*, now tends to connote a sense of hierarchical distance and deference. Recognition of the implication of Buber's choice of the original German pronoun, however, is essential for understanding his sense of both the intimate and relational nature of the sacred.

Referring to the realm of It, Donald J. Moore observes, "Whenever I touch, explore, categorize, name, apply, or use, I am in the world of It" (113). In the relationship of I-It, one holds oneself to be separate from the object one experiences. Moreover, in the relationship of I-It, only a part of the person is brought to the experience. On the other hand, in the I-Thou relationship, there is a genuine meeting or encounter with someone or something that prevents objectification and requires us to



bring the totality of ourselves—in Buber’s words, “one’s whole being”—into the moment of encounter (*I and Thou* 9).

In addition, while the I-It relationship is a one-sided one in which the It remains an object to the I, the relationship between I and Thou is always one of genuine encounter. In this encounter, the I is addressed by the Thou and is expected to respond in some fashion to that message. In I-Thou encounters, writes Daniel Breslauer, “people develop by meeting other subjects, by allowing the reality of other subjects to challenge them, to call forth a response, to change them in one way or another” (9). The concept of “dialogue”—referring to the event that occurs when an I is addressed by a Thou and chooses to respond—is essential to Buber’s vision of the sacred. “Dialogue implies becoming aware, becoming aware that we are addressed and that the address demands an answer,” writes Moore (104). Moreover, he adds, “It is not necessarily a person of whom I become aware; it can be an animal, a plant, a stone.” In this way, he continues, “Nothing is excluded from the things through which from time to time something is said to me” (104).

Another quality of the Thou as distinguished from the It is the autonomous nature of the manifestation of the Thou. Much as Otto’s numinous, Eliade’s hierophany, and Tillich’s ultimate concern, Buber’s sense of the sacred as the relationship between the I and Thou is not controllable by human beings. “The *Thou* meets me through grace,” Buber writes, “it is not found by seeking” (11). Nevertheless, according to Buber, the relation of the individual and the sacred as Thou remains volitional in that one must still choose to enter into relationship with the Thou that autonomously manifests.

While Buber takes pains to differentiate the profound qualitative difference between I-It and I-Thou relations, his vision of the sacred also recognizes that, like the sacred as the numinous or the sacred as hierophany, any particular manifestation of the Thou will be inherently temporary in nature. “Every *Thou* in our world must become an *It*,” writes Buber in this regard, while “everything in the world [. . .] is able to appear as an *I* to some *Thou*” (16). Given this interrelationship between the It and the Thou, Buber observes, “The *It* is the eternal chrysalis, the *Thou* the eternal butterfly” (18).

Moreover, while the I-Thou relationship remains for Buber the only source of genuine meaning in life, he also recognizes the basic necessity of the I-It frame of reference. “The world of It is a reliable world,” writes Moore, “necessary to the growth and sustenance of human life” (113). Similarly, just as the world of It is not regarded as inherently evil in Buber’s theology, the world of Thou is not seen as an unqualified good. According to Buber, the moments of Thou “appear as strange lyric and dramatic episodes, seductive and magical, but tearing us away to dangerous extremes, loosening the well-tried context, leaving more questions than satisfaction behind them, shattering security” (34).

At the core of Buber’s sense of the sacred is the conception of what he calls the “eternal Thou.” Buber’s vision of the sanctified nature of the I-Thou relationship derives from the idea that that “every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou” (75). Indeed, according to Buber, it *only* through engagement with a particular and temporal Thou that the otherwise unknowable eternal Thou may be experienced by human beings. Further refining this idea of God as the eternal Thou, Buber cites Otto, observing that “Of course, God is the ‘the wholly Other.’ ” Buber also paradoxically

insists, however, that God is “at the same time the wholly Same: the wholly Present.” As a result, he continues, God “is the *Mysterium Tremendum* that appears and overthrows; but He is also the mystery of the self-evident, nearer to me than my *I*” (79).

Despite the omnipresence of Buber’s vision of the eternal Thou, he also sees an unbridgeable gulf between the eternal Thou and the mundane world of It. This separation exists because, unlike every particular Thou, which must ultimately become an It, the eternal Thou can never do so. “The eternal *Thou* can by its nature not become *It*,” Buber writes, “for by its very nature it cannot be established in measure and bounds” (112). In this sense, Buber’s conception of the sacred parallels Eliade’s, for just as Eliade’s sacred can never become one with the profane, Buber’s Eternal Thou can never become one with any part of the world of It.

While Eliade’s view of the sacred tends to emphasize this separation of the sacred and profane dimensions of consciousness, however, Buber’s vision nevertheless seeks to diminish that distinction. Since the eternal Thou can only be met via encounter with a particular Thou and since every It offers the potentiality of being transformed into a particular Thou, the sacred and mundane are perpetually intertwined for Buber. “One cannot meet the Eternal Thou by turning away from the temporal Thou,” writes Maurice Friedman, just as “One cannot find one’s direction to God apart from ‘the lived concrete’ ” (*Hidden Human Image* 236). Supporting this idea of interrelationship between the temporal and eternal aspects of the sacred, Buber insists that one look to the immediate present for the source of the sacredness of myth, while Eliade encourages one to look to the primordial past. “Where for Eliade myth liberates one from the fallen, present world and returns one to the time of the primordial experience that inspired the

myth,” writes Robert A. Segal. “for Buber myth enables one to garner in the everyday, present world an experience akin to the original experience” (Forward iii).

Buber’s particular vision of myth directly relates to his concept of the sacred as the encounter between the I and the Thou. “Buber views myth as a special type of story: a mythic story begins in an I-Thou event that defies rational explanation,” writes S. Daniel Breslauer (26). “Myth for Buber,” he continues, “evolves from the natural response of the human spirit, expressing the memory of that meeting, and acting as a psychological stimulus for future meetings.” This process of communicating the memory of I-Thou encounters through myth, however, remains an inherently paradoxical one for Buber. This paradox arises from the fact that, by definition, all human communication—including myth—is of the world of It. At the core of this paradox, observes Breslauer, is the idea that myth “represents an I-It version of an event people experienced in I-Thou reality” (23).

In addition to its relationship to his vision of the sacred as an I-Thou encounter, Buber’s sense of the mythic also grows out of his study of the Hebrew Scriptures and his attempt to graft a mythic sensibility onto the rigorously historical orientation of the Jewish religion. As a result, unlike Eliade, Buber strongly rejects the idea that the mythic and the historical are fundamentally irreconcilable forms of consciousness. Instead, he sees myth and history as complementary forms of understanding, with the mythic view serving to deepen awareness of the metaphysical significance of historical events and the historical view serving to ground the mythic in particular lived experiences of human individuals and communities. Reflecting Buber’s view of this interrelationship between the mythic and the historical, writes Segal, “History roots myth in actual, concrete events,

and myth transforms history from merely a record of past events to an ever-beckoning opportunity for present ones” (Forward iv).

Further discussing Buber’s view of myth, Friedman observes that Buber also recognizes that not all myth can be ascribed or connected to historical experience. For example, while much of the Biblical material that Buber attempts to revision in mythic terms derives from accounts of the historical experience of the Jewish people, others—for example, the Genesis story of creation—are clearly non-historical in origin. Buber’s vision of myth, Friedman continues, recognizes that “some myths do, in fact, have a historical kernel and other, universal ones, an existential kernel, one that is repeated over and over in the history of the human race.” For Buber, then, creation stories would be an example of myth growing out of an existential experience, namely the experience of asking cosmological questions and of experiencing the arising of order out of chaos.

In addition to even those mythic forms that Buber considered to be existentially derived, however, Buber recognized that some myths have “come loose from both the historical and existential kernels that gave rise to them,” as Friedman describes this phenomenon. For Buber, the existence of such myths gives rise to the idea of archetypes. However, Friedman further notes, in Buber’s view, even archetypes “have a human base and arise out of the loam of earthy, human existence,” which in no way denies their reality, but “roots them in the lived concrete rather than some Platonic universal or some mystical sphere floating above time and history” (*Via Humana* 63). As Buber himself expressed this concern for historically and biographically grounding archetype, “What is wrong is not the mythicization of reality which brings the inexpressible to speech, but the

gnosticizing of myth which tears it out of the ground of history and biography in which it took root” (*Prophetic Faith* 46).

Buber’s insistence on grounding both myth and archetype in historical and biographical experience, however, does not mean that either myth or archetype should be constrained by the requirements of rational causality. Indeed, while a such a focus on causality is a hallmark of the world of It for Buber—“Causality has unlimited reign in the world of It,” he writes in *I and Thou* (51)—he knows that humanity’s “myth-making facility” can bypass this awareness “in times of high tension and intense experience” (“Myth in Judaism” 104). At such times, he writes:

one perceives the world’s processes as being supracausally meaningful, as the manifestation of a central intent, which cannot, however be grasped by the mind but only by the wide-awake power of the senses, the ardent vibration of one’s entire being. And this, more or less, is how the man who is truly alive still relates to the power and the fate of a hero; though capable of placing him within causality, he nevertheless mythicizes him, because the mythical approach discloses to him a deeper, fuller truth than the causal, and by so doing, first reveals to him the very being of the beloved, beatific figure—in other words, of the sacred as the eternal Thou.

In considering the mythic nature of the eternal Thou which one encounters in each I-Thou meeting, Keith Ward suggests it takes on “countless names and forms.”

Employing Eliade’s term for the manifestation of the sacred as a particular divinity, he continues, “The world is full of gods and each god signifies a living and continually renewed relational event. In a moment of theophany, the ‘thou’ confronts me. I step into direct relation with it. In such moments, gods are born, moments of meeting” (33).

Like myriad forms of the numinous and the hierophanic, like the manifold manifestations of ultimate concern, the idea that the Eternal Thou can assume infinite variety of divine forms has profound implication for the idea of seeking the sacred

through the medium of personal mythology. Most importantly, however, Buber's theological framework identifies a critical dimension of the sacred that must be encountered in the sacred space in between personal mythologies. That dimension of sacred—namely, divinity manifested through one's relationship to the other—can only be found in those places where personal mythologies intersect and engage each other.

*Friedman's Concept of the "Touchstones of Reality"*

The last of the five approaches to the sacred considered in this chapter centers around a concept called "touchstones of reality." This religious framework has been developed by Maurice Friedman, a contemporary religious studies scholar and the principal biographer of Martin Buber. Friedman's approach to the religious dimension of life evolved, at least in part, from his engagement with Buber's vision of the sacred and draws heavily on Buber's idea of the sacred as encounter or meeting.

Originally employed as an ancient method for testing the genuineness and quality of precious metals, a touchstone was a hard, highly polished flint-like stone against which a piece of gold or silver could be rubbed. If the metal was actually gold or silver, it would leave a telltale streak across the touchstone, the color of which would indicate the relative purity of the alloy being tested. The metaphorical sense of something being a touchstone, therefore, suggests that which serves as a kind of standard or exemplar against which some other thing's potential value can be tested and evaluated. Given its connection with the idea of discerning the preciousness of something, it is not surprising that the word touchstone also seems to have developed a particularly philosophical and religious connotation. Noteworthy in this regard, for example, is the fact that religious groups as diverse as Quakers, the United Church of Canada, Roman Catholics, a

fundamentalist Christian organization, and an organization of American Muslims all currently use the word “touchstone” as the title of one of their respective religious journals.

Friedman’s use of this term draws specifically on its philosophical and religious connotation. He employs it to refer to the accumulated ideas, beliefs, principles, and values that both direct one’s engagement with the world and serve as a sort of existential standard for personally deciding what is good and true. According to Friedman, one’s collective touchstones represent an evolving spiritual and ethical framework that is both experientially derived and continuously tested through interaction with everything that one encounters in the course of living one’s life. “For touchstones there cannot be two separate spheres of religion and morality,” he writes, “but one indivisible sphere of the concrete hour in which our awareness of what speaks to us and our response to that address are two aspects of a single reality” (*Touchstones of Reality* 237).

Given this sense of guiding or directing one’s actions, of establishing a kind of ethical or moral dimension to one’s life, Friedman’s concept of touchstones—like Tillich’s idea of ultimate concern and Buber’s concept of the other as Thou—largely focuses on the dimension of personal mythology concerned with the underlying structure of one’s personal beliefs and values. Described by Michael Pieracci as the “ontic” dimension of myth, this aspect of one’s personal mythology reflects those deeply held beliefs and values that both shape one’s mythic narrative and draw continuing support from it (212).

Friedman repeatedly emphasizes that one’s touchstones of reality must be discovered and tested through a process of encountering those of others. As a result,



Friedman observes, one does not evolve one's touchstones primarily through adherence to an existing system of values, but rather through existential conflict with these values. In this regard, he continues, this process of encounter must open one to continuously question the validity of the one's existing touchstones. The idea that engaging new touchstones requires a process of contending with existing ones implies that new touchstones only come, "when we have fought our way through to where we are open to something really other than our accustomed set of values and our accustomed way of looking at the world" (*Touchstones of Reality* 23).

Another important aspect of Friedman's approach to the sacred is its open-ended quality as a framework for religious engagement. Just as Otto's numinous, Eliade's hierophany, Tillich's ultimate concern, and Buber's eternal Thou all can manifest in and through an infinite variety of forms and contexts—including images and ideas, as well as events, people, and material objects—so too can touchstones of reality be encountered in many ways. In considering some of the sources of his own touchstones, Friedman identifies "meetings with persons, with situations, with the characters of literature, the scriptures of religions, and the writers who have spoken to me through their thoughts" (22). In a similar vein, he also observes, "Walking on our path, we encounter something that lights up for us—an event perhaps, but it might also be the teaching of the Buddha if that speaks to our condition." In this sense, he observes, "a Greek tragedy or a Rig Veda may say something to us just as any contemporary happening may" (24).

Still another important dimension of Friedman's approach is his emphasis on the potential of touchstones to bring together opposing subjective and objective modes for apprehending the meaning of experience. As Friedman observes, "touchstones of reality

imply that we do not have to be ‘hung up’ on either objective, universal meaning or a meaning that is merely subjective and cultural,” but instead are able to seek forms of meaning which retain their objective and universal significance while also being firmly and experientially grounded in the subjective and the cultural (59).

Referring simultaneously to the historical and impressionistic qualities of one’s encounters with touchstones, Friedman describes the process by which he arrived at the touchstones of reality in his own life as a succession of “glimpses.” These glimpses, he observes:

have come to me in a series of separate yet not unconnected events and meetings in my life [...]. In the residues of these events and meetings a way in the present and into the future has opened up for me. For these residues, I claim what cannot be claimed for any objective metaphysics or subjective inspiration. (22)

Moreover, just as touchstones help bridge the gap between purely subjective and objective ways of experiencing the world, the memory of the experience of the meetings that shaped one’s touchstones simultaneously connects one with one’s past and anchors one in the present moment. “Touchstones have a history,” observes Friedman, “they live with us.” It is also important to note, however, that the ability of touchstones to link one with the sacred encounters of one’s past is not the primary source of their meaningfulness, but rather their ability to engage and direct one’s course in the present moment. In this regard, Friedman insists that “a touchstone of reality is either present or it has ceased to exist” (24).

Just as Buber insists that all encounters with the Thou possess a sense of immediacy that conceptualization tends to detach one from, so too for Friedman one must be wary of overly abstracting from the experience of directly engaging touchstones.

“Touchstones of reality are like insights, except they are closer to events,” he writes. “An insight arises from a concrete encounter,” he continues, “but we tend to remove it too quickly and completely to a plane of abstraction” (23). As a result, cautions Friedman, “like any existential truth,” a touchstone “remains true only insofar as it is again and again tested in the stream of living” (25).

In this regard, Friedman is also concerned that touchstones not be considered primarily in symbolic or archetypal terms. “Touchstones of reality are not universal ideas shining above history and above our own lives,” he insists, but rather “are existential realities that remain meaningful only insofar as they are shared, witnessed for, and made living again in the present” (59). In this way, he continues, “Our touchstones of reality are themselves the bond between absolute and particular, the embodiment of symbol in the lived lives of actual persons” (*Via Humana* 45).

As an approach to the religious dimension of life, Friedman suggests that focusing on the idea of touchstones of reality can keep one “close to the concrete reality, without pursuing theology at the expense of the fully human or humanism at the expense of closing man off from the nameless reality that meets his meeting with everyday life” (*Touchstones of Reality* 232). Maintaining that “it is the event itself that again and again gives rise to religious meaning,” he insists that “only out of that meaning, apprehended in our own history and the history of past generations that we have made present to ourselves, do religious symbols and theological interpretations arise” (233).

Like the other four theological frameworks described in this chapter, Friedman’s concept of the touchstones of reality offers a profoundly useful way of interpreting the sacred dimension of one’s personal mythology. Of course, as is equally true of the other

four approaches, Friedman's framework emphasizes certain aspects of the experience of the sacred while ignoring or arguing against others. Indeed, in the process of comparing and contrasting these five approaches, it becomes evident that there are areas of both considerable compatibility and significant disagreement among them as to the nature and significance of sacred experience. Still, even in those areas where these frameworks appear to be in conflict, it is possible to see such differences in approach as complementary rather than antagonistic. In the end, whether exploring the numinous content of one's dreams, considering one's archetypal experiences as hierophanies, inquiring into the nature of one's ultimate concerns, tracking one's encounters with the other as Thou, or reflecting on the evolution of one's network of touchstones, one is likely to discover new facets of the sacred dimension of one's personal mythology.

Chapter 5  
All the Gods Are Within Us:  
Joseph Campbell and the Religious Power of Personal Mythology

*On Joseph Campbell and the Religious Dimension of Personal Mythology*

Of all of the figures who can be said to have played seminal roles in the development of the concept of personal mythology, Joseph Campbell is probably the individual most commonly associated with this idea. Moreover, with particular regard to the idea of personal mythology as pathway to the sacred, no one has done more than Campbell to convey the enormous power of adopting a personal approach to myth as a means of invigorating and enhancing spiritual or religious life. In commenting on the effect of this achievement, William G. Doty writes:

That ordinary lay persons could wrestle with gripping issues about the meaning of the universe, the nature of gods and goddesses, how to face death, where to turn to find a moral community, and how to pursue religious interests in a context free of denominational cant and privilege—we all have Campbell to thank for his impetus in this regard. (“Joseph Campbell’s Myth and/versus Religion” 440)

A particularly compelling quality of Campbell’s approach to the religious function of mythology stems from his blending of the mystical dimension of religion with contemporary psychological ideas regarding the nature of the unconscious. Indeed, Campbell recognizes that the religious and the psychological domains of human life are inextricably interwoven into one complex and ever-evolving tapestry of which mythic consciousness is both weaver and loom. The ultimate implication of the profound interconnectedness of the religious and the psychological is that, as Campbell expresses it, “All the gods are within us” (*Power of Myth* 39). Indeed, this often quoted statement—a phrase that Campbell, in turn, borrowed from the work of his mentor Heinrich Zimmer, a renowned scholar of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions—

encapsulates the core of what it means to speak of personal mythology as a religious pathway.

Throughout his long career, Campbell taught that direct experience of the symbolic power of myth creatively woven into a personally meaningful framework of narrative and image could serve as a viable alternative religious option for those contemporary people who could no longer find the sacred through traditional religious means. This process of creative mythic encounter, he argues, not only bypasses traditional theological frames of reference, but more radically leads to “the secularization of the sacred,” a term which “suggests an opening of the sense of religious awe to some sphere of secular experience, or more marvelously, to the wonder of this whole world and oneself within it” (*Flight of the Wild Gander* 193).

In considering the religious significance of Campbell’s insistence on personal encounter with myth, Walter B. Gulick observes that such mythic engagement offers the possibility of engendering a sense of “originative religious meaning.” In general, Gulick writes, experiences of religious meaning occur when key elements of a person’s sense of selfhood “are integrated with that person’s notion of what is ultimately most real, valuable, and/or powerful through a myth, symbol, ritual, creed, or experience interpreted as religious.” In particular, he continues, an experience of originative religious meaning “awakens a person to previously unrecognized sacred dimensions of reality and incidentally contributes to a transformed notion of oneself and life’s possibilities.” Describing the effect of experiences of originative religious meaning on the individual, Gulick observes, one is forced “to reconceive what is of religious importance in life” (42).

Campbell deeply recognized the failure of mainstream Western religion to provide experiences of originaive religious meaning for many people. He also recognized that this failure ultimately deprived such individuals of a sustainable and resilient metaphysical framework for encountering life. At same time, Campbell understood the personal and collective dangers of attempting to return to a literalized and constricted religious fundamentalism as an alternative to a mainstream religious orientation. Nevertheless, as Lonnie D. Kliever writes, while Campbell fully recognized that “the great traditional mythologies have lost their exclusive monopoly on world construction and personality formation,” he also believed “that deliteralized and deabsolutized mythologies can have a vital and permanent role in human life and thought” (176).

In this context, observes William D. Dinges, Campbell believed that a personal encounter with mythic symbols and stories could still draw individual seekers toward a whole range of experiences once considered the sole province of conventional religion. In particular, Dinges credits Campbell’s work with demonstrating how myth functions as a powerful vehicle for drawing one toward “inward illumination, to an experience of ultimate meaning beyond the bounds of ordinary certainties and knowledge, to the fullest potentiality of personhood, to an experience of heightened consciousness from which vitality flows” (11). Consideration of some of the important ways in which Campbell’s orientation to myth encourages the evolution of a more personal orientation to the religious dimension of life is the focus of the rest of this chapter.

*On the Symbolic and Universalist Nature of Campbell’s Orientation to Myth*

In reading Campbell’s books and essays as well as the writings of those who have

critiqued his work, two characteristics of Campbell's orientation to mythology soon become evident. The first of these aspects of Campbell's basic frame of reference toward myth relates to his emphatic and repeated insistence that mythology is inherently and perennially symbolic and metaphorical in nature. Summarizing much of the commentary on Campbell's linkage of the mythic with the symbolic and the metaphorical is Joan Weatherly's observation that "underlying Campbell's whole conception of mythology is its synonymy with metaphor" (141). Typifying this aspect of Campbell's frame of reference is his definition of mythology as "an organization of symbolic images and narratives metaphorical of the possibilities of human experience" (*Thou Art That* 1-2). Moreover, he continues, the very life of a mythology "springs from and depends on the metaphoric vigor of its symbols" (6).

The second essential quality of Campbell's approach to myth is his equally consistent emphasis on the universality of mythic themes and characters. "Reviewing with an unprejudiced eye the religious traditions of mankind," he observes, "one becomes very soon aware of certain mythic motifs that are common to all, though differently understood and developed in the different traditions" (*Inner* 11). In this regard, while remaining generally attentive to many of the particular or local aspects of the mythic traditions he explores, it is on their universal dimension that Campbell primarily and most steadfastly focuses his attention. At the same time, bearing in mind the understanding that all mythic symbols and stories inevitably retain the limiting aspects of their particular local inflections, Campbell cautiously comments on "the provincial character of *all* we are prone to regard as universal" (*Flight of the Wild Gander* 120)



Critical to understanding both the symbolic and universalist dimensions of his approach to myth is Campbell's interest in the work of the nineteenth century anthropologist and ethnologist Adolf Bastian. Bastian had earlier observed this tendency of particular ethnic and religious traditions to embody a common pool of core motifs. In his writings, Bastian describes these core universal motifs as representing "elementary" ideas, while he calls the particular manifestations of such core motifs "ethnic" or "folk" ideas. When he later encountered the ideas of Jung, Campbell recognized an important connection between Bastian's work and a core concept in Jung's approach to psychology, observing that the same mythic motifs that Bastian described as "elementary ideas," Jung called "archetypes of the collective unconscious" (*Thou Art That* 6).

Moreover, just as Campbell understood that the ethnic or folk manifestations of recurring motifs are the "concern properly of historians and ethnologists," he recognized the underlying elementary and archetypal nature of these motifs to be a core concern of both depth psychology and a depth psychological orientation to religious experience (*Inner Reaches of Outer Space* 11). As a result, in Campbell's view, the symbolic nature and universalism of mythology functions to fundamentally underscore and facilitate the role of myth as the psychological carrier of the experience of metaphysical meaning. "The metaphorical languages of both mythology and metaphysics are not denotative of actual worlds or gods," Campbell observes in this regard, "but rather connote levels and entities within the person touched by them" (*Power of Myth* 7). In this way," he continues, "the images of myth are reflections of the spiritual potentialities of every one of us," adding that "through contemplating these we evoke their powers in our own lives" (217).

*On the Mystical Foundation of Campbell's Approach to the Religious Function of Myth*  
Campbell's emphasis on the symbolic and universalist qualities of myth is, in

turn, even more fundamentally grounded in a particular form of mysticism which both informs and supports all of Campbell's work. To grasp the religious dimension of Campbell's approach to myth—and, more to the point, to comprehend his contribution to the idea of personal mythology as a religious endeavor—it is necessary to explore this mystical vision underpinning Campbell's work as a comparative mythologist.

The particular mystical orientation underlying Campbell's approach to myth, an approach that draws heavily upon Hindu religious ideas, grew out of his early association with the work of Zimmer. This orientation is also largely congruent with the principal tenets of the "perennial philosophy," a metaphysical perspective focused on seeking a universal framework for understanding mystical experience. Aldous Huxley, the novelist and religious seeker who first popularized this perspective in the West in the mid-1940s, states that the perennial philosophy "recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and [to] lives and minds." Huxley further observes that this approach to mystical understanding psychologically finds in the soul of each individual human being some essential aspect coinciding with this "divine Reality" (vii).

Detailing a number of other key precepts incorporated within the perennial philosophy, Paul O. Ingram writes:

What is 'perennial,' meaning 'no matter what, when, or where,' about the [perennial philosophy] is: (1) 'God' or 'Godhead' or "Absolute' or 'the Sacred'—whichever one prefers—is the ultimate reality to which each religious Way points; (2) human beings possess the capacity to ascertain truth about this Sacred reality; (3) the most important of these truths is the Sacred's ultimacy in comparison with the world's finitude; (4) the Sacred, however it is named, is beyond all names and predicates. (30)

More generally describing the doctrines of the perennial philosophy, Huston Smith observes that they are “derived from metaphysical intuitions” and that, “like mystical theophanies, metaphysical intuitions are ultimately ineffable” (554). As a consequence, he continues, “No more than the former can they be adequately rationalized; strictly speaking, they can only be symbolized.”

In the concluding essay of *Myths to Live By*, a collection of lectures published in 1971, Campbell directly refers to the idea of the perennial philosophy. “When the symbolic forms in which wisdom-lore has been everywhere embodied are interpreted not as referring primarily to any supposed or even actual historical personages or events,” he writes, but rather “psychologically, properly ‘spiritually,’ as referring to the inward potentials of our species, then there appears through all something that can properly be termed a *philosophia perennis* of the human race” (264). Later in that same essay, Campbell further observes that mythologies which retain their power “point infallibly through things and events to the ubiquity of ‘presence’ or ‘eternity’ that is whole and entire in each” (266).

More than twenty years earlier, in his seminal work *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell first expressed the sense of a “universal doctrine” underlying his vision of myth, observing that “all the visible structures of the world—all the things and beings—are the effects of a ubiquitous power out of which they rise, which supports them and fills them during the period of their manifestation, and back into which they must ultimately dissolve” (257-8). Forty years later and at the end of his career, in the television series *The Power of Myth*, Campbell reiterates his integration of the core vision of the perennial philosophy with his understanding of the nature of mythology, observing simply that “the

basic theme of all mythology [...] is that there is an invisible plane supporting the visible one” (71).

Another particularly important aspect of Campbell’s orientation to the mystical relates to Walter T. Stace’s distinction between “introvertive” and “extrovertive” forms of mystical experience (15). Regarding the former approach to the mystical, Stace writes “the introvertive way turns inward, introspectively” and is “wholly nonsensuous” in nature (16). In contrast, he observes, “the extrovertive way looks outward and through the physical senses into the external world and finds the One there” (18).

Citing Stace’s work, Robert A. Segal suggests that Campbell’s form of mysticism is of the “extrovertive” variety, noting “the mysticism that, according to Campbell, all myths express is of a world-affirming rather than world-rejecting variety” (“Myth versus Religion for Campbell” 43). In comparison to introvertive mysticism, which seeks to ignore the realm of the senses, “rejecting earth for heaven, body for spirit, and humanity for god,” Segal further observes, “extrovertive mysticism embraces rather than rejects the everyday world.” In this way, he continues, “Campbell’s extrovertive mysticism finds heaven in earth, the spirit in the body, and god in humanity” (“Joseph Campbell, the Perennial Philosopher” 93).

Another key element of the mystical orientation implicit in Campbell’s approach to myth is his emphasis on the profound inter-relatedness—and ultimate oneness—of the metaphysical and psychological dimensions of experience. A number of commentators on Campbell have written about the importance of this bringing together of mystical metaphysics and depth psychology in the shaping of Campbell’s particular approach to myth. “Because Campbell interprets myth psychologically as well as metaphysically,”

Segal observes, myth becomes a tool for celebrating “the oneness of the unconscious with everyday consciousness as well as the oneness of ultimate reality with ordinary reality” (“Joseph Campbell, the Perennial Philosopher” 93). In this same vein, Kleiver also comments on the interweaving in Campbell’s work of the teachings of the perennial philosophy with an understanding of the nature of the unconscious based in depth psychology. “Stripped of their supernatural, literal, and historical posturings,” he writes, “the myths of humankind give expression and form to those two mysterious voids which come from life and to which it returns—the unconscious self and the unlimited universe” (176).

Described by Campbell himself as “the great key to the understanding of myth,” is the recognition that although “the two worlds, divine and human, can be pictured only as distinct from each other,” these two worlds “are actually one.” Once one has grasped the significance of this recognition, he writes, one learns that “the realm of the gods is a forgotten dimension of the [everyday] world we know” (*Hero with a Thousand Faces* 217). Expressing this fundamental tenet of his orientation to myth in other words, he states that mythologies “having sprung from the psyche, point back to the psyche” and that “anyone seriously turning within will, in fact, rediscover their references in himself” (*Myths to Live By* 266).

In this sense, it can be seen that, though Campbell delineates the metaphysical and psychological as separate functions of myth, these functions can never be wholly differentiated in practice. Regarding these two functions, Campbell describes the metaphysical as serving to express our relationship to divinity, “that ultimate mystery, transcending names and forms,” while the psychological function serves to “foster the

centering and unfolding of the individual,” enabling one to find the meaning inherent in the inner workings of one’s own psyche (*Masks of God* 6, 609). As Mark Meadows observes, for Campbell, these two functions interpenetrate each other, simultaneously operating “in the depths of the psyche and in the transcendent aspect of the macrocosm itself,” thereby engaging one in a “psychological experience of seeing the material world as a symbol of an unseen unity that undergirds and informs that phenomenal world” (253).

*On Myths Being “Transparent to Transcendence” and Myths as the “Masks of God”*

The mystical foundation of Campbell’s approach to myth can perhaps best be understood in terms of two often-quoted, interrelated concepts essential to his work. The first of these two interconnected ideas states that if symbols and stories are to function effectively as myth, they need to be “transparent to transcendence” (*Hero’s Journey* 40). This concept, adopted by Campbell from work of the German mystic and depth psychologist Karlfried Graf Durkheim, suggests that mythic symbols and metaphors must not be allowed to become opaque to the mystical consciousness or essence to which they refer. For Campbell, the transcendent realm to which myth must remain transparent is identical with the sense of an “invisible plane supporting the visible one” at the core of the perennial philosophy (*Power of Myth* 71). Equally importantly, the transcendent referent of mythic symbols and metaphors cannot be seen as separate from one’s experience of the world of people and things.

When mythic material becomes opaque to transcendence, in Campbell’s view, the local (e.g., the cultural, ethnic, historical, or sectarian religious) interpretation of a particular image or narrative has obscured its universal significance. Moreover, in

Campbell's orientation to myth, grasping the universal significance of mythic material implicitly requires recognition of the sort of mystical vision implicit within the perennial philosophy. Conversely, engaging the metaphysical dimension of mythic narratives and symbols requires imaginably stepping outside of limited, literalized, local interpretations of them.

The second of these core inter-related concepts within Campbell's work states that if mythic stories and images remain transparent to the transcendent realm, they are then able to function metaphorically as the "masks of God." In this phrase, Campbell employs the word "God" as a referent for the transcendent, as opposed to the term "gods," a word he frequently used to describe the many different kinds of masks. Since the transcendent is always manifest and yet hidden, simultaneously beyond "definition, categories, names, and forms" and yet "the very substance, energy, being, and support, of all things, including ourselves," it can never be represented in all of its ultimate-ness and universality (*Flight of the Wild Gander* 196).

As a result, human consciousness requires symbolic interfaces with transcendence—"masks" in the form of particular mythic images and stories—that speak effectively to both the psychological and metaphysical dimensions of awareness, yet always point indirectly beyond themselves to an ultimate and perennial reality. For this reason, Campbell writes, "the metaphorical languages of both mythology and metaphysics are not denotative of actual worlds or gods, but rather connote levels and entities within the person touched by them" (*Thou Art That* 7). Indeed, Campbell emphasizes, one must never mistake the limited, localized mask for the transcendent reality both concealed and revealed by it. Such confusion of the mask, a particular

manifestation of transcendence in time and space, with the timeless and unchanging nature of transcendent reality itself means that the myth represented by the mask has ceased to be transparent.

Commenting on Campbell's concept of the "masks of God," Robert Cummings Neville ironically observes that when one attempts to peer behind the many masks, one finds that "behind the masks of God are more masks" (*Behind the Masks of God* 1). Neville further observes that contemplating what lies behind the masks is not about obviating the need for them or seeking to abandon them, but rather "to understand the contexts in which they are true expressions of divinity" (2). Moreover, given that behind the masks of god one eternally finds only more masks, Neville asks if religion and theology—and, by extension, mythology—can therefore deal "only in appearances." Attempting to answer his own question, he first observes that all religious concepts, symbols, and images are inherently "partial and inadequate." As a result, he continues, "we've never said enough, and everything we've said is at least a little wrong" (1). Echoing Campbell's sense of both the value and limitation of any of the countless masks of God, Neville emphasizes that while "every mask, every symbol [. . .] has validity in some time and condition," it is equally true that "each is also limited," since "divine reality is never exhausted in a finite collection of symbols or theological assertions" (168-9).

One potential source of confusion regarding what Campbell means to imply by the phrases "masks of God" and "transparent to transcendence"—indeed, a potential source of confusion regarding his whole frame of reference regarding the nature of the sacred—lies in not fully comprehending Campbell's use of the term "transcendence."



That this term is crucial to Campbell's approach to myth can be seen in his simple declaration that "the word transcendence is the key word for mythology" (*Hero's Journey* 162). As opposed to the meaning of this word in the context of traditional Judeo-Christian theology, referring to the idea of divinity transcending the phenomenal world, Campbell always employs the term transcendent to mean "that which is beyond all concepts" and "all categories of thinking." Explicating this idea further, Campbell observes that within the limited awareness of ordinary human consciousness, one "always think in terms of opposites," adding that "everything we know is within the terminology of the concepts of being and not being, many and single, true and untrue." In contrast, he argues, "God, the ultimate, is beyond the pairs of opposites" (*Power of Myth* 62).

Moreover, since "the transcendent is unknowable and unknown," he continues, "God is transcendent, finally, of anything like the name 'God'." As a result, Campbell declares, quoting the medieval Christian mystic Meister Eckhart, "the ultimate and highest leave-taking is leaving God for God, leaving your notion of God for an experience of that which transcends all notions" (*Power of Myth* 49). Myth, in Campbell's view, is meant to facilitate just such a leave-taking by imaginally and symbolically pointing one toward an experience of "that which is [. . .] ultimately transcendent of all definition, categories, names, and forms" (*Flight of the Wild Gander* 196). Commenting further on the proper relationship between the many masks of myth and transcendence, Campbell observes, "Myth is but the penultimate; the ultimate is openness—that void, or being beyond the categories—into which the mind must plunge alone and be dissolved" (*Hero with a Thousand Faces* 258).

It is essential to recognize that, in keeping with the metaphysical framework of the perennial philosophy, Campbell never views “divine reality”—both the transcendence to which myth should remain transparent and the God behind the many masks—as any sort of differentiated personal divinity. Rather, as Phil Cousineau observes, for Campbell, “every deity is a metaphor, a mask, for the ultimate mystery ground, the transcendent energy source of the universe, that is also the mysterious source of your own life” (Introduction xv). In this regard, Campbell writes, “the gods are agents, manifestations, or imagined functionaries of an energy that transcends all conceptualization” and, as such, “are not the source of the energy but are rather agents of it.” (*Thou Art That* 18).

Equally important to an understanding of Campbell’s approach to the study of mythology is the concept that this mysterious ground of being and transcendent source of energy is actually the fount from which all genuine religious myths and meaningful god-images spring in the first place, the ultimate source of all of the many masks of God. In other words, the universal, eternal energy source that creates and supports the phenomenal world is also the energetic point of origin of the symbolic forms by which human consciousness recognizes the existence of that transcendence.

Understanding the proper relationship between all mythic forms and the ultimate field of consciousness that is both their referent and their source is, in Campbell’s view, crucial if one is to appreciate the sacred dimension of mythology. For this reason, he declares, what is “holy and to be sought [is] not the promise of any given myth or the claims of any inherited god but the living source of all myths and of all the god and their worlds” (*Flight of the Wild Gander* 6-7). The wisdom of this guidance regarding “given

myths” and “inherited gods” is particularly urgent today, Campbell observes, because “there is nothing now that endures.” In this context, he continues:

The known myths cannot endure. The known God cannot endure. Whereas formerly, for generations, life so held to established norms that the lifetime of a deity could be reckoned in millenniums, today all norms are in flux, so that the individual is thrown, willy-nilly, back upon himself, into the inward sphere of his own becoming, his forest adventurous without way or path, to come through his own integrity in experience to his own intelligible Castle of the Grail—integrity and courage, in experience, in love, in loyalty, and in act. (*Masks of God* 677)

*On the Experiential Dimension of Myth and Engaging the “Symbol without Meaning”*

Central to Campbell’s approach to the religious dimension of myth is his idea that myth is meant to function as both stimulus and vehicle for the direct experience of the sacred. Indeed, one of the most distinctive general features of Campbell’s work is his repeated insistence that the power of myth resides specifically in its ability to stimulate personal experiences of a profoundly existential nature regarding the sacred dimension of human life. In particular, Campbell continually links myth with the experience of two interwoven mysteries connected to the sacred: the mystical experience of the mystery of transcendent reality and the existential experience of the mystery of being passionately alive in the phenomenal world.

Speaking of this experience of a mystery that is simultaneously mystical and existential, Campbell tells Bill Moyers in the *Power of Myth* television series:

People say that what we’re all seeking is a meaning for life. I don’t think that’s what we’re really seeking. I think that what we’re seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. (5)

Regarding the ability of myth to direct one toward such an experience of transcendence, Campbell observes that mythic symbols and narratives “deliver more than just an

intellectual concept, for such is their inner character that they provide a sense of actual participation in a realization of transcendence.” As a result, he continues, such symbols and narratives convey “not just an idea of the infinite but some realization of the infinite” (*Thou Art That* 6). Describing this aspect of Campbell’s orientation to myth as “symbolico-experiential mysticism,” Doty observes that Campbell “believed that myths could give conscious access to the underlying and transcending cosmic powers” (“Joseph Campbell’s Myth and/versus Religion” 422). In this regard, he adds, “mythic/mystic symbols are for Campbell the bearers of [a] great energetic, spiritual source” and “important entities that release energies not otherwise accessible” (427).

One of Campbell’s most significant and controversial concepts regarding personal engagement with mythic stories and images is the notion of the “symbol without meaning.” Campbell first introduced this concept in a lecture delivered at the Eranos Conference in Ascona, Switzerland, in 1957. Subsequently published in the official proceedings of that conference, as well as in an essay in the collection *The Flight of the Wild Gander*, this lecture directly addresses Campbell’s conception of the essential role of myth in an existential and experiential approach to the sacred.

In this lecture, Campbell discusses two mutually exclusive functions that can be served by mythic images and stories, functions that Campbell labels “engagement” and “disengagement” (168). Like the literalized and largely unconscious level of mythic engagement that Paul Tillich calls “unbroken,” Campbell writes that when a mythic image or story “is functioning for engagement, the cognitive faculties are held fascinated by and bound to the symbol itself, and are thus simultaneously informed by and protected from the unknown.” In contrast, Campbell observes, when the symbolic nature of a

mythic image or story is made conscious and thus becomes “broken” in Tillich’s terms, such mythic material is then allowed to function for the purpose of “disengagement, transport, and metamorphosis.”

Connected to this distinction between the engagement and disengagement functions of myth, Campbell also observes that the unknown can take on one of two possible forms, categories described by Campbell as “the relatively unknown” and “the absolutely unknowable” (169). While the former category of the unknown contains all those kinds of mysteries which are potentially solvable, like mystery stories where one is supposed to figure out “whodunit,” the latter category consists of all those eternal mysteries which, like the questions posed in Zen koans, are inherently unsolvable. While the former category of the unknown is today the proper concern of science, Campbell writes, it is the latter category “to which all of the high mythologies and religions are ultimately directed.” It is to this category of the absolutely unknowable kind of mystery that Campbell devotes the first of his four functions of mythology, the specifically religious function devoted to the numinous experience of the sacred.

With regard to this numinous quality of the absolutely unknowable, Campbell writes, “two attitudes have been fostered.” Describing the first attitude as “absolute terror, submission or, as we say, piety,” Campbell observes that in the pietistic response to the overwhelming quality of the sacred, “one does not seek to penetrate, for that would be hybris.” As a result, adds Campbell, “one remains with [the] symbol, as the only possible medium of relationship.” Campbell associates such a response with conventional religious orientations and the “engagement” function of myth.

The alternative response, Campbell argues, is to open oneself to myth's ability to disengage one from the experience of living exclusively in the safety of a relatively known and knowable relationship to the sacred and thereby "propel the soul" into an experience of genuine mystery (171). When myths are allowed to function in terms of disengagement, Joseph Felser suggests, their symbolic content serves to direct one toward "a more or less shattering experience of the numinous and not, as in the past, to a safe, comfortable identification with a limited social group and its peculiar rituals, ethical values, etc." (406).

A third distinction that Campbell makes in this essay—a distinction connected to both the idea of the engagement and disengagement functions of myth and the relative versus absolute forms of the unknowable—states that mythic symbols possess two different and mutually exclusive aspects. In this regard, he states, one must be careful to distinguish "between the 'sense' and the 'meaning' of the symbol" (*Flight of the Wild Gander* 188). Campbell connects both the engagement function of myth and the idea of the mystery that is only relatively unknown with the search for concrete, literal meanings behind mythic symbols. In contrast, he continues, "the ineffable, the absolutely unknowable, can be only sensed" and, as a result, cannot be conveyed in terms of any concrete or literal meaning that might be ascribed to mythic symbols. It is precisely for this reason that, at the beginning of this lecture, he comments on the "provincial character" of all symbols (93).

Explaining why mythic images cannot offer any form of concrete, unchanging meaning if they are also meant to point one toward a direct experience of what Campbell calls transcendence, David L. Miller writes, "If someone assigns a so-called 'meaning' to

a myth or symbol, this ‘meaning’ serves for engagement of energy and consciousness to itself.” In this context, Miller also comments on the critical importance of Campbell’s metaphor of myth functioning as a bow intended to release an experiential, existential arrow. “For the symbol to work properly (if indeed the symbol, the myth, and the religious text do indeed refer to something unknown and unknowable),” he observes, “‘meaning’ must be withdrawn so that the symbol, like the bow, may function to disengage the arrow” (“Flight of the Wild Gander” 114).

Further commenting on the significance of the idea that mythic symbols must remain without permanent meaning, Felser observes, “To say that the symbol lacks ‘meaning’ is to say that its significance cannot be literal, its references cannot be to transient particulars, and hence that its values and purposes, if there be such, cannot be to establish an emotionally charged identification with some in-group and its ideology” (408). Indeed, given Campbell’s devotion to embracing the symbol without meaning, Sandler and Reeck view him as a figure “whose religious passion is so strong as to lead him beyond institutions and creeds to confront in his own person the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*” (4). In so doing, they suggest, Campbell becomes a fearless exemplar of the creative vision of mythology he encourages others to pursue. Describing the simultaneously existential and profoundly religious outcome of applying such an approach to the mythology of one’s life, they write:

Renewing the act of experience itself, it restores to existence the quality of adventure, at once shattering and reinvigorating the fixed, already known, in the sacrificial creative fire of becoming the thing that is no thing at all but life, not as it *will be* or as it *should be*, as it *was* or *never will be*, but as it *is*, in depth, in process, *here and now*, inside and out. (7-8)

*On the "Hero's Journey" as Metaphor for Seeking the Sacred through Personal Myth*

Of all of the ideas associated with Campbell, it likely that none have achieved greater public recognition and critical comment than that of the "hero's journey," a concept Campbell introduced in 1949 in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Borrowing a term from the work of James Joyce, Campbell describes the concept of a universal heroic journey of discovery as a "monomyth" underlying much of the world's mythological narratives. "Essentially," Campbell writes, "there is but one archetypal mythic hero whose life has been replicated in many lands by many, many people" (*Power of Myth* 136). Characterizing the concept of the hero's journey as a kind of metamyth, Cousineau describes its theme as "the universal quest for self-transformation," further suggesting that Campbell's concept offers "a philosophical reading of the unity of humankind's spiritual history" (Introduction xvi).

Characterizing this mythic figure, Campbell observes that the hero "is usually the founder of something," adding that "in order to found something new, one has to leave the old and go in quest of the seed idea, a germinal idea that will have the potentiality of bringing forth that new thing." This theme of leaving of the known and familiar in search of that which is unknown and original is key to the myth of the heroic journey.

Translating this archetypal theme from the level of the heroic figures in ancient myths to the life experience of contemporary individuals, Campbell proposes that one "might also say that the founding of a life—your life or mine, if we live our own lives, instead of imitating everybody else's life—comes from a quest as well" (*Power of Myth* 136).

At the outset of the journey, Campbell observes, "destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown" (*Hero with a Thousand Faces* 58). Paradoxically, at the same time that the



hero is journeying from the spiritually familiar into territory that is unknown, he or she is also seeking to rediscover the universal and archetypal roots of the particular world from which they have come. As a result, Campbell writes, the heroic figure “is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms” (19). For such a person, he goes on, “one’s visions, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought.” As a result of drinking deeply from such archetypal springs, Campbell proposes, “the hero has died as a modern man,” to be reborn as “eternal man—perfected, unspecific, universal man” (20).

In keeping with the initiatory nature of the hero’s journey, Campbell observes that the three phases of the hero’s journey—stage of departure or separation, the stage of transition and transformation; and the stage of reintegration and return—are identical to those found in many of the world’s initiation rituals. Implying a commonality of theme and function between the mythic hero’s journey and traditional initiation rituals, Campbell ascribes to the latter the power “to conduct people across those difficult thresholds of transformation that demand a change in the patterns not only of conscious but also of unconscious life” (10).

In contemplating core aspects of Campbell’s hero monomyth, one can find connections to many of the essential themes encompassed within Campbell’s approach to the religious or spiritual dimension of myth. In this regard, one can see within Campbell’s discussion of the hero’s journey a discourse on the universal nature and form of the personal encounter with that mystical transcendence of which the perennial philosophy speaks. Commenting on this dimension of the hero’s journey, Campbell

writes that the monomyth reflects the realization that “the two—the hero and his ultimate god, the seeker and the found—are understood as the outside and inside of a single, self-mirrored mystery, which is identical with the mystery of the manifest world” (*Hero with a Thousand Faces* 40). Further reflecting on the mystical dimension of the hero’s journey, Segal observes, “Just as Campbell’s hero returns to the everyday world only to find within it the strange new world he assumed he had left behind, so all who heed the message of myth eventually find ultimate reality within, not outside, the everyday world” (“Joseph Campbell, the Perennial Philosopher” 92).

In Campbell’s vision of the hero’s journey, one can observe a kind of mythic model or template for the personal experience of existential meaning by contemporary men and women. In this regard, one should consider the implication of Campbell’s rhetorical question to Bill Moyers at the end of the segment on “The Hero’s Adventure” in the *Power of Myth* television series. “The big question,” Campbell states, “is whether you are going to be able to say a hearty yes to your adventure,” an adventure that Campbell describes not only as “the adventure of the hero,” but also as “the adventure of being alive” (163). Of course, since Campbell considers the experience of the adventure of being alive and the experience of transcendent reality to be inextricably interconnected, the hero’s journey must be seen as the simultaneous model for both.

For Campbell, one of the greatest gifts that can come to an individual who has successfully undertaken the rigors of the journey is an awareness of what Campbell call’s one’s “bliss.” The admonition to “follow your bliss,” which has become a catchphrase even among those who are otherwise unfamiliar with Campbell’s work, is often misinterpreted as being roughly synonymous with another popular maxim from the

1960's and 70's, namely "if it feels good, do it." Such a misinterpretation of Campbell's idea seriously trivializes what is, in essence, a profoundly religious concept.

Derived from the Hindu tradition, writes Doty, the term bliss refers to "the attainment of insight into one's proper place in the universe, one's appropriate relationship to the divine energies" ("Joseph Campbell's Myth and/versus Religion" 429). Moreover, Doty continues, one needs to bear in mind that bliss "is the highest value not of traditional, orthodox religious teaching but of the left-hand, unorthodox path," the path of the mystic (430). Regarding the left-hand path, Doty writes, "it is the path that recognizes fully the paradoxicality of life and can absorb the horror of the Fall" (431). In this context, Campbell observes that knowing one's bliss also brings awareness that "Life's a killer." While this may be a "terrible message," he continues, it is nevertheless "the bliss message" (*This Business of the Gods* 105). Moreover, he cautions, while it is true that bliss "absorbs pain," it's "certainly not happiness" (*Hero's Journey* 214).

In opposition to any suggestion of an "offer of easy grace," Doty further observes, Campbell's version of bliss "is not cheap, easy, or attained as a gift, but something gained by experience and discipline" ("Joseph Campbell's Myth and/versus Religion" 430). In Campbell's view, the attainment of bliss is the outcome of wholeheartedly responding to the "call" of the hero's journey and, in this sense, is related to the ideas of vocation, calling, and mission. As a result, following one's bliss requires a courageous willingness to defy both social and religious conventions, thereby risking the alienation and sacrifice that such defiance often brings. "Bliss is adduced from the deepest place within oneself that harbors one's sense of personal mission," writes Doty. Emphasizing the profound

sacrifice that following one's bliss may entail, he also suggests that seeking such a life path is "comparable to what lead Jesus to the cross and crucifixion" (431). Honoring the enormity of both the cost and the reward involved, Campbell considers the attainment of one's bliss to be the ultimate and appropriate outcome of the hero's "mythologically-inspired life" (*Hero's Journey* 64).

Finally, to appreciate fully the significance and power of Campbell's vision of the hero's journey as a religious or spiritual template, one must be able to appreciate its fundamentally universal frame of reference. Just as Campbell understood the many masks of God to represent the countless ways in which the peoples of the earth have personified the transcendent throughout history, so to are the thousand faces of the hero seen to highlight a perennial and enduring heroic quality within the human spirit. Paradoxically, as with every other aspect of Campbell's orientation to myth, it is precisely in the universal nature of the hero's journey that one may find the most profoundly personal significance. Commenting on the personal significance of Campbell's universal hero, Belden C. Lane writes:

The story of the hero [. . .] ultimately turns us back to our own experience. I am Telemachus, ever waiting for the lost father Odysseus to come home; I am Gilgamesh, longing to overcome the mystery of death. There is in me the blood-red hatred of Kali, who is consumed by her own rage; in me too is Demeter, the earth mother that loves and nurtures. I am Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi, the learner and the teacher, preparing for bold action. All these stories are my stories. (652-3)

Chapter 6  
 Personal Mythology and the Archetypal Realm:  
 C. G. Jung and the Depth Psychological Approach to the Sacred

*On Jung and the Relationship between Depth Psychology and Mythology*

Together with Joseph Campbell, C. G. Jung must be considered a founding figure in the evolution of the concept of personal mythology. In addition, Campbell and Jung have played equally definitive roles in developing the idea that the sacred might be experienced through a personal engagement with myth. Whereas Campbell's approach to these concepts grew largely out of his work as comparative mythologist, Jung's frame of reference regarding both mythology and religion evolved in the context of his crucial role in the development of the psychological school known as depth psychology.

As a general approach to psychological inquiry, depth psychology traces its roots back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century work of Sigmund Freud and his colleagues. Depth psychology takes as its primary concern the phenomenology of the deeper level of consciousness—variously described as the unconscious, subconscious, or preconscious—that underlies the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of the human mind. “Since its beginning in Freud’s study of the deep layers of the mind,” writes James Hillman, “the field of ‘depth psychology’ [. . .] has always been directed downward, whether toward buried memories of childhood or toward archaic mythologems” (*Archetypal Psychology* 28).

With regard to understanding the nature of the unconscious, a key distinguishing feature of depth psychology has been its recognition of the prominent connection between this foundational layer of the psyche and the stories, themes, and characters of ancient mythology. Expressing depth psychology’s understanding of the profound nature of this relationship, Michael Vannoy Adams observes, “the unconscious is intrinsically

mythopoetic, or myth-making” (11). Considering this fundamental concept from a slightly different perspective, Hillman observes that, for depth psychology, the “Gods of mythology become ‘psychic factors,’ and [. . .] the archetypes of psychology become mythological Gods” (*Re-Visioning Psychology* 37).

According to Adams, it was Freud himself who first speculated on the nature of the connection between the unconscious and the mythological (2). In a letter written in 1897, Freud first introduces two terms—“endopsychic myths” and “psycho-mythology”—to describe the inherently mythic dimension of the unconscious mind. In this letter, he describes the process by which such mythic material is generated, observing that the “dim inner perceptions of one’s own psychic apparatus stimulate thought illusions, which of course are projected onto the outside and, characteristically, into the future and beyond” (*Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud* 286). From his early emphasis on the Greek myth of the tragic hero Oedipus to his late reflections on Eros and Thanatos, the Greek divinities of love and death, Freud continued to affirm the critical importance of the interconnection between depth psychology and mythology throughout his career.

Equally important for the early development of depth psychology is the fact that C. G. Jung, while still a protégé of Freud, became equally fascinated by the similarities he discerned between the characters and themes of mythology and the functioning of the unconscious mind. Expressing the seriousness of this interest in a letter to Freud in 1909, Jung writes, “It has become quite clear to me that we shall not solve the ultimate secrets of neuroses and psychoses without mythology” (Freud and Jung, *The Freud/Jung Letters* 279). To an even greater extent than Freud, however, Jung’s ever-deepening recognition of the relationship between the nature of the unconscious and world mythology grew to

the point where understanding the former became incomprehensible without knowledge of the latter. Indeed, while the myth of Oedipus was certainly not the only myth that came to assume a special importance for Freud, as Adams observes, Freud never saw the need to elaborate “an archetypal psychology of multiple mythological motifs” (5). Jung’s approach to depth psychology, in contrast, could not have evolved without one.

It is also important to note in this context that Freud primarily viewed the psychological dimension of myth in terms of the deeply rooted patterns by which repressed personal material becomes expressed behaviorally. In this regard, for example, the primary psychological significance of the Oedipus myth for Freud is that it reflects an archaic model for the unconscious ways in which male children act out their incestuous desires and aggressive instincts. While Jung initially seems to have endorsed this more limited view of the relationship between mythology and psychology, he soon came to recognize that myth played a far more significant role in psychological functioning than that of an innate template for the acting out of sublimated sexuality and aggression. Indeed, in one of his many statements regarding the fundamental role of myth within the study of human consciousness, Jung goes so far as to characterize myth as “the primordial language” of psyche (*CW* 12: 25; para. 28).

With particular regard to the concept of personal mythology, one can trace the evolution of this idea in Jung’s thinking back to the intensely painful period that followed the breakup with his mentor Freud. During this critical time, a period described in detail in his memoir, Jung found himself deeply engaged in contemplating the powerful unconscious material that suddenly began to appear in his own dreams and waking visions. Eventually these reflections gave rise to many of the principles and methods that

were to become the core of his unique approach to psychology. Chief among these was the recognition that psychological development was dependent upon understanding one's guiding inner mythology. "I did not know that I was living a myth," he writes, reflecting on his own process of psychic evolution, "and even if I had known it, I would not have known what sort of myth was ordering my life without my knowledge." As a consequence, he continues, "I took it upon myself to get to know 'my' myth, and I regarded this as the task of tasks" (*CW* 5: xxv).

While his encounters with the contents of the unconscious were enormously intensified during this period, Jung had been aware since childhood of receiving important symbolic messages in the form of dreams and visions. It was in the midst of the deep depression that followed his banishment from the psychoanalytic community, however, that the ultimate significance of all of this unconscious material began to become clear to Jung. In his memoir, he describes the dawning of this realization in the following passage:

About this time I experienced a moment of unusual clarity in which I looked back over the way I had traveled so far. I thought, "Now you possess a key to mythology and are free to unlock the gates of the unconscious psyche." But then something whispered within me, "Why open all the gates?" And promptly the question arose of what, after all, I had accomplished. I had explained the myths of peoples of the past; I had written a book about the hero, the myth in which man has always lived. But in what myth does man live nowadays? In the Christian myth, the answer might be. "Do *you* live in it?" I asked myself. To be honest, the answer was no. For me, it is not what I live by. "Then do we no longer have any myth?" "No, evidently we no longer have any myth." "But then what is your myth—the myth in which you do live?" (*Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* 171)

In this remarkable passage, Jung reflects upon three principles that are essential both to the concept of personal mythology as well as the whole of Jung's psychological



approach. The first of these principles acknowledges the irreplaceable role played by myth in understanding the functioning of the unconscious. The second expresses a recognition that the prevailing collective myths of the past—and, in particular, the Christian myth—may no longer be valid or meaningful to modern humans. The third principle is that individuals who are no longer sustained by a historical collective myth inevitably need to seek an individually derived one if their lives are to retain an abiding sense of context and purpose. Jung’s recognition of the profoundly personal nature of such new myths is further highlighted by the emphasis he places on the word “you” in his self-reflexive question regarding his relationship to the Christian myth. “Far from an inferior alternative to a group myth,” writes Robert A. Segal in this context, “a personal myth for Jung is the ideal, for it alone is geared to the uniqueness of one’s psyche” (Introduction 29).

*On Jung and the Religious Dimension of Depth Psychology*

In addition to the deeper and broader significance attributed to mythology in Jungian depth psychology, Jung’s approach differs from that of Freud in another important way, namely with regard to their respective visions of the relationship between psychology and religion. Summarizing the core difference between Freud’s and Jung’s views on this subject, Michael Palmer observes that for Freud, the goal of psychotherapy inherently involves “the elimination of the religious neurosis in the life of the maturing individual.” Opposing that viewpoint, he continues, Jung “sees the process as requiring a reorientation of consciousness towards religion, towards those psychic processes generic to the human species which religion embodies and which are thus expressive of the deepest and innermost processes of the psyche” (92).

It should be noted in this context that Freud, who remained a professed atheist throughout his life, considered all religious beliefs and practices to be a form of primitive and infantile regression on the part of modern humans. As he wrote in *The Future of Illusion*, “religious ideas have arisen from the same needs as have all the other achievements of civilization: from the necessity of defending oneself against the crushing superior force of nature” (21). As a result, Freud states, “religious beliefs are illusions, fulfillments of the oldest, strongest wishes of mankind” (30). Moreover, given that Freud sees the roots of the religious impulse largely arising from the neurotic need to resolve the Oedipal conflict with the father, it is not surprising that he characterizes religion as “the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity” (226).

Far from viewing religious behavior as either wish-fulfilling illusion or neurotic regression, Jung’s personal and professional experience brought him to view human consciousness as possessing an innately and intrinsically religious function. Jung further came to understand that this religious function of the psyche exercised as powerful an influence on human behavior as the instincts of sexuality or aggression. For Jung, Palmer writes, “religion does not [. . .] signify the repression of a sexual and infantile impulse, but rather the energetic movement of the libido towards the deepest layers of the psyche” (111).

Perhaps most importantly, in contrast to Freud, Jung came to recognize that conscious engagement of the psyche’s religious function was essential for long-term psychological health and development. In this context, he observes that among all of his clients past the onset of mid-life, “there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life.” Moreover, Jung declares, “every one

of them fell ill because he had lost what the living religions of every age have given their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain a religious outlook” (*CW* 11: 334; para 509).

Regarding the evolution of the human understanding of divinity, Jung’s work suggests a three-stage movement beginning in ancient times and extending into the modern world. At the beginning of the evolution of human consciousness, Jung writes, the gods “lived in superhuman power and beauty on the top of snow-clad mountains or in the darkness of caves, woods and seas.” Then, with the rise of the monotheistic religions about 3,000 years ago, he continues, the many divinities “drew together into one god, and then that god became man.” The third stage of this process, initiated with the birth of depth psychology, continues that evolution in consciousness by shifting awareness entirely away from the conception of divinity as an external, transcendent power and toward awareness of its internal manifestation in the form of equally powerful psychological phenomena. Regarding this third phase of the evolving relationship between the divine and the human, Jung writes, “the gods in our time assemble in the lap of the ordinary individual and are as powerful and as awe-inspiring as ever, in spite of their new disguise—the so-called psychical functions” (*CW* 11: 84; para. 141).

In order to comprehend Jung’s vision of the essential relationship between depth psychology and the religious dimension of human life, one must first explore his perspective on two interrelated religious concerns. The first of these concerns deals with the meaning of the term “religion” in the context of Jung’s approach to depth psychology, while the second focuses on the distinction between theological or doctrinal

conceptualizations regarding the nature of divinity and the direct, phenomenological experience of the sacred.

It is important to note that in both his definition of religion and his description of the phenomenological nature of the human experience of the sacred, Jung draws heavily on Rudolf Otto's concept of the numinous. As was discussed in Chapter 4, Otto employed this term to describe the fundamental nature of the experience of the sacred or holy. In this context, Otto defines the numinous to be a pre-rational, involuntary, emotional response to an image or event that simultaneously totally overwhelms and utterly fascinates. Since the experience of the numinous cannot be a manifestation of rational consciousness, Jung attributes such experience to the functioning of the unconscious. Indeed, in writing of the "numinosity of the unconscious" Jung directly ascribes to it both the awe-inspiring and wonder-inducing qualities of Otto's vision of the sacred (*CW* 9.2: 194; para. 303).

With regard to Jung's definition of religion, his most definitive statement on the subject is provided in the text of his Terry lectures delivered at Yale University in 1937. In this text, Jung declares that religion, "as the Latin word denotes, is a careful and scrupulous observation of what Rudolf Otto aptly termed the *numinosum*" (*CW* 11: 8; para. 8). He further contends that, in his view, religion necessitates:

a careful consideration and observation of certain dynamic factors that are conceived as 'powers': spirits, daemons, gods, laws, ideas, ideals, or whatever name man has given to such factors in his world as he has found powerful, dangerous, or helpful enough to be taken into careful consideration, or grand, beautiful, and meaningful enough to be devoutly worshipped and loved. (7; para. 6)

Later in this same text, Jung is also careful to emphasize what is not included in his definition of religion. "I want to make clear," he emphatically states, "that by the term

‘religion’ I do not mean a creed,” adding that creeds are primarily “codified and dogmatized forms of original religious experience” (8-9; para. 9-10).

In his insistence that the depth psychological view of religion bears no relationship to the concept of religious creed, Jung is also implicitly addressing the second of these concerns, namely the psychological necessity of distinguishing between direct, personal experience of the sacred and any form of empirical knowledge regarding the ultimate source of such experience. Recognizing the distinction between the experience of divinity and knowledge of its source was critical for Jung, since he viewed the former to be an experientially knowable psychic phenomenon, while the latter must remain, empirically speaking, an inherently unknowable mystery about which one may only speculate. Commenting further on the significance of this concept, Lionel Corbett observes that “numinous experience arises out of the autonomous level of the psyche” and that one cannot empirically say whether this level of the psyche is “the source of, or the medium for, the transmission of religious experience” (*Religious Function of the Psyche* 8).

This emphasis on the primacy of phenomenological experience is among the most important aspect of Jung’s orientation to religion. Regarding the depth psychological view of religious experience, Jung observes, metaphysical and theological speculation “answers itself by reason of the subjectively overwhelming numinosity of the experience.” Anyone who has had an experience of the numinous, he continues “is seized by it” and for this reason is not “in a position to indulge in fruitless metaphysical or epistemological speculations” (*CW* 11: 293-4; para. 506). Moreover, as Corbett further argues, regardless of the manner in which it appears, “numinous experience is

always psychologically relevant to the experiencer, and at the same time it tells us something about his or her true spirituality” (“Depth Psychological Approach to the Sacred” 78).

Another key aspect of Jung’s view of the relationship between psychology and religion—and one which is directly related to the concept of personal mythology as pathway to the sacred—is the role Jung ascribes to myth as the carrier of numinous experience. “Myth gives the ultimately unimaginable religious experience an image,” he observes, “a form in which to express itself” (*Letters* 486). Because of this critical imaginal role played by myth in the experience of the sacred, Jung also describes myth as ‘the revelation of a divine life in man’ (*Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* 340). In this context, Corbett is not exaggerating when he states that “mythical sensibility is integral to the depth psychological approach to psyche’s religious function” (*Religious Function of the Psyche* 84).

In considering Jung’s view of the proper function of myth in the modern world, it is important to note the utter disregard he shares in common with Campbell regarding the traditional religious approach to myth. Like everyone else who accepts the modern scientific worldview, Jung rejects what Segal calls the “explanatory” view of myth, the perspective that seeks metaphysical explanations from myth for how the material world works. Likewise, Jung avoids the secular, materialist view that dismisses myth as meaningless and irrelevant to life in the modern world. Instead of dismissing myth as falsehood because it fails in its old explanatory function, Jung adopts the same radically different approach as Campbell. That strategy, writes Segal, is “to separate myth from

the rest of religion” and instead “to offer mythology as a psychological, not explanatory, phenomenon” (“Is Analytical Psychology a Religion?” 552).

Jung also recognizes that the depth psychological approach to the religious dimension of human existence, like the depth psychological orientation to myth, must focus on the numinous experience of the individual rather than on collective religious dogma. At the same time, the Jungian perspective also recognizes the universality of the broader underlying patterns within which personal religious experience tends to manifest, just as it recognizes the universal patterns underlying the images and themes within personal myths. “The individual who works seriously with the products of the unconscious,” observes Edward C. Whitmont, “finds symbols and images arising in himself which have occurred over and over again in the religious experiences of all peoples—whether within the framework of an organized religion or not” (*Symbolic Quest* 84). Such symbols and images, he further cautions, while universal in nature, “are exclusively concerned with the individual’s personal relation with ultimate reality” (85).

Considering the larger religious implications of Jung’s approach to depth psychology, Ann Belford Ulanov observes that the individual human psyche can now be seen as “the medium through which we experience the divine” (120). In this regard, she is commenting on the degree to which universal, ancient religious images, stories, and symbols can be given renewed meaning and energy when refracted through the medium of the individual in communion with the unconscious. According to Ulanov, Jung sees the purpose of his psychology “as helping us reestablish connection to the truths of religious symbols by finding their equivalents in our own psychic experience.”

*On the Collective Unconscious and Archetypes*

The underlying reason why encounters with the numinous “belong to the most intimate and personal of human experiences, yet they are of a universal validity,” writes Aniela Jaffé, is that “from a psychological point of view, they are rooted in the collective unconscious and in collective archetypes” (*Was Jung a Mystic?* 23). These two concepts are key to understanding not only Jung’s approach to myth and religion, but also the Jungian approach to depth psychology as a whole. In addition, these two concepts are interconnected in Jung’s work to such an extent that, as Robert H. Hopcke suggests, to “separate Jung’s conception of archetype from his theory of the collective unconscious is impossible.” Since these two concepts depend on each other for theoretical coherence, Hopcke continues, “one could not speak of archetypes, as Jung used the term, without the theory of the collective unconscious, nor could the collective unconscious be truly collective, as Jung used the term, without the archetypes” (*Guided Tour of the Works of Jung* 13).

Jung first came to recognize the existence of archetypes in the course of his work with his own dreams and fantasies as well as those of his clients. In this context, Hopcke observes, Jung’s wide knowledge of mythology, anthropology, religion, and ancient art permitted him to recognize strong parallels between the symbols that appeared in the dreams of patients and those that had “appeared and reappeared over thousands of years in myths and religions all over the world.” Nevertheless, he continues, Jung was initially “at a loss to trace the appearance of such dream symbols to experiences in his patients’ individual lives.” Jung initially predicated the concept of the collective unconscious as a way of explaining the source of the universality of such archetypal material (*Guided Tour of the Works of Jung* 14). This recognition that a primordial, shared stratum of



consciousness was responsible for the universal nature of his patients' dream symbols ultimately came to be viewed by Jung as the single most significant aspect of his life's work. In this regard, when asked late in his life what myth or central idea had given the greatest meaning to his life, Jung answered without hesitation "Oh, that is the collective unconscious" (Bennet 101).

The concept of an impersonal and universal stratum of the unconscious coexisting side-by-side with a purely personal one is key to understanding Jung's overall conceptualization of the psyche. "We have to distinguish between a personal unconscious and an impersonal or transpersonal consciousness," Jung observes in this regard. "We speak of the latter also as the collective unconscious," he further notes, "because it is detached from anything personal and is common to all men, since it is held to found everywhere, which is not the case with the personal contents" (*CW* 7: 66; para. 103-4).

Like Freud, Jung recognizes that the personal layer of the unconscious is the repository of an individual's neurotically repressed psychic material. Because Jung came to see the personal layer of the unconscious serving as a psychic bridge between individual consciousness and the collective dimension of the unconscious, however, he views the contents of the personal unconscious as more than the sum of an individual's repressed psychic material. As the point of entry for the contents of the collective unconscious, Jung observes that the personal unconscious also contains "the seeds of future conscious contents," nascent material, for example, rising into consciousness in the form of archetypal dreams (*CW* 7: 128; para. 204).

Again, as Freud does, Jung recognizes that the contents of the personal unconscious are often the impetus behind neurotic behavior. Because he recognizes the existence of its collective dimension, however, Jung also views the unconscious as a potential source of profound wisdom and guidance. In this regard, for example, contents arising into consciousness from the collective unconscious can greatly aid individuals in working with their neurotic complexes. Moreover, it is the unconscious, through the operation of its religious function, that serves as the medium through which the individual is enabled to encounter the numinous experience of the sacred.

In writing about the relationship between the collective unconscious and its psychic contents, Jung observes that the “collective unconscious, being the repository of man’s experience and at the same time the precondition for that experience, is an image of the world that has taken aeons to form.” From within this image, he continues “certain features, the archetypes or dominants, have crystallized out in the course of time.” These archetypes, he further states, “are the ruling powers, the gods, images of dominant laws and principles, and of typical, regularly occurring events in the soul’s cycle of experience” (*CW* 7: 95; para. 151). Also describing archetypes as “primordial images,” Jung calls them “the most ancient and the most universal ‘thought-forms’ of humanity” (66; para. 103-4).

When writing about the nature of archetypal material, Jung is always careful to distinguish between the generalized forms of archetypes and their specific content. Commenting on this distinction, he describes the “archetype *an sich*” as “a ‘disposition’ which starts functioning at a given moment in the development of the human mind and arranges the material of consciousness into definite patterns” (*CW* 11: 148-9; para. 222).

Jung also writes that “archetypes are not determined as regards their content, but only as regards their form and then only to a very limited degree.” Moreover, regarding archetypal content, he adds, “a primordial image is determined as to its content only when it has become conscious and is therefore filled out with the material of conscious experience” (*CW* 9.1: 79; para. 155).

In addition, while the variable personal content of an archetype may become accessible to consciousness, Jung views the archetype at the level of its a priori form as ultimately unknowable. Because the unknowable archetypal form or pattern is the underlying shaper of its conscious content, however, an archetype makes its presence known to consciousness in the guise of symbolic images and metaphors. On the collective level, the conscious manifestation of such archetypal content becomes the symbolic source of collective myths and religious images, while on the individual level this material becomes the foundation of one’s personal mythology.

Regarding the relationship between such archetypal material and the evolving nature of one’s personal mythology, it is also important to bear in mind Jung’s view of the cyclical nature of life of symbols. This cycle begins, as Bond observes, when an archetypal image spontaneously arises out of the collective unconscious and constellates in personal consciousness as a response to an emotionally charged life situation. This image then serves to channel the intense psychic energy thus aroused and, in the process, attracts to itself a flow of associated archetypal material. Once such an image becomes sufficiently charged with psychic energy and takes on a sufficiently recognizable archetypal form, it becomes a living symbol.

Key to this concept of the life cycle of symbols is the recognition that the compelling power of a symbolic image is dependent on the flow of psychic energy it is able to direct. In this regard, Bond writes, “one must speak of the symbol always with the energy, fascination, and attention that the image commands” (83). Psychic energy periodically redirects itself in new directions over the course of a lifetime, however, and once the flow of psychic energy has been withdrawn from an image, it will gradually lose its archetypal power to generate a sense of psychological and spiritual meaning. When that happens, Bond observes, though its outer form remains for a time as a sort of empty archetypal shell, the symbol is no longer a living presence. Eventually a new archetypal situation will arise, calling forth a new symbolic image from the unconscious, and the whole cycle will begin again. That one’s personal myth evolves over the course of a lifetime is the result of this autonomous ebb and flow of archetypal material.

Like Adolf Bastian’s distinction between elementary and folk ideas which had so influenced Campbell’s view of myth, Jung’s theory of archetypes is foundational to the concept of personal mythology. By adding a depth psychological perspective to Bastian’s anthropological one, Jung’s concept of archetypes provides a profoundly useful tool for contemplating the universal dimension of the experience of being human. “At bottom, all psychic events are so deeply grounded in the archetype and are so much interwoven with it,” Jung states, “that in every case considerable effort is needed to separate the unique from the typical with any certainty.” As a result, he observes, “Ultimately, every individual life is at the same time the eternal life of the species” (*CW* 11: 89; para. 146).

Paradoxically, while deepening one's awareness of myth's universal and timeless aspects, adopting an archetypal view also simultaneously emphasizes the absolutely personal and time-bound qualities of the personal experience of the mythic. In this context, one might paraphrase Jung to observe that "the eternal life of the species" is only knowable through the archetypal experience of each individual human being (*CW* 11: 89; para. 146). Commenting on this aspect of Jung's vision, Segal acknowledges that "for all his insistence on the universal identity of the archetypal content of myths, Jung is also attentive to the differences." In this regard, Segal observes, Jung understood that "a myth is not merely a myth in its own right," but rather "is a myth for someone." As a result, he adds, in the Jungian approach to mythology, the meaning of a myth is always "more than its general meaning for all humanity" (Introduction 13).

Another important aspect or quality of archetypes, and one which is essential to the idea of personal myth as a religious or spiritual practice, relates to their inherently numinous nature. "The archetype, as a glance at the history of religious phenomena will show," Jung writes in this regard, "has a characteristically numinous effect so that the subject is gripped as though by an instinct" (*CW* 5: 158; para. 225). It is this numinous quality of the archetypes that explains both their enormous power as psychic phenomena as well as their profoundly religious significance.

Writing about the religious significance of Jung's theory of collective archetypes, Jaffé observes that "the recognition or experience of timeless archetypes as the hidden operators behind the scenes of life" brings with it "awareness of a transcendental or spiritual reality that complements the empirical reality of life and together with it forms a whole" (*Myth of Meaning* 21). Moreover, suggests Corbett, "any experience which

touches on questions of meaning, value, or purpose is potentially religious, depending on whether we contextualize it archetypally.” In this way, he adds, any experience “can become a religious one if we are influenced in our attitude toward it by direct contact with the archetypal realm” (*Religious Function of the Psyche* 67).

*On the Role of Symbolic Consciousness in Working with Personal Mythology*

The concept of mythological consciousness and its role in the evolution of one’s personal mythology was initially considered in Chapter 2. Expanding on that topic, it is important to consider at this point Jung’s distinction between two mutually exclusive and opposed forms of consciousness, forms which he names “directed thinking” and “fantasy thinking.” The former term, defined by Jung simply as “thinking in words,” describes that kind of consciousness which is inherently objective, logical, deliberate, and purposeful (*CW* 5: 16; para. 17). In contrast, the latter term is used by Jung to describe consciousness which is inherently subjective, non-logical, spontaneous, and directionless.

For Jung, the most advanced form of directed thinking is found in scientific discourse. “The clearest expression of modern directed thinking,” he writes, “is science and the techniques fostered by it” (19; para. 21). He goes on to suggest that the reason ancient and indigenous people developed only a primitive kind of science was that they lacked a sufficiently developed capacity for directed thinking. “We shall not be wrong” he observes in this regard, “in saying that the tremendous work of education which past centuries have devoted to directed thinking [. . .] has produced a readjustment of the human mind to which we owe modern empiricism and technics” (16; para. 17). While acknowledging that the rise of directed thinking has proven to be an undoubted and enormous asset in the evolution of humankind, Jung also recognizes that its elevation to

the forefront of modern consciousness has also tended to obscure and devalue the far more ancient form of consciousness expressed in the form of fantasy thinking.

If science and empiricism epitomize the nature of directed thinking, then dreams and the imaginal frame of reference typify the subjective realm of fantasy thinking. In this form of consciousness, Jung writes, “we no longer compel our thoughts along a definite track, but let them float, sink or rise according to their specific gravity” (16; para. 17). Regarding the content of fantasy thinking, he observes that it “shies away from reality,” focusing instead on “the past with its thousand-and-one memory images” (18; para. 19). In contrast to directed thinking, which is both “difficult and exhausting,” fantasy thinking is described by Jung as “effortless, working as it were spontaneously, and with contents ready to hand and guided by unconscious motives” (para. 20).

Another key difference between directed and fantasy thinking is that the former “is an altogether conscious phenomenon.” In contrast, Jung suggests, while much of fantasy thinking takes place in the conscious sphere, “at least as much goes on in the half-shadow, or entirely in the unconscious, and can therefore be inferred only indirectly.” It is therefore through the engagement of fantasy thinking, he continues, that one “is brought into contact with the oldest layers of the human mind, long buried beneath the threshold of consciousness” (29; para. 39).

Most importantly, since not only dream and image, but also the entire realm of myth emanates out of the unconscious, fantasy thinking is of the utmost importance in any form of engagement with the mythic dimension of existence. The relationship between myth and fantasy thinking is so intense, writes Segal, that for Jung, “mythic thinking is fantasy thinking” (Introduction 25). The application of fantasy consciousness

in the form of mythic thinking therefore is central to Jung's approach to the functioning of the psyche. "In describing the living processes of the psyche," Jung states regarding this key aspect of his work, "I deliberately and consciously give preference to a [. . .] mythological way of thinking" (*CW* 9.2:13; para 25). Walker suggests that, beyond simply preferring a mythological form of thinking, Jung demonstrates an "unusual capacity not only to empathize with the archaic mythological world view, but also to actually operate within it and adopt it as his own" (17).

With regard to the distinction between directed and fantasy thinking, Bond suggests that, as a result of Jung's ongoing experience, he later came to tacitly distinguish a third level of consciousness which is different from either one and serves as the bridge between them. Given that the archetypal contents of the unconscious cannot be described in the language of directed consciousness, psyche presents consciousness with fantasy images that signify these unconscious contents. Ordinarily, however, directed thinking then quickly steps in to dismiss these products of fantasy thinking as nonsensical and imaginary. Jung came to understand that by consciously adopting a symbolic frame of reference for the interpretation of the contents of fantasy thinking, an intermediary mode of consciousness comes into play. Symbolic thinking then creates an intermediary psychic space which is focused neither on the purely subjective or objective levels of consciousness, but rather "participates in the subjective process of fantasy while at the same time maintaining awareness of the process as an objective, autonomous factor" (18).

In considering the nature of symbolic consciousness, Jung further observes that for this level of psyche to function there must be what he calls a "symbolic attitude," a



concept he defines as “a definite view of the world which assigns meaning to events, whether great or small, and attaches to this meaning a greater value than bare facts.” The symbolic attitude, he continues, “stands opposed to another view which lays the accent on sheer facts and subordinates meaning to them” (*CW* 6: 476-7; para. 819-20).

Conscious engagement of a symbolic attitude is essential in working with the concept of personal myth because the archetypal content of the collective unconscious can only be understood through the medium of symbol. In this sense, writes Corbett, a functional definition of personal myth might be “the sum of an individual’s symbolic experiences.” Corbett is also careful to point out that, as carriers of the numinous energy of the archetypes, symbols serve another critical psychic function. This function, Corbett observes, relates to their “ability to bring new sources of sacred imagery from the unconscious into consciousness” (*Religious Function of the Psyche* 95). From the point of view of personal myth as pathway to the sacred, this religious dimension of symbolic consciousness is important because, as Corbett observes, “the individual’s relationship with such material is the basis of much of his or her personal religion, regardless of which outer religion he or she adheres to” (96).

The recognition of the power of the symbolic perspective and its application within the context of a religious orientation to life are key to what Jung calls “living the symbolic life.” In a lecture delivered to a group of Jungian pastoral counselors in 1939, Jung observed that the extreme reliance of the modern age on rationality has left many individuals bereft of access to an ongoing symbolic frame of reference for engaging their everyday experience. Such a symbolic perspective, he writes, imparts “the only meaning

to human life” by giving the individual a sense of being an actor “in the divine drama of human life” (CW 18: 275; para. 630).

Commenting on the personal mythic significance of this concept, Hopcke writes that “the meaning of our lives, the plot of our stories, is not written simply by what we know of ourselves but comes from a much deeper place, from our innately human capacity to experience wholeness through living a symbolic life” (*There Are No Accidents* 252). In a similar vein, Eugene C. Bianchi writes about the religious implications of engaging a symbolic perspective in the living of one’s life. He observes that the “direction of the symbolic way is toward inner religiousness, a quest for inner meaning.” He further suggests that in pursuing such a path, one is “called to move beyond the ordered certainties, patterned by family and church in childhood, to risk confrontation with the unpredictable numinous of archetypal symbols in the psyche” (185).

*On the Mythic Dimension of Dreams, Active Imagination, and Synchronicity*

Given that the content of one’s personal myth is not consciously chosen, but rather arises out the totality of one’s autonomous encounters with the archetypal content of the collective unconscious, it is important to understand the various ways in which such encounters arise. The need to understand how one may best attend to these manifestations of the unconscious is further increased by fact that personal experience of the sacred occurs through one’s contact with the numinous nature of the archetypal realm.

Among the ways in which one may most effectively engage the mythic, numinous content of the collective unconscious, Jung emphasized the importance of paying attention to one’s dreams and waking visions, as well as to the meaningful coincidences

in one's life. Regarding the powerful nature of these three forms of psychic phenomena, Jung observes that "when an archetype appears in a dream, in a fantasy, or in life, it always brings with it a certain power by virtue of which it [. . .] exercises a numinous or fascinating effect" (*CW* 7: 70; para. 109). In the particular context of personal myth, Stephen Larsen describes these autonomous manifestations of the unconscious as "spontaneous mythmaking experiences" (*Mythic Imagination* 22).

Probably the most familiar of these three avenues for encountering the archetypal contents of the unconscious is work with dreams. From the beginning, with Freud's injunction that they represent "the royal road to the unconscious," depth psychology has understood that dreams represent the principal means of accessing the unconscious, symbolic dimension of the psyche (*Interpretation of Dreams* 647). Given that Freud only acknowledged the existence of a personal unconscious, however, he saw all symbolic dream content as fundamentally personal in nature. While Jung did not disagree with the idea that dreams often contain symbolic material that is purely personal in context, his recognition of the existence of the collective unconscious also led him to perceive the potentially archetypal nature of the content of dreams.

In this regard, Jung distinguishes between two categories of dreams which he describes using the terms "little dreams" and "big dreams" (*CW* 8: 290; para. 554). Regarding the former, Jung characterizes such dreams as "the nightly fragments of fantasy coming from the subjective and personal sphere," adding that "their meaning is limited to the affairs of everyday" as a result of which they "are easily forgotten [. . .] because their validity is restricted to the day-to-day fluctuations of the psychic balance." In contrast, he characterizes the latter category as "significant dreams" which "occur

mostly during critical phases of life. Jung further suggests that such dreams “not infrequently prove to be the richest jewel in the treasure-house of psychic experience” (291; para 555).

Jung recognizes that big dreams “come from a ‘different level’ from that of the dreams we dream every night” (CW 17; 117; para. 209). Unlike ordinary personal dreams, which draw largely on the contents of the personal unconscious, big dreams draw their contents from the collective level of the unconscious. In this context, Jung observes that “the collective unconscious influences our dreams only occasionally, and when this happens, it produces strange and marvelous dreams remarkable for their beauty, or their demoniacal horror, or for their enigmatic wisdom” (118; para. 209).

Given their origin in the collective unconscious, big dreams are inherently archetypal in their symbolic content. In this regard, Jung observes, a big dream “uses collective figures because it has to express an eternal human problem that repeats itself endlessly, and not just a disturbance of personal balance.” As a result, he cautions, the interpretation of such dreams often involves “considerable difficulty” because the dreamer’s personal associations with images in such dreams are usually of little help (CW 8: 291; para. 555). “For these archetypal products are no longer concerned with personal experiences,” he continues, “but with general ideas, whose chief significance lies in their intrinsic meaning and not in any personal experience and its associations” (292; para. 557).

Regarding the archetypal content of big dreams, Jung writes that such contents reflect “ideas and associations whose exact equivalents can be found in mythology” (CW 17: 119; para. 209). In comparison to ordinary dreams, Jung writes, “the typical motifs in

big dreams are of much greater importance” precisely because “they permit a comparison with the motifs of mythology” (*CW* 8: 247; para. 474). Recognition of the identical nature of the motifs in big dreams and those of mythology, he continues, “not only raises the dream to a higher a level and places it in the larger context of the mythologem, but, at the same time by the mythology are brought into connection with the psychic life of the individual” (*CW* 11: 301; para. 451).

While many different archetypal figures may appear among the numerous mythological motifs of big dreams, Jung further observes that these motifs are often connected with “the life of the hero.” Describing some of the typical motifs of archetypal dreams, he observes:

Here we find the dangerous adventures and ordeals such as occur in initiations. We meet dragons, helpful animals, and demons; also the Wise Old Man, the animal-man, the wishing tree, the hidden treasure, the well, the cave, the walled garden, the transformative processes and substances of alchemy, and so forth—all things which in no way touch the banalities of everyday. (*CW* 8: 293; para. 558)

These archetypal mythologems, Jung adds, “are condensed, interwoven, and blended not only with one another [ . . . ] but also with unique individual elements” (para. 559). For this reason, big dreams often play a crucial role in both the genesis and evolution of an individual’s personal mythology.

Given the numinous nature of archetypal material, it should not be surprising that big dreams are not only mythic in nature but also possess an innately religious quality for the dreamer. As a result, while the figures in ancient mythologies can often “appear as pale phantoms and relics of a long lost past life that has become strange to us,” the religious aspect of a big dream “represents an immediate ‘numinous’ experience.” In this way, he declares, the dream becomes “a *living mythologem*.” (*CW* 11: 301; para. 451).

Often such dreams “stand out for years like spiritual landmarks,” Jung suggests, “even though they may never be quite understood.” As a result, he continues, it is “a hopeless undertaking to interpret such dreams reductively, as their real meaning and value lie in themselves.” Such dreams, he concludes, “are spiritual experiences that defy any attempt at rationalization” (*CW* 17: 117; para. 208).

Commenting further on the religious dimension of big dreams, Anthony Stevens observes that if one works seriously with such dreams “it is hard not to develop some degree of mystical awareness, for the dreams become more profound, more mythic, more ‘religious,’ and expose one to experiences unmistakably suprapersonal and ‘transcendent’” (220). In the context of archetypal dreams, he writes, the “mundane patterns of daily existence are transfused with the radiant intensity which is universally ascribed to ‘the sacred’.”

In addition to dreams, Jung recognized a second method for accessing the contents of the unconscious which he named “active imagination.” Characterized by June Singer as a method for “dreaming the dream forward,” active imagination can be likened to a waking dream or vision (272). As defined by Robert Johnson, active imagination is a symbolic process of “going to the images that rise up in one’s imagination and making dialog with them” (25). Describing the core of the process of active imagination, Jung states that the “essential thing is to differentiate oneself from these unconscious contents by personifying them, and at the same time to bring them into relationship with consciousness” (*Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* 187). It is this “conscious participation in the imaginative experience,” Johnson observes, that makes active imagination “different from ordinary, passive fantasy” (140).

Just as dreams can function on both the purely personal as well as the archetypal level, the process of active imagination can also be applied to engage material from the personal as well as the collective unconscious. This latter type of active imagination, Johnson suggests, “is not to work out some immediate problem or conflict on the personal level,” but rather “to make a place in one’s life where the great archetypal themes can live themselves out” (157). At this level, he writes, active imagination “seems more like a mythical adventure, a journey into the archetypal realm” (151). Regarding this potentially mythic dimension of work with active imagination, Johnson observes that everyone contains “the seeds of the heroic quest” within them and active imagination can serve as “one of the best and most legitimate levels on which to live these experiences” (153).

Profounder still, as Johnson observes, is the employment of active imagination for experiencing the spiritual or religious dimension of consciousness. At this level, he writes, active imagination “is perceived as vision which gives rise to religious insight” (200). The essence of the meaning of such visionary experiences with active imagination, Johnson suggests, is the process of “learning from your own experience those profound truths of life that cannot be transferred from one person to another with words but can only be genuinely known through one’s own connection to the collective unconscious” (218). Further commenting on the religious dimension of engaging in this form of inner work, Barbara Hannah writes, “active imagination is a form of meditation which man has used, at least from the dawn of history, if not earlier, as a way of learning to know his God or gods.” In other words, she continues, “it is a method for exploring the unknown, whether we think of the unknown as an outside god—as an immeasurable

infinite—or whether we know that we can meet it by contemplating our unknown selves as an entirely *inner* experience” (3).

In addition to paying attention to the archetypal content of big dreams and the deepest forms of active imagination, Jung proposes a third way that individuals can access the mythic dimension of their life stories, namely by attending to the meaningful coincidences occurring within their lives. Jung began to recognize the existence of such events early in the course of his professional work and eventually created the term “synchronicity” to describe such phenomena. “Since the causality principle seemed to me insufficient to explain certain remarkable manifestations of the unconscious,” Jung writes of the evolution of the concept in his thinking, “my researches into the psychology of unconscious processes [ . . . ] compelled me to look for another principle of explanation” (*CW* 15: 56; para. 81). Jung defines the phenomenon of synchronicity as an “acausal connecting principle” and describes synchronicities as “meaningful coincidences” (*CW* 8: 518; para. 967). Examples of synchronicities offered by Jung include “the simultaneous occurrence of identical thoughts, symbols, or psychic states” (*CW* 15: 56; para. 81).

In his principle essay on this subject, Jung recounts an exemplary case of a synchronicity that manifested during his professional work, an incident in which a client was describing the contents of dream about a Egyptian scarab beetle just as a very similar kind of beetle synchronously flew through the window of Jung’s study. The client, who had previously resisted the idea of looking at the meaningfulness of any irrational experience, was deeply emotionally affected by this event, as a result of which her work with Jung was greatly facilitated. Jung understood that both the dream image of the



beetle, an ancient symbol of rebirth and renewal, and its synchronous appearance in his office were harbingers of a major psychological and spiritual transformation in the client. According to Jung, the symbolic meaning of both the dream and the synchronous event derive from archetypal material which had been activated in the consciousness of this individual as a response to the psychological impasse she faced (*CW* 8: 438-440; para. 843-5).

Writing about the nature of synchronicities, Hopcke identifies four characteristics that typify such phenomena. The first and foremost of these attributes is the acausal nature of the relationship between synchronous events. Second, he continues, such events are always accompanied by an experience of deep emotion. The third quality of synchronicities, Hopcke writes, is that “the content of the synchronistic experience, what the event actually is, is always symbolic in nature.” The final aspect of synchronicities, he continues, relates to the fact “that such coincidences occur at points of important transitions in our life.” As a result, Hopcke concludes, “a synchronistic event very often becomes a turning point in the stories of our lives” (*There Are No Accidents* 22).

Considering the religious or spiritual significance of synchronistic phenomena, Jaffé remarks on the numinous quality of such experiences. “In the majority of cases an experience of the hidden, transcendental, ordering factor is bound up with an awareness of numinosity,” she observes, as a result of which the “synchronistic phenomena arranged by the archetype often arouse wonder and awe” (*Myth of Meaning* 153). Writing about the idea of “mystical experiences as synchronistic events,” Hopcke observes that humans historically and traditionally have used these insights “to develop ways of getting

spiritual direction for themselves, to discover the stories of their souls” (*There Are No Accidents* 190, 205).

Regarding the relationship between synchronous events and mythology, Segal observes that synchronicity “is not itself myth,” but rather “the experience of the world as meaningful.” Myth, he writes, “would be an account of that experience” (Introduction 20). Much as with the archetypal content of big dreams and waking visions, the symbolic significance of the synchronous experiences in one’s life helps to define and elaborate the contours of one’s personal mythology. Even more than in the case of dream-work and active imagination—which are both entirely inner psychic processes—contemplation of the significance of synchronicities also inevitably binds one’s mythology to one’s experience of the outer world.

In this sense, Hopcke observes that the phenomenon of synchronicity “invites us to see our lives from a different angle, in which our subjective experience determines our place in the universe of random events that occur around us and to us and to which we are connected through what they mean to us” (*There Are No Accidents* 29-30). In addition, he continues, mythic reflection on one’s experience of synchronicity can potentially convey a still greater gift. “Through our ability to uncover and live out the individual meaning of what befalls us,” Hopcke proposes, “we receive in a synchronistic event a reminder of an important truth” (47). At the core of that truth, he writes, is the recognition “that our lives are organized, consciously and unconsciously, the way a story is, that our lives have a coherence, a direction, a reason for being, and a beauty as well.”

*On Individuation and the Encounter with the Sacred through Personal Myth*

Central to Jung’s approach to depth psychology is the concept of individuation, a

term which describes the innate and lifelong evolution of personal consciousness in the direction of psychic wholeness, a process leading toward, as June Singer observes, “the conscious realization and integration of all the possibilities contained within the individual (134). Understanding Jung’s conception of the process of individuation requires that one first explore another core concept in Jung’s work, namely the idea of the self. The self functions as both the focus of and the force behind the individuation process. Describing the self, as “an innate teleological and psychic component,” Palmer observes that it simultaneously “confronts the individual” and acts “as an inner guiding factor” directing the individual toward increased psychic complexity and integration (121)”

In contrast to the concept of the ego, which Jung defines as the center of personal consciousness, the self is a term used to describe the totality of both consciousness and unconsciousness. Expressing the inherently paradoxical nature of his definition of this idea, Jung writes, the “self is not only the centre, but also the whole circumference which embraces both conscious and unconscious; it is the centre and totality,” Adding to the mystical and enigmatic nature of this concept, Jung also observes that the self is “a construct that serves to express an unknowable essence which we cannot grasp as such, since by definition it transcends our powers of comprehension” (*CW* 12: 41; para. 44). Suggesting that the self “might be equally called the ‘God within us,’” Jung further observes that the “beginning of our whole psychic life seems to be inextricably rooted in this point, and all our highest and ultimate purposes seem to be striving toward it” (*CW* 7: 238; para. 399).

Another paradox regarding the nature of the self is its relationship to the rest of the archetypal realm. In this regard, as Vera von der Heydt observes, the self is both “the central archetype from which all other archetypes evolve,” as well as the “protective boundary” within which the archetypes may be said to interact. Moreover, while the self shares with all archetypes the quality of being knowable only through its symbolic contents, Jung found that the particular symbolic manifestations of the self uniquely tend to appear in the form of an “*imago dei*,” a term he used to describe the many images traditionally associated with divinity. Not surprisingly, Jung describes the experience of the manifestation of the self in the symbolic form of a god-image as possessing “the quality of numinosity, often in very high degree” (*CW* 11: 59; para.102).

In describing the nature of the self, Palmer lists a range of symbols cited by Jung as typical god-images. These symbols include powerful or prestigious human or animal figures such as monarchs and lions, images of gods and goddesses, outstanding religious personalities such as Jesus or the Buddha, sacred plant symbols such as the rose and the lotus, cosmic symbols such as the sun, elemental geometric figures such as the square and the circle, and, above all, mandalas (121). Given the wide range of archetypal images typically symbolizing the self, their overwhelming correspondence with images found throughout the world’s religious traditions, and their common source in the collective unconscious, Murray Stein suggests that there “is no god or goddess who is utterly alien to anyone, and, in fact, all deities have a place in the psyche’s pantheon.” In its own way, he further observes, “each image of God—whether male or female, animal, human, or superhuman, concrete or abstract—sheds some additional light on the wholeness of the God image embedded in the human psyche” (viii).

While the self functions as both the catalyst for and the goal of human psychological development, it is the process called individuation that describes the path along which development proceeds over the course of a lifetime. As noted above, Jung's approach to depth psychology deems the individuation process to be the core concern of the psyche. Defined as an ongoing dialogue between the ego, as the central archetype of personal consciousness, and the self, as the central organizing and integrating archetype of the totality of consciousness, individuation is viewed within Jungian psychology as the essential and autonomous pathway leading to psychological evolution.

Described in terms of "coming to selfhood" and "self-realization," Jung characterizes individuation as "a process of psychological development that fulfills the individual qualities given; in other words, it is the process by which a man becomes the definite, unique being he in fact is" (CW 7: 173-4; para. 266-7). Commenting further on the teleological nature of the individuation process, Jung describes the self as "our life's goal" and "the completest expression of that fateful combination we call individuality" (240; para. 404). Also considering the emerging outcome of consciously engaging in the process of individuation, Hopcke writes of an evolving ability "to hold together a sense of one's unique individuality as well as one's connection to the larger experience of human existence, enabling one to live in a truly creative, symbolic, and individual way" (*Guided Tour of the Works of C. G. Jung* 63).

Just as with the darker aspect of Campbell's concept of bliss, however, it is equally important to remember that the path of individuation is often deeply painful and disturbing. Anyone doubting this need only read Jung's account of his own process of individuation contained in the chapter entitled "Confrontation with the Unconscious" in

*Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*. Observing that he “felt helpless before an alien world,” Jung writes that everything in this frightening new psychic realm “seemed difficult and incomprehensible” to him (177). As Liliane Frey-Rohn warns, such an encounter “can just as well result in a dissolution of the personality as in guidance on the path of wisdom” (265). Moreover, much as in following one’s bliss, the process of individuation requires the willing abandonment of psychological and spiritual conformity and the resulting risk of alienation from family and community.

What is necessary for the successful navigation of this process is an awareness that individuation, like the attainment of bliss and the completion of the hero’s journey, requires a major reorientation of one’s way of life. That reorientation is predicated, in turn, on the recognition that one’s life is no longer one’s own, but instead must in some way serve the larger concerns of both the self and one’s community. In this sense, Jung cautions, it is not enough that one “gain some understanding” of the archetypal images that grip one, but also that such insight “be converted into an ethical obligation” to the larger world (*Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* 192).

With regard to the concept of personal mythology, it is particularly important to note that individuation, being the central archetypal process at work within the psyche, is intrinsically mythological in nature. In this context, Jung states that it is “impossible for anyone without knowledge of mythology and folklore [. . .] to grasp the essence of the individuation process” (*CW* 8: 290; para. 553). In a similar vein, Jolande Jabobi observes that from “the remotest times” human beings have tried to express the nature of the individuation process “in the imagery of myths and fairy tales” (60). Given the ultimate importance accorded the process of individuation in Jungian psychology, Walker is not

exaggerating when he declares that “Jungians value the study of mythology primarily as a means of furthering” this process (33).

In a very real sense, merely to begin consciously engaging in the process of one’s individuation requires posing Jung’s vital question about the nature of the myth one is living. Paying attention to the archetypal significance of one’s dreams and the synchronous events in one’s life and engaging the world with a greater awareness of the symbolic nature of one’s experience are all intrinsically connected with the evolution of one’s personal myth. These developments are, in turn, prompted and directed by the growing urge of the self for greater manifestation and the ego’s gradual submission to that imperative. In this manner, the evolution of a personal myth can be seen as an essential and inevitable consequence of the never-ending process of individuation. Commenting on the essential interweaving of one’s evolving personal mythology within the process of individuation, Bond observes that the progressive unfolding of one’s myth allows “our participation in the process of our own development.” In that sense, he continues, individuation “requires a myth to live by” (56).

Equally important with regard to the idea of personal mythology as pathway to the sacred is the recognition that individuation plays as essential a role in the process of personal religious or spiritual evolution as it does in engendering greater psychological integration and wholeness. One only need remember that individuation is the process through which the ego encounters the self in the form of those numinous god-images that autonomously manifest in dreams, waking visions, and other forms of psychic activity. As such, individuation must be seen as an inherently religious process.

What makes Jung's recognition of the religious nature of the individuation process particularly important from the point of view of a personal approach to the sacred is the degree to which it affords individuals a viable religious framework for spiritual development that is free of sectarian theological claims. "Rather than dictate the way in which the sacred *should* appear, rather than appealing to tradition, to biblical authority and to dogmatic assertions," Corbett writes, the Jungian approach to religious life urges one "to discover the ways in which the sacred *actually* appears in one's life" ("Depth Psychological Approach to the Sacred" 73). Further commenting on the profound religious significance of Jung's work, Curtis D. Smith observes, "What is ultimately important in the universe is not transcendent to human existence but is found in the depths of the human psyche; that is, with the realization of the Self" (117).



Chapter 7  
On “Faith in the Journey” as Metaphor for  
Encountering the Sacred through Personal Mythology

*Introducing the Concept of “Faith in the Journey”*

This dissertation has focused on the exploration of the possibility of approaching the sacred dimension of human existence—that domain of life traditionally associated with the concept of religion—through a profound personal encounter with mythology. In doing so, this work has previously considered both the general question of the role of myth in modern life, as well as the particular concept of “personal mythology,” a term describing the sense of an evolving mythic dimension at the core of each human life. This work has also explored ways of contemplating both the religious or spiritual dimension of life and the concept of the sacred as these might apply in the context of personal mythology. In addition, this work has considered the contributions of the two figures most responsible for the idea that a personal encounter with myth could bring one into contact with the experience of the sacred, namely Joseph Campbell and C. G. Jung.

In this closing chapter, my intention is to bring all of this material into a more unified focus by proposing an overarching metaphor to describe both the process and the outcome of seeking the sacred through a personal engagement with mythic stories, images, and symbols. This metaphor is expressed in the simple phrase “faith in the journey.” While this phrase may be grammatically quite simple, however, it nevertheless contains two of the most connotatively complex and evocative words in the English language. With the possible exception of the equally loaded religious concepts of divinity and the sacred, it is hard to imagine a religious concept that has been more discussed, argued, and fought over than that of faith. As concerns the word journey, it is equally difficult to contemplate a concept more complex and poetically evocative of both

the human condition and the process of human growth and evolution. In order to comprehend the symbolic richness and power inherent in the concept of “faith in the journey” as a metaphor for approaching the sacred through personal mythology, therefore, one must first contemplate the meaning and significance of each these two rich and potent words.

*On the Concept of Religious Faith*

Much as Chapter 3 of this dissertation explored a range of open-ended, individualistic, pluralistic, and universalist frames of reference for discussing the nature of the sacred and of divinity, it is important to seek similarly inclusive approaches when contemplating the potential meaning of a mythologically-based conception of religious faith. Similarly, just as the concepts of the sacred and the divine were previously considered in an experiential and phenomenological context, so too will the following discussion emphasize the idea of religious or spiritual faith as a phenomenological experience of sacredness and divinity.

In considering the concept of faith, it is first important to distinguish between this term and the word “belief.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “faith” is originally derived from the Latin verb *fidere*, meaning “to trust.” This dictionary initially defines faith as “confidence, reliance, or trust” in “the ability, goodness, etc. of a person,” “the efficacy or worth of a thing,” or “the truth of a statement or doctrine.” Also emphasizing the idea of trust, belief is initially defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the mental action, condition, or habit, of trusting to or confiding in a person or thing.” Secondly, belief is defined as “mental acceptance of a proposition, statement, or fact [...] on the ground of authority or evidence” and “assent of

the mind to a statement, or to the truth of a fact beyond observation, on the testimony of another.”

In further distinguishing between faith and belief, it is helpful to next consider the view of religious scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Describing what he considers the essence of faith, Smith writes that it is fundamentally “a quality of human living.” He also suggests that the highest manifestation of faith takes the form of “a quiet confidence and joy which enables one to feel at home in the universe, and to find meaning in the world and in one’s own life, a meaning that is profound and ultimate” (12). Also characterizing faith as “an engagement,” he adds that “to know faith authentically is to become oneself involved, to know it in a personal committed fashion in one or another of its varied forms” (6). Belief, in contrast, is described by Smith as “the holding of certain ideas” about the object of one’s faith and the proper ways in which to engage that object (12).

Smith’s vision of religious faith as a form of committed engagement concerned with questions of profound personal meaning regarding both oneself and the world is very much relevant to the concept of a mythologically oriented approach to faith. Where Smith’s conception of faith is at odds with the idea of faith based on personal mythology is his sense that, while faith “precedes and transcends” religious traditions, it also necessarily exists within the context of a particular tradition (5). Moreover, while Smith recognizes that faith is “a direct encounter with God” and therefore inherently and inevitably personal in nature, he also rejects the idea that faith can ever meaningfully thought of as “individual” because he views the content of religious faith as inherently concerned with collective religious traditions (8,11). So while Smith views faith in a

generic sense as an essential human response to the sacred, he also sees religious faith as a “quality that has been expressed in, has been elicited, nurtured, and shaped by, the religious traditions of the world” (6). Since faith for Cantwell becomes associated within religious traditions with beliefs grounded in theological doctrines, this conception of faith is ultimately too restrictive to be effective in the context of personal mythology as a religious endeavor

Paul Diel, a depth psychologist, also considers the relationship between faith and belief. Distinguishing between what he calls “mythological faith” and “theological belief,” Diel writes that the difference between these concepts “amounts to the same thing” as the difference between “religiosity and religions” (29). In this context, he also comments on the distinction between the “symbolic God of the myths” and the literal “god of convention,” between a “God endowed with symbolic significance” and a “god without any deep symbolic meaning” (16). Regarding one’s orientation to the “symbolic God,” Diel further writes, “the mythical phrase ‘to love God’ means to be magnetized by mystery, not to be oblivious to the mysterious depth of life” (31).

In contrast, belief, which Diel associates with conventional religion, “does not deal with mystery as such but with the façade of myths,” as a result of which it becomes “attached to images mistaken for realities” (29). Believing in one set of images, he notes, “excludes belief in other images.” Commenting on the ultimate significance of being able to distinguish faith from belief, Diel observes, “faith is a psychic function” while “beliefs are its products.” As a psychic function, he continues, faith “can be strong or weak” and the beliefs that result from the expression of faith “can be truthful or erroneous.” What is key in Diel’s analysis is his observation that the function of faith “is

weak if it mistakes its own product—symbolic images—for the image of a reality that would exist independently” and “is strong if it can avoid such a fundamental error” (30). In this regard, Diel’s distinction between the objects of strong versus weak faith closely resembles Campbell’s distinction between God and the masks of God, as well as Jung’s distinction between an archetype *an sich* and any particular symbolic manifestation of that archetype.

Another scholar who specifically addresses the mythological nature of faith is Paul Brockelman. Writing within the contemporary tradition of narrative theology, he describes an approach to religion called “narrative religious understanding,” an approach that characterizes the essence of faith as “living the story” (130). The narrative approach to religious understanding, Brockelman writes, first seeks to encounter mythological stories which offer “a vision of a possible meaningful way to be” and then encourages “the embodying and living out” of such a mythologically-inspired vision of life as a deliberate act of faith. “Faith is living in the light of an interpretive understanding of life made manifest narratively and mythologically,” he observes (130-1). Such faith does not entail beliefs about a particular vision of a transcendent divinity,” Brockelman continues, nor is it concerned with “assertions considered true or false in some matter-of-fact way” (138). Rather, he argues, it constitutes “a mode of being, actively living out a personal story centered on [. . .] an interpretive understanding of what it means to be” (139).

Paul Tillich is another important figure who has explored the nature of religious faith in a way that is relevant to the idea of personal mythology. As was noted in Chapter 4, a key aspect of Tillich’s approach to the sacred is his concept of “ultimate concern.” Ultimate concern is defined as that aspect of an individual’s life that is taken with the

utmost seriousness and reflects one's ultimate values. Just as Tillich defines divinity in terms of ultimate concern, observing that whatever concerns one ultimately becomes one's god, so too does he characterize faith "as the state of being ultimately concerned," adding that "the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of being ultimately concerned" (*Dynamics of Faith* 1).

A quality of Tillich's definition of faith that is particularly interesting in the context of the religious dimension of personal mythology relates to the relationship between faith and doubt. Often considered to be opposing concepts, Tillich views faith and doubt to be inherently bound together. In this sense, Tillich argues that doubt is inevitably included in every genuine act of faith and that every genuine act of faith must recognize the possibility of doubt. "If faith is understood as belief that something is true, doubt is incompatible with the act of faith," he writes, but if "faith is understood as being ultimately concerned, doubt is a necessary element of faith" (20-1). Given that personal mythwork involves asking ever deeper and more profound questions about the archetypal nature of one's story, such an openness to a sense of existential doubt must be seen as essential to this process.

Drawing on Tillich's concept of faith as ultimate concern, religious studies scholar James N. Fowler has developed a highly useful three-part definition of faith. First and most simply, he proposes, faith represents "people's evolved and evolving way of experiencing self, others and world." Second, he adds, faith must also describe how these ways of experiencing life "are related to and affected by the ultimate conditions of existence" (92). In the sense of this second aspect of Fowler's definition, faith also "involves how we make our life wagers" and "shapes the ways we invest our deepest

loves and our most costly loyalties” (5). Thirdly, Fowler writes, faith determines and defines how people shape “their lives’ purposes and meanings, trusts and loyalties, in light of the character of being, value, and power determining the ultimate conditions of existence” (92-3). Being concerned with the process nature of evolving faith, he is also careful to point out that one’s sense of the ultimate conditions of existence are not given, but rather must be individually constructed and interpreted.

Most importantly, Fowler observes, one can only comprehend the nature of the sacred as it is continuously revealed in and through the images of divinity that grip us. “We have varying degrees of consciousness regarding these working images of ultimate reality,” he writes, “but conscious or unconscious, they affect the setting of our goals, the relationships we make and maintain and the ways we respond to emergencies and crises.” Moreover, Fowler cautions, one’s comprehension of the nature of the sacred evolves over the course of a lifetime and “only with the death of our previous image [of divinity] can a new and more adequate one arise.” As a consequence, he writes, it is essential that “substantive doubt” always remain a part of evolution of faith (31).

Regarding what he calls “the contents of faith,” Fowler observes, “we may say that our faith orientations [...] are shaped by three major elements.” The first of these elements, he states, comprises those “*centers of value* that claim us.” Defined by Fowler as “the causes, concerns or persons that consciously or unconsciously have the greatest worth to us,” such centers of value are said to bring together the etymologically related ideas of “worth” and “worship.” We attribute worth, he writes, “to those centers of value that give our lives meaning,” just as we worship “those things in relation to which our lives have worth” (276).

Equally important in determining the contents of faith, he continues, “are the *images of power* we hold and the *powers* with which we align ourselves in the midst of life’s contingencies.” In “a world of wars, of natural catastrophes, of senseless random and intentional assaults, of sudden accidental death for us or for loved ones, or opportunity and denial, of good health or bad,” he suggests, “we seek for images and realities of powers that can be relied upon in life or death.”

Finally, according to Fowler, the contents of one’s faith are shaped by “the *master stories* that we tell ourselves and by which we interpret and respond to the events that impinge upon our lives.” Describing the profound impact our most sacred stories have in determining our orientation to faith, Fowler writes, “Our master stories are the characterizations of the patterns of power-in-action that disclose the ultimate meanings of our lives” (277). Given its highly open-ended and experiential qualities as an approach to defining the phenomenon of faith—and, in particular, with its emphasis on the essential role of personally relevant images and stories of the sacred—Fowler’s work can be seen to be especially relevant to the idea of personal mythology as pathway to the sacred.

Robert Nozick, a scholar of philosophy, approaches the question of the nature of faith from the perspective of phenomenology. He is therefore inherently concerned with the experiential manifestation of faith, an event that he describes in the following terms:

There is an encounter with something very real—an actual person, a person in a story, a part of nature, a book or work of art, a part of one’s being—and this thing has extraordinary qualities that intimate the divine by being forms of qualities that the divine itself would have: these extraordinary qualities touch you deeply, opening your heart so that you feel in contact with a special manifestation of the divine, in that it has some form of divine qualities to a very great extent. (51)

Whether or not there is a pre-existing theological argument supporting the validity of



such an experience for the experiencer, Nozick argues, faith is not dependent upon theology, but rather “arises directly out of [. . .] being deeply touched and moved in encountering something.” For this to happen, he observes, the core of one’s faith would need to center on a “faith *in oneself* and in one’s own responses, a faith that one would not be *so* deeply touched by something in *that* way unless it was a manifestation of the divine.” Nozick is also careful to point out that such a faith would initially not be faith in any given aspect of divinity, but rather “a trust in one’s *deepest* positive responses.” As a result, he continues, it would not be necessary to adhere to any particular image of divinity or theological view of ultimate reality in order to explain one’s experience of the sacred simply because such experience would be inherently trusted. In a such a state of religious faith, writes Nozick, the “fundamental connection to the world is not *explanatory*, but one of relation and trust” (52).

Such an affirmation and trust in the validity of one’s most profound experiences, Nozick cautions, “is not the same as dogmatism,” a belief that such experiences are “infallible.” Indeed, he observes, one must always remain open to the possibility that “still deeper experiences might undercut those or show something different.” In this way, Nozick proposes, faith “can be investigative, guiding further inquiry into the range and validity” of such experiences. “The affirmation can be wholehearted and yet tentative,” he concludes, thereby always “open to being superseded” (53).

Sharon Salzberg, a founder of the Insight Meditation Society, one of the largest Buddhist communities in the Western world, also writes about faith from a perspective of the primacy of personal experience. “The tendency to equate faith with doctrine and then argue about terminology and concepts,” she argues, “distracts us from what faith is all

about.” In her view, the essence of faith “lies in trusting ourselves to discover the deepest truths on which we can rely.” In this regard, she writes, faith “does not require a belief system,” nor is it “a commodity we either have or don’t have.” Rather, she suggests, “it is an inner quality that unfolds as we learn to trust our own deepest experience” (xiii-xiv).

Also emphasizing the process nature of faith, Salzberg observes that the “first step on the journey of faith is to recognize that everything is moving onward to something else, inside us and out.” With faith, one can approach “the truth of the present moment,” she observes, a moment “which is dissolving into the unknown even as we meet it” (13). In this way, genuine faith opens one up, she continues, “to what is happening right now in all its mutability and evanescence” (14). Given her primary concern with the evolving nature of faith, it is not surprising that she is also concerned with the essential role of doubt in the growth of faith. “To develop a verified faith,” she writes, “we need to be open to the messiness, the discordance, the ambivalence, and, above all, the vital life-force of questioning.” Without a healthy openness to doubt, she states, “our faith can wither.” Moreover, she continues, without the willingness to doubt what we claim to profess, “our faith will always remain in the hands of someone else, as something we borrow or abjure, but not as something we can claim fully as our own” (73).

With particular regard to a mythically-oriented approach to the nature of faith, religious studies scholar Robert E. Neale writes about three different responses to myth which he characterizes as “disbelieving,” “believing,” and “make-believing” (142). Neale ascribes the first response to those whose worldview is secular, materialist, mundane, and profane (as in the context of Eliade’s distinction between sacred and profane). The second response, which Neale describes as “magical” in orientation,

typifies a fundamentalist and literalist orientation to myth. While the former approach dismisses myth as “useless” because it is powerless to alter material reality, the latter view embraces the validity of myth with the intention of magically either receiving a benefit or averting some form of harm. Neale suggests that most people live in between these two poles, “shuffling back and forth between disappointment and hope.” He further observes that while disbelief may dominate in most situations, “belief gains ascendancy in times of crisis” (143).

The third response to myth, described by Neale as “make-believing,” is considered by him to be the truly “religious” one (144). In this third way of responding to myth, “the conflict between believing and disbelieving is transcended in make-believing.” This orientation recognizes that myth “is purposeless and the attempt to use it irreligious.” In the religious response, Neale observes, “the myth is acknowledged as autonomous,” as a result of which the “story is neither doubted nor buttressed by belief,” but accepted because ‘it is there.’ ” Judging the truth or falsity of a mythic story—that is, whether the story can or cannot affect the material world—requires standing “outside the story in the profane world,” which is precisely what a mythic perspective refuses to do. For one “who fully participates in the story,” Neale suggests, “questions of truth and falsity remain irrelevant, indeed, even incomprehensible” (144). In the end, he notes, “the magical person tries to make myth effective in daily life, the secular person unhappily accepts that this is impossible, and the religious person rejoices in myth for its own sake (145).

David L. Miller, an authority in both the field of religious studies and depth psychology, also writes about the relationship between faith and make-believe. “Faith is

not mental assent or emotional assent,” he writes, “whose object is a belief in some supernatural or historical datum which dogmatically and zealously insists on its truth” (*Gods and Games* 167). Instead of this outmoded view of faith, Miller proposes a radically postmodern one. Faith, he suggests simply, “is being gripped by a story.” Such faith, he adds, means “being gripped by a pattern of meaning, a pattern of meaning that affects one’s life pattern, that becomes a paradigm for the way one sees the world.” He further observes that the “efficacy and meaning-function” of myth is not dependent “believing in the truth of something.” Authentic faith is not belief, he asserts, but rather “being turned on by an incredible vision” (168).

Particularly within the context of the concept of faith in the journey as a metaphor for a mythically-oriented approach to the religious dimension of life, one final approach to the question of the nature of religious faith is useful to consider. C. Daniel Batson, Patricia Schoenrade, and W. Larry Ventis, three social psychologists, have explored the phenomenon of “individual religion.” In the process, they have identified three aspects of the personal experience of religion, aspects they characterize as the “extrinsic, means dimension,” the “intrinsic, end dimension” and the “quest dimension” (373, 375).

The first of these is described as involving “the use of religion as a means to attain self-serving ends such as going to church for social reasons or praying for a new car, a good grade, or a needed cure” (373). This religious dimension, these researchers suggest, “is not associated with more meaning in life or less anxiety about death” (374). An extrinsic/means religious orientation is also generally “associated with a perception of religion as an oppressive set of restrictions.” As a result, one might describe this orientation as characterized by the lack of any deeply held religious faith.

The second religious orientation described by Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis involves a “sincere, devout commitment” to a set of dogma-based religious beliefs (375). These devoutly-held beliefs, they observe, “are not to be used in the service of other needs,” but rather are meant “to define the master motive in life.” This form of religion, the authors suggest, “is associated with freedom from existential concerns such as meaningless and anxiety over death.” However, they caution, “with this freedom comes bondage to the beliefs,” because the believer is no longer able to reflect openly and honestly on their truth. Indeed, in the context of an experiential orientation to faith, this second approach might more accurately be described as belief-driven rather than faith-based.

The third orientation to religion, described in terms of the metaphor of the quest, “involves an open-ended readiness to confront ultimate, existential questions, coupled with a skepticism of definitive answers to these questions” (375-6). Not surprisingly, this third dimension “does not provide the same sense of freedom from existential concerns” as the intrinsic, ends orientation, “but neither does it produce the same bondage” to particular beliefs. “Religion as quest,” these three researchers observe, is a highly personal approach to religion:

that involves honestly facing existential questions in all their complexity, while at the same time resisting clear-cut, pat answers. An individual who approaches religion in this way recognizes that he or she does not know, and probably never will know, the final truth about such matters. Still the questions are deemed important, and however tentative and subject to change, answers are sought. They may or may not have a clear belief in a transcendent reality, but there is a transcendent, religious aspect to the individual’s life [...]. It involves the individual hammering out his or her own stance on religious questions, refusing to be dominated by the views advocated by the religious institutions of society. (166-7)

Commenting on the possibility of such an open-ended kind of faith, Keith Ward suggests that “true faith” might actually “decrease our ‘religious’ certainties, as we realize how little we know or can say about God, and how much depends on the wordless experience that all religious doctrines only dimly and inadequately point towards” (59-60). Given its highly experiential and existential nature, as well as its firm refusal to conform to any sort of religious dogma, this questing form of religious orientation is particularly suited to a mythologically-based approach to religious experience.

In closing this discussion of the nature of religious faith as viewed from the perspective of personal mythology, it is noteworthy that both Campbell and Jung offered highly publicized declarations regarding their own views on this subject. Interestingly, while Campbell refers to “faith” and Jung to “belief” in their respective declarations, both are actually distancing themselves from any sort of relationship to the sacred that is not fundamentally symbolic and experiential in origin. In a statement expressed in a 1989 *Power of Myth* television broadcast, Campbell declares, “I don’t have to have faith, I have experience.” Clarifying this statement, he goes on to say:

I have the experience of the wonder of life. I have experience of love. I have experience of hatred, malice, and wanting to punch this guy in the jaw. From the point of view of symbolic imaging, those are different forces operating in my mind. One may think of them—wonder, love, hatred—as inspired by different divinities. (208)

Three decades earlier, Jung was asked during the course of a television interview with the BBC whether he believed in God. “It is difficult to answer,” Jung replied thoughtfully. After a moment’s pause, he added with assurance, “I know; I don’t need to believe; I know” (qtd. in Costello). Elsewhere Jung offers a similar sentiment on the nature of his orientation to the sacred. “Either I know a thing and I don’t need to believe it,” he writes,

“or I believe it because I am not sure I know it.” In this regard, he declares, “I am well satisfied with the fact that I know experiences which I cannot avoid calling numinous or divine” (*CW* 18: 706; para. 1589).

*On General Nature of the Archetype of the Journey*

In contemplating the metaphor of “faith in the journey,” it is next important to reflect on the symbolic significance of the concept of journeying. Among the most perennial and complex of archetypal themes, the journey has served as the focus of myths and epics, of legends and fairy tales, from the most ancient of times to the present day.

“The myth of the human as traveler or wanderer is an ancient one, perhaps rooted in hundreds of thousands of years our species spent wandering in nomadic bands of gatherers and hunters,” observes Ralph Metzner (226). In addition, the symbolism of being on a journey is as personal as it is universal, as timeless as it is contemporary. “It is Adam’s tale of exile, Ulysses’ saga of wandering, the search for the Holy Grail, my autobiography and yours,” writes Sam Keen (*Hymns to an Unknown God* 9-10).

Regarding the particularly religious or spiritual significance of the symbolism of the “journey of life,” Jerome Berryman observes that “each generation produces and leaves behind it a literature of concern about this journey,” adding that “evidence of such ‘faith maps’ is, in fact, strewn about us from every century and every part of the earth” (4).

Commenting on the essential human quality of perpetually being on a journey of one sort or another, David Leeming observes, “Poets from the Gilgamesh bard and Homer to John Bunyan, Robert Frost, and Jack Kerouac have always explicitly or implicitly celebrated this fact.” As Leeming further observes, “we are all significant sojourners because we live with the constantly present metaphor of a journey” (133).

Leeming also suggests that the imaginal power of this metaphor is directly connected to the idea of story itself, of narratives with plots that flow from beginnings to endings. In a sense, every story takes the form of an imaginal journey, transporting the listener or reader through a series of episodes in time and space, culminating in some sort of resolution or denouement.

Describing this process of imaginal journeying, Laura Sims writes of the storyteller who “guides us into an unseen realm,” leading the listener or reader through a recognizable series of doorways or thresholds along the way. The first of these, described as “the threshold of longing” begins when one first engages the voice of the narrator, yearning to follow him or her into the imaginal landscape and encounter the story’s characters. Sims likens this stage of the story-journey to “entering the grounds that surround a sacred temple, a place where one will have the opportunity to come face to face with the divine,” a “temenos [...] dedicated to a god.” At this stage, one is “literally carried away, as if a little trap door in the inner world falls open” and one descends fully into the imaginal realm (63).

This passage brings the listener or reader to the next doorway, “the threshold of no return,” wherein one becomes identified with the characters and the action of the story and is totally swept up in the activity of make-believe. Following this comes the “threshold of death,” the doorway leading to the place of disappointment and danger, the place in the story that “calls forth our greatest fear and attachment to the world as we know it” (64). The only way out of this impasse, Sims observes, appears when “we let go of our expectation and preconceptions, defying all logic in our pilgrimage toward the end of the story” (66).



Once one has passed through this place of symbolic death, one arrives at “the threshold of mystery” and enters the inner sanctum, the magical and enchanted heart of the story. Here the surrender to the inner logic of the narrative is at its most profound and the heart is most open to the world of possibilities inherent in the tale. At the same time, one is also most open to embracing its inevitable and fated outcome. Finally, Sims writes, the storyteller must bring the listener or reader to “the threshold of return,” the necessary homecoming to the world of one’s everyday life (67). At the end of the imaginal journey, she concludes, like the hero or heroine of the story, “we bring back a secret treasure of awareness that is priceless” (68).

In addition to its primal correspondence to story, the archetypal theme of the journey also derives much of its fascination from the richness of its many-layered symbolism. In its many forms, the theme of the journey generally serves as a primary image for the concept of process. In this regard, it is most simply a metaphor for the flow of each human life, the journey that encompasses the lifespan from birth to death. The journey can also be viewed as a symbolic reflection of the soul’s passage from incarnation into the world of time and space to the mystery of whatever follows death. In addition, the theme of the journey has often been employed to symbolize the process of psychological or spiritual transformation, the often-painful journey from simpler to more complex levels of human consciousness.

Another source of the power of the theme of the journey derives from the many distinct forms in which it can manifest. Among the most ancient of these archetypal forms is that of the quest or the heroic journey. Another ancient variation on the theme of the journey is that of the pilgrimage, a journey undertaken for specifically religious or

spiritual ends. In addition, the process of initiation often has been described in the context of a journey from one stage of life to another. The themes of exile and wandering are also aspects contained within the larger symbolism of journeying, as are the themes of homecoming and return.

Of course, while each of these differing themes defines a particular quality or aspect of the archetype of journey, they also inevitably overlap and merge in countless ways. In addition, as Metzner observes, people “differ greatly in the quality of their experience of life’s journeys, and for each one of us, there may be a different type of journey at different stages of life.” In this regard, he continues, “Some of us—probably all of us at some time—wander restlessly and aimlessly through life,” while at other times, “we may be seized by a sudden sense of destiny” and start off “for a destination, a definite goal” (226).

In considering the deep significance of the image of being on a journey, it is appropriate to consider the work of the philosopher Gabriel Marcel. In describing the spiritual nature of humanity, Marcel coined the term *homo viator*, meaning “man the traveler” or “man the wayfarer” (153). Fulfilling the role of *homo viator*, Marcel writes, obliges each human being “to cut a dangerous path across the unsteady blocks of a universe which has collapsed and seems to be crumbling in every direction.” Such a path, he suggests, “leads to a world more firmly established in Being, a world whose changing and uncertain gleams are all that we discern here below” (154). One of the basic tenets of Marcel’s vision of *homo viator*, writes Keen, is the idea that “there is in the basic structure of human existence a certain restlessness.” This restlessness, Keen continues, results from the fact that each human is “a nostalgic being, forever longing for

fulfillment which eludes him,” perpetually “anxious about his condition, ill at ease with himself, constantly seeking to transcend his estrangement.” According to Keen, Marcel’s work suggests that meaningfully dealing with this aspect of the human condition requires that one embrace one’s role as “a wayfarer in time... wondering as we wander, yet daring to have faith that the mystery of being intends fulfillment and not frustration as the ultimate destiny of man” (*Gabriel Marcel* 16).

*On the Archetypal Journey as Quest, Initiation, and Pilgrimage*

As was noted above, the journey archetype has appeared throughout history in a variety of different aspects and forms. While these variations share many archetypal qualities, they each also impart a particular connotative shading to the generalized symbolism of the image of the journey. In this context, when considering the symbolism of the journey as an overarching metaphor for the religious dimension of personal mythology, it is useful to explore the interrelationship between three specific forms or dimensions of this archetype, namely those of quest, pilgrimage, and initiation.

Among the most ancient and ubiquitous versions of the archetype of journeying is that of the quest. In this regard, writes Robert M. Torrance, “We shall not look far in search of the quest: it will meet us at every turn of the way.” Torrance characterizes the quest as the “business of seeking, of setting off in determined pursuit of what we are lacking and may never attain.” In keeping with Marcel’s concept of *homo viator*, Torrance observes that the symbolic quest is “no incidental theme of our literature and thought, no bypath of history, but a fundamental activity that contributes in no small measure toward defining our existence *as human*” (3). The quest, he argues, “is the creative process par excellence, the process by which human beings continually remake

themselves in accord with goals forever beyond them.” In the process of such questing, he continues, lies “our essential humanity, our fidelity to our unfinished selves” (57).

This quality of seeking something totally unknown is a defining aspect of the quest as an archetype. In this regard, Torrance further observes, there is an intrinsic connection between “the quest and the question,” since both are derived from the Latin *quaerere*, meaning “to seek” or “to ask.” Given its nature as “the animal that must seek to acquire what it characteristically lacks to begin with and to actualize by directed effort what is potential in its being but never knowable in advance,” Torrance suggests, “the human species may be designated *animal quaerens* with at least as much right as *animal rationale*” (3). Also commenting on this relationship between quests and questions, Keen writes, “I have come to believe that ‘the quest’ is a metaphor for the willingness to live and wrestle with the perennial questions that underlie the mythic answers that religions offer.” As a result, he observes, “My ‘question’ is the ‘quest-I’m-on’” (*Hymns to an Unknown God* 15).

Regarding the mythological basis of the archetype of the quest, few writers have written as extensively on this subject as Campbell. Core to his work is the metamyth of hero’s journey, a form of the heroic quest considered by Campbell to underlie much of the world’s mythological traditions. He describes this pattern as having three primary stages, the first of which relates to the hero’s separation from an old way of life, a going off in some radically new direction precipitated by a perceived “call” from some sort of divine presence. The middle stage of the journey focuses on the initiation of the hero into a new mode of existence in the world, following which the hero typically meets with helpers who present him with magical instruments of power. This section climaxes with a

life-or-death confrontation with a demon or some other sort of supreme ordeal, which symbolizes the hero's own inner struggle as much as it represents a battle with external forces of destruction. At the end of the heroic quest, Campbell states, the adventurer must return with "the life-transmuting trophy," bringing this gift "back into the kingdom of humanity," where it "may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds" (*Hero with a Thousand Faces* 193).

Commenting on the basic nature of this form of the journey, Campbell writes that hero must leave the world of the known, predictable, and familiar and encounter a realm that is strange, ambiguous, and incredible. This mysterious and fateful realm, he continues, "may be variously represented: as a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty mountaintop, or profound dream state," further noting that "it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delights" (*Hero* 58). Remarking on the universality of this story and its perennial relevance to the human condition, he observes, "we do not even have to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path" (25).

While the heroic quest typically takes the form of an outer adventure, as with all of the forms of the archetypal journey, its real purpose is personal and collective transformation. "While the heroic adventure of our tribal memory takes some outer form," writes James Hollis, "the same motif of summons, descent, struggle, wounding, and return are part of the everyday life of the individual." To recognize, he suggests, "that each of us is part of such a rich pattern [. . .] is to discover the depth principle," the

core insight of both depth psychology and a mythic orientation to the sacred (*Tracking the Gods* 72).

In many ways parallel to Campbell's concept of the quest as hero's journey is Jung's vision of the process of individuation, the lifelong movement of the individual toward greater psychic wholeness. In this context, Edward C. Whitmont describes the process of individuation as the "symbolic quest." Regarding the quest-like quality of the individuation process, he observes that the "hero or heroine's quest and his or her encounter with mythological antagonists can be summarized in psychological language as the ego's encounter with the ever-recurring typical form elements of the psyche" (*Symbolic Quest* 137).

Most important, particularly given the topic of this dissertation, is the recognition of the underlying religious or spiritual dimension of the quest archetype. In this context, Keen observes, "I have come to believe that 'the quest' is a metaphor for the willingness to live and wrestle with the perennial questions that underlie the mythic answers that religions offer" (*Hymns to an Unknown God* 15). In a similar vein, Torrance comments, the "quest is [. . .] a continuous questioning on the subject of life itself as an open system or structured process defined most fundamentally by a transcendent potentiality" (56).

Writing specifically about the spiritual aspect of the hero's journey, Campbell writes of bridging "the two worlds, the divine and the human," worlds which normally are thought to be "as different as life and death, as day and night." While the hero is typically portrayed as venturing between the seemingly opposing and irreconcilable realms of the spiritual and material worlds, the ultimate heroic discovery, Campbell writes, is that "the two kingdoms are actually one," that the "realm of the gods" is

actually “a forgotten dimension of the world we know” (*Hero with a Thousand Faces* 217). In this way, he observes, the hero comes to learn “that the perilous journey was a labor not of attainment but of reattainment, not discovery but rediscovery.” As a result, he continues, the “godly powers sought and dangerously won are revealed to have been within the heart of the hero all the time” (39).

Another important form of the archetypal journey—and one related in a number of ways to the archetype of the quest—is that of initiation. According to Mircea Eliade, the process of initiation “is equivalent to a basic change in existential condition” in that “the initiate emerges from the ordeal endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed before his initiation.” With regard to the generalized form of this archetype, he further observes, “the same initiatory patterns are found in the dreams and in the imaginative life both of modern men and of the primitive” (*Rites and Symbols of Initiation* 131). Also commenting on the general nature of this form of symbolic journey, Eliade writes, the “foundation of all rites and rituals of initiation is always a deep religious experience” (*Sacred and Profane* 193).

The nature of initiation rituals has been studied by cultural anthropologists since the start of the twentieth century, most notably by Arnold Van Gennep and later by Victor Turner. Both men observed that such rituals traditionally passed through three distinct stages which are described respectively as a period of “separation,” followed by an intervening transformative phase described as “liminal” in nature, and ending with a return or “reaggregation” (Turner *Ritual Process* 94-5). This three-stage model is also remarkably similar to Campbell’s three phases of the hero’s journey, namely the stage of departure, the intervening initiatory period, and the stage of return.

While the first and the last of Genep's and Turner's three stages of the initiation process are relatively simple to comprehend, the central liminal phase of the initiation process is substantially more enigmatic and paradoxical in nature. In addition, the mysterious nature of the experience of liminality is core to the unique archetypal quality of the journey-as-initiation. Derived from the Latin word *limen*, meaning threshold, liminality describes a state of profound transition, the experience of being outside of chronological time and conventional space and entering instead into a world of sacred space and sacred time. In this topsy-turvy world, ordinary assumptions about both one's own life and nature of existence must be discarded in favor of an extreme openness to the unstructured and the unpredictable. This liminal realm is both a no man's land of the mysterious and the unfamiliar, as well as being, in Turner's words, "the realm of pure possibility" ("Betwixt and Between" 97). Characterizing the transitional nature of this primal state, Turner observes, "liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon" (*Ritual Process* 95). It is precisely this amorphous, enigmatic, and paradoxical quality of liminality that makes the initiatory journey a profoundly numinous experience, simultaneously fascinating and frightening for the initiate.

While initiatory journeys are most commonly associated with youth and the process of becoming an adult, this is only one of two principal types of initiation. The other primary form of initiation is that undergone by a candidate seeking admission to a secret organization. The prototype for this second form of initiation is the initiatory rituals of the mystery religions of the ancient world. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "mystery" comes from the Greek noun *mysteria*, which is derived



from the Greek verb *myein*, meaning “to close the lips or eyes.” This verb is thought to refer to the closing of the eyes of the initiate when entering into the darkness of the ritual space and to the closing of the initiate’s lips because of the vow of silence typically required by these mystery cults. According to Walter Burkert, the word “initiation” comes from the Latin term *initiare*, which, in turn, is a translation from the Greek of *myein* (7). Because of their common derivation, both the words mystery and initiation connote some kind of mystical process which may not be spoken of or described, ostensibly because of strict ancient prohibitions against doing so and more likely because of the ineffable nature of the experiential revelation received by initiates.

With regard to the contemporary relevance of these mystery religions of the ancient world, Burkert suggests that they were not truly religions at all, at least in the sense that one refers to the term religion today. “Initiation at Eleusis or worship of Isis or Mithras does not constitute adherence to a religion in the sense that we are familiar with,” he writes. Whereas modern theistic religions tend to focus on demarcating their distinctive and exclusive natures and conceptions of the sacred, Burkert observes, in the ancient world “the various forms of worship, including new and foreign gods in general and the institution of the mysteries in particular, are never exclusive.” These traditions, he continues, “appear as varying forms, trends, or options within the one disparate yet continuous conglomerate of ancient religion.” In this sense, Burkert observes, these mysteries “are a form of personal religion, depending on a private decision and aiming at some form of salvation through closeness to the divine” (10).

Reflecting on the relationship of the individuation process to the archetype of the initiatory journey, Jung writes that the “transformation of consciousness that occurs under

analysis makes it the natural analogue of religious initiation ceremonies” (*CW* 11: 523; para. 854). Also writing about the archetype of initiation from a Jungian perspective, Joseph L. Henderson specifically associates the youthful type of initiation into adulthood with the individuation process in the first half of life, the process of effectively establishing one’s role within the community and taking on life responsibilities appropriate to that role. The second type of initiation, that of the aspirant to a mystery, on the other hand, is thought by Henderson to have a kinship with the individuation process in the second half of life and the encounter with the archetype of the self.

In relating the totality of the initiation archetype to the process of depth psychological analysis, Henderson observes, “At first this ritual tends to recapitulate in significant ways the initiation of youth,” in the sense that “such rites always have been expressed as the need to outgrow old, repressive childhood patterns and to become adapted to the social group” (18). Later on, he continues, “especially for people who have already made a satisfactory social adaption, individuation appears as a wish to withdraw in order to discover some secret knowledge, to participate in some mystery” (19). This latter stage of initiation, he suggests, “is represented by no rite of entrance or of exit; it is not a state of containment or incubation, nor is it a state of release or liberation” (200). As a result, he continues, the final outcome of this form of psychic initiation “might best be called the state of immanence, in the sense that individuation forces a man to obey the immanent law of his own nature in order to know himself as an individual” (201). Even this second stage of initiation does not halt the process of psychological and spiritual development. Just as the individuation process goes on all the way through life, Henderson concludes, after the passage of “a long period of time and in

response to another inward pull,” one may yet again embark “upon the way of initiation.” (221).

While the versions of the journey archetype symbolized by the quest and the initiation both possess a clearly religious or spiritual dimension, it is in the concept of pilgrimage that one finds the most inherently religious or spiritual form of symbolic journey. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word pilgrim is derived from the Latin *peregrinus*, meaning “a traveler.” Interestingly, the dictionary’s first definition of pilgrim—that is, “a wayfarer, a traveler, a wanderer, a sojourner”—emphasizes the displaced quality of such a person, the fact that a pilgrim is first and foremost a person far from home. It is only in the second definition that a pilgrim is defined as “one who journeys (usually a long distance) to some sacred place as an act of religious devotion.” Regarding the significance of this definition of a pilgrim, Mary Jo Leddy writes, when beginning a pilgrimage, “we become, by choice, displaced persons; we leave our usual place of life or work and go to a place that is holy,” (104-105).

As with the archetypes of quest and the initiation, the pilgrimage also takes the form of a three-stage process. The first of these stages, according to Jean Dalby Clift and Wallace B. Clift, is an initial decision to embark on a pilgrimage, a decision prompted by a “call” to leave the concerns of everyday life and depart for some place deemed to be sacred. In a traditional pilgrimage, for example, one may feel called to go “to some distant holy place renowned for miracles where one might hope to be physically healed or renewed in one’s faith in the divine” (11). Emphasizing the fact that not all sacred places are conventionally religious in nature, however, the Clifts also observe that “one may find oneself longing to go back to the scene of some childhood experience, perhaps to

where one experienced a hurt or wounding” with the hope of finding some sort of personal redemption or absolution there (12).

The second stage of a pilgrimage consists of the actual journeying to the place of veneration. This stage of the journey, the Clifts observe, is characterized “by an awareness of a temporary release from social ties which in itself can contribute to a sense of renewal or refreshment” (11-2). More problematic is the fact that sacred places are often in hard-to-reach or out-of-the-way locations, as a result of which this stage of the journey can also be arduous and challenging to the pilgrim. This difficulty of gaining access to the pilgrimage site, the Clifts suggest, “may be expressive or symbolic of the fact that growth, like all change in life, requires effort, requires a movement away from the place where we have been, requires a willingness to leave the comfort of the status quo behind” (69).

This second stage culminates in the arrival at the sacred place and the hoped-for encounter with the sacred. As a part of that encounter, the Clifts observe, it is traditional to “leave something behind,” as well as “taking something home” (76, 83). That which is left behind is typically thought of as an offering or sacrifice of some kind made in honor of the divinity or sacred principle enshrined at the place of pilgrimage. Commenting on the Jungian implications of such an offering, the Clifts suggest that in terms of the pilgrimage as a symbol of individuation, “the ego must bring the sacrifice.” In this sense, the ego “must give up some of its control in order to listen to and to integrate material from the unconscious” and in the process “leave behind its old understanding of itself” (69).

It is with the last stage of the pilgrimage, the return home, that the pilgrim takes with him or her, as the Clifts observe, a precious gift of some kind. Unlike the boon granted at the end of the hero's journey, however, this gift is personal in nature. Generally, the Clifts suggest, the gift takes the form of "new sense of relationship with the divine or with some value of importance" (12). In Jungian terms, they add, because the sacred place which is the destination of the pilgrimage is symbolic of the self, the pilgrim's outward journey to the shrine is simultaneously an inward journey to their own center. In this sense, the ultimate gift the pilgrim brings home and back into his or her daily life is a deepened and renewed relationship with the self (13).

In commenting on the nature of the pilgrim experience, Richard Niebuhr describes pilgrims as "persons in motion—passing through territories not their own—seeking something we might call completion, or perhaps the word clarity will do as well, a goal to which only the spirit's compass points the way" (7). The concept of the pilgrimage, he continues:

reinterprets the word 'experience' for us, a word that has grown pale and weak in our usage, and restores it to its strong meaning. In its weak form, experience means simply the continuum of moments scarcely distinct from one another—the run of day-to-day life. In its strong form, it means [. . .] the passage into ourselves of places and being previously unfamiliar and an accompanying enlargement of ourselves. (12)

In contrasting those engaged on a pilgrimage from "tourists or sightseers"—the other sort of traveler one is likely to meet on the journey—Niebuhr observes that the latter "travel merely wishing to find something new to see, to hear, to touch, without so much as glimmering that they themselves may be altered." Those engaged on a pilgrimage, on the other hand, "pass over thresholds aware of their need to be changed." Pilgrims "see symbols everywhere," Niebuhr continues, with the result that "each particular thing

beckons the pilgrim as a potential icon and cipher of what is to come” (10). In this sense, Mircea Eliade suggests, for the religious person “every road can symbolize the ‘road of life,’ and any walk a ‘pilgrimage,’ a peregrination to the Center of the World” (*Sacred* 183).

Regarding the relationship between the archetype of the quest and that of the pilgrimage, Leeming observes, “much of the mythology surrounding the mystical aspect of the heroic journey is derived from a particular understanding of the rite of pilgrimage.” A pilgrim, he continues, “is a person who leaves home to travel to an important place with the intention not of staying but of bringing something of spiritual value back into his or her ordinary life.” In this sense, Leeming suggests, one can recognize the archetypal similarity between the pilgrimage and the quest. Both, he observes, “are based on the frame of Departure, Adventure, Return, the process of threshold crossing, the achievement of higher knowledge, and union with the Absolute” (132).

Conversely, Leeming also recognizes the differences between these two kinds of archetypal journeys, observing that the “pilgrimage is a ritual journey” wherein the “pilgrim knows exactly where he is going, exactly what he will find there, and exactly what he is supposed to do when he gets there” (133). In other words, while the quest is fundamentally a journey to an unknown destination for an as-yet unknown purpose, the pilgrimage is a journey undertaken to a known place for the ostensible reason of seeking an experience of the sacred. However even this distinction may not be quite so definite or clear if one bears in mind the testimony of those pilgrims who paradoxically found that it was some unexpected encounter or adventure along the way to the shrine that actually brought the revelation they sought.

*On the Concept of Amor Fati as Faith in the Journey*

In contemplating the idea of religious or spiritual faith as a reverence for and devotion to the unfolding of the sacred dimension of one's personal mythology, it is meaningful to conclude this dissertation with an exploration of a relevant concept from the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. Known by the Latin phrase *amor fati*, or "love of fate," this idea predicates the existence of an internal, necessary, autonomous, and unique ordering of the significant events of a person's life. This internal patterning of every human life is thought to play a central role in the shaping of one's character, as well as in influencing the particular way in which one tends to experience life. In addition, the concept of *amor fati* fully recognizes that the destiny of every individual inevitably includes a range of painful and distressing occurrences as well as joyful and uplifting ones.

The key to meaningfully experiencing one's own uniqueness as a conscious being, Nietzsche states, is the wholehearted embracing of the totality of this innate pattern. "My formula for the greatness of a human being is *amor fati*," he writes, "that one wants nothing to be different—not forward, not backward, not in all eternity." Moreover, he adds, in contemplating the totality of one's life experience, it is not sufficient that one "merely bear what is necessary," but indeed to "love it" (258). Commenting on Nietzsche's vision of destiny, Greg Mogensson writes that one's relationship to "a sense of the fatal" is "the ink-well out of which we write our personal mythology, our *amor fati*, our 'yes' in the face of necessity" (155).

Given their life orientations as well as their orientations to mythology, it is hardly surprising that both Campbell and Jung were attracted to the concept of *amor fati*. Commenting on this idea, Campbell states, "if you say no to a single factor in your life,

you have unraveled the whole thing.” Further commenting on Nietzsche’s explication of this idea, he adds, “the more challenging or threatening the situation or context to be assimilated and affirmed, the greater the stature of the person who can achieve it.” In this way, he observes, the “demon that you can swallow gives you its power, and the greater life’s pain, the greater life’s reply” (*Power of Myth* 161). With particular regard to the mythic implications of *amor fati*, Campbell argues that thinking mythologically helps put one “in accord with the inevitables of this vale of tears.” As a result, he continues, “You learn to recognize the positive values in what appear to be the negative moments and aspects of your life.” Only then, he cautions, is one “able to say a hearty yes” to one’s adventure (163).

While Jung rarely referred to the concept of *amor fati* by name, he offers many observations in keeping with the spirit of Nietzsche’s idea. Citing a letter Jung wrote in March of 1933, for example, Aniela Jaffé quotes Jung as observing that when one does “the next and most necessary thing without fuss and with conviction, one is always doing something meaningful and intended by fate” (*Myth of Meaning* 150). Indeed, Jung’s embracing of the idea of *amor fati* is so total that he is able to define God as “the name by which I designate all things which cross my willful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans and intentions and change the course of my life for better or worse” (*Letters* 525). Perhaps the most insightful Jungian commentary on the value of *amor fati*, however, comes not from Jung himself, but rather from one of his patients. In a letter later quoted by Jung, this former client writes:

Out of evil, much good has come to me. By keeping quiet, repressing nothing, remaining attentive, and by accepting reality—taking things as they are, and not as I wanted them to be—by doing all this, unusual knowledge has come to me, and unusual powers as well, such as I could



never have imagined before. I always thought that when we accepted things they over-powered us in some way or other. This turns out not to be true at all, and it is only by accepting them that one can assume an attitude towards them. So now I intend to play the game of life, being receptive to whatever comes to me, good and bad, sun and shadow that are forever alternating, and, in this way, also accepting my own nature with its positive and negative sides. Thus everything becomes more alive to me. What a fool I was! How I tried to force everything to go according to the way I thought it ought to! (*CW* 13: 5; para. 18)

This statement both fully embraces the concept of *amor fati*, as well as powerfully emphasizing its profoundly affirming quality as a philosophy of life.

In keeping with the Jungian vision of the process of individuation, Whitmont equates the pattern implicit in one's destiny with "the unfoldment of the self-archetype in time and space." While this pattern autonomously arises from the self, he writes, it nevertheless "needs the cooperation of consciousness for its realization in actual life." This process, he concludes, depends "largely on the individual's capacity for awareness," as well as "his ability to experience symbolic significance and to attempt a cooperative acceptance of the tragic as well as the joyful patterns of his life" ("Destiny Concept in Psychotherapy" 73). In this regard, Whitmont cautions, it is important to remember that *amor fati* "does not imply absolute determinism" (74). Echoing this sentiment, Hollis observes, "the love of one's fate is not fatalism, resignation, defeat, or passivity." Rather, he suggests, it is "an heroic submission to the gods—not my will but Thine—which leads to the blessing of a life lived as it was meant to be lived" (*Creating a Life* 69).

With regard to the particular aspects of consciousness that must be brought to bear in order for one to embrace the concept of *amor fati*, Hollis also writes of the necessity for confronting what he calls "Triple A's," namely the forces of anxiety, ambiguity, and ambivalence. Describing the source of the first of these sources of

psychological tension, Hollis observes that anxiety always rises under conditions of uncertainty and open-endedness. Ambiguity, the second of these forces, he continues, “confounds the ego’s lust for security,” and seeks “to fix the world in a permanently knowable place.” Ambivalence, the third of these disruptive forces, arises from the inevitable presence of opposites, Hollis writes, and “obliges one to deal with capacity for dialogue with that other” (57).

Far from becoming a barrier to the experience of the sacred in the context of one’s life story, Hollis argues, consciously opening oneself to life’s anxiety, ambiguity, and ambivalence offers a powerful means of accessing the personally sacred. In this context, he further observes, the way in which one handles “the inescapable problem of the Triple A’s” implicitly raises questions with regard to spiritual authority. “Is one to project authority outside to a received package of values, the institutionalization of dogma, rite and cult,” he asks, “or is one willing to assume responsibility for tracking the spirit as it arises from new venues?” Engaging the second option, he argues, requires “the capacity to stay open to the dynamism of life, to grant autonomy to the gods, to allow enlargement through revelation,” and finally, “to open a more respectful relationship to the mystery that moves through all events” (58).

In this regard, Hollis further argues, it is precisely those individuals “who are strong enough to suffer the angst of modernism consciously” while trying to hold “the necessary tension of opposites rather than tumble into fundamentalist pieties” who remain open to the possibility of personal revelation. Indeed, it *because* such people remain open to the developmental and the dialogical, he suggests, that the divine is made accessible, “for the gods are most present when our dogmas and attitudes are not

enclosing and containing them” (56). Summarizing his view of the relevance of the concept of the love of fate to the idea of a mythically-based religious faith, Hollis writes:

*Amor fati* [. . .] is in the end a recognition that it is *here*, in *this place*, in *this time*, in *this arena* that we are called to live our lives. Surely meaning will be found not in the ego’s triumphant conquest of fate, but by its interaction with, enlargement through, and sometimes defeat by, fate. To live our lives here, in this world, in this time, is richly pregnant with possibilities of meaning. Meaning is not something abstract, something sought [. . .]. It is an experiential byproduct of a life lived in the way it is supposed to be lived—as defined by forces transcendent to consciousness. (68)

Another reason why the concept of *amor fati* is particularly relevant to the idea of a mythic orientation to the sacred is that love of fate also inherently involves the embracing of one’s personal myth. For this reason, seeking a sense of existential meaning purely through the embracing of collective myths will always prove insufficient to the task of *amor fati*. In this regard, Sam Keen writes, “The cosmic story fails in an essential way to provide me with a map for my spiritual journey.” While such a story “locates human beings in the grand scheme of things,” he continues, “it does not locate that one individual who is the center of my quest for meaning.” In the end, he states, “My quest, like yours, is driven primarily by a personal-existential need to discover how I fit in with the scheme of things, not by an abstract need to understand how human beings fit within the cosmos.” In this regard, Keen further argues, “If I am ever to feel at home in the world, I must discover how a single life fits into Life, how my story fits into the universal story” so that by “examining my own story, I can at least bring into focus one small part of the sacred whole” (*Hymns to an Unknown God* 37).

Keen further proposes that where traditional religion tends to require “a broad leap into the arms of authority,” the personal spiritual quest “only requires a short step

over the void” (41). The basic assumption of such a spiritual quest, Keen declares is this: “My life is the text in which I must find the revelation of the sacred.” Given their respective orientations to the religious dimension of life, it seems unlikely that either Campbell or Jung would find much to disagree with regarding this simple, yet revolutionary, assumption. Both Campbell and Jung would also agree that an individual can only comprehend the revelation of the sacred concealed in the text of his or her life by consciously choosing to interpret that text in mythic terms, meaning in terms that are inherently archetypal, symbolic, and imaginal.

It is my contention that by seeking the sacred through the mythic text of one’s life, one also inevitably finds a faith in the inherent rightness and necessity of one’s unique journey through life. In the presence of such a mythic faith, one realizes that the sacred lies not in obtaining the object of the quest or in reaching the shrine that is the destination of the pilgrimage, but rather in the act of consciously journeying itself. Such faith would also lead one to understand that discovering a sense of the meaning of one’s life lies not in solving the great cosmic mysteries, but rather in actively encountering and embracing them. Finally and most importantly, if one were to experience such an existential kind of faith, it would matter little what one believed about the unknown and unknowable God behind the many masks and images because one’s faith in the journey would be enough.

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