

# GENEROSITY OF C. G. JUNG'S RELIGIOSITY

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**Abstract:** *Jung attributed a religious dimension to the individuating process and postulated the existence of an archetype of God, in the human unconscious. The logical-epistemological criticisms aimed at Jung, overlook the possibility of their being an expression of a religious representation of the world. If Jung is religious, then his religiosity is more comprehensive than the Christian one and it might be the expression of a new paradigmatic type of representation of the world.*

**Key words:** *individuation process, religiosity, God, Self, archetypal representations.*

## 1. Introduction

Recent researches highlight the tendency to liberate the Western religiosity from its consecrated Christian expressions. The recovery of several Ancient religious traditions, the reactivation of the popular religions and of the magical practices, as well as the closeness to some exotic forms of spirituality are a few expressions of this tendency. In parallel, from the sphere of the scientific knowledge, some voices are ever more clearly heard, which submit several unitary, comprehensive descriptions, of the real. These descriptions legitimate religiosity as an attitude justified by structuring reality.

In this context, the religiosity of Jung's writings, a subject of many discussions, ever since their issuance, and which is somewhat at the confluence of the previously mentioned tendencies, is worth being reevaluated, in my opinion. I will proceed thereto in this paper, attempting to prove that Jung anticipatively assumed a

wide and generous range of religiosity.

## 2. Psychologism and argumentative weaknesses, at Jung

The main criticisms brought to Jung targeted its psychologism and related thereto, the circularity of his argumentation. As I have already highlighted, Jung deemed that the images of God and the images of the Self cannot be discerned. Likewise, Jung emphasized that the psychic reality of God could only be experienced through the images of the psyche. It is around these articulations of his argumentative discourse that the critical discussions upon the religiosity of Jung's writings concentrated.

For the purposes of a condensed presentation of these critical approaches, I will resort to the highly accurate formulations given to them by Edward Glover and Michael Palmer.

Edward Glover [3] considers that Jung's essential statements as regards the

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religious experience, are as many proofs for the irreligiosity of his ideational system. In the light of analytical psychology, as emphasized by Glover, it is not important whether God is energy or the energy is God. In the light of analytical psychology, the idea of God and the numinous experience are only good things, therapeutically useful. To conclude, Glover further writes “far from being religious, Jung’s system is fundamentally irreligious. God’s real existence should preoccupy no one; much less Jung; all that is necessary resides in experiencing an attitude, as that helps us live. Had Jung exposed his system in the Middle Ages, so dear to him, due to its relations to alchemy, he would have certainly died at the stake” [3, p. 132].

Glover is an adept of Freud. Without embracing this orientation in its wholeness, the theologian from Oxford, Michael Palmer [8] considers Freud’s straightforward atheism, less dangerous to humanity, than Jung’s ambiguous discourse: “I dare say Jung’s goodwill is a much more serious and radical defiance to religion than Freud’s hostility has ever been.” [8, p. 242]. Palmer deems the accusation of psychologism brought by critics to Jung, to be justified; and considers the latter not to have succeeded in convincingly removing, by arguments, that accusation, which he had been aware of.

Palmer signals the difficulty of homogeneously comprehending Jung’s ideas in a known pattern. If the archetype is a behavioural pattern, then the theory of the collective unconscious is compatible with ethology and cannot be attacked from biology. Jung deemed himself to be an empiricist and phenomenologist, to speak truth, in a quite odd sense of the terms (whereto I will return): he considered his approach to be a description of noticeable psychical facts; the psychic phenomena being facts, as they supply the only immediate certainty, which is the

knowledge of the psychic world; and he claimed that any psychical experience was true, as long as it existed. With a view to admitting the psychic realities, one needs a more comprehensive representation of the universe than the materialist-scientific one, as shown by Palmer. At Jung, he further claims, the ambiguity is the necessary characteristic for the argumentation upon the complexity of the psych deepness. Furthermore, Jung can be deemed an elitist, his therapeutic approach supposing the patients’ access, at least partially, to the significations of the analyzed material valued by the therapist. As a matter of fact, as admirably noted by Palmer, the criticisms brought to Jung seldom targeted the correctness of his cultural references.

Palmer highlights the objectionable articulations of Jung’s argumentation [8, pp. 129-239]:

Jung considered the human beings possess the capacity to form images of God; as there obviously are images of God. Such (circular) inferences do not prove God’s existence; this is not the psychologist’s business, Jung further specified. Yet, for the Swiss psychologist, the effects of the archetype and of the atom are as easily detectable on an empirical level, as reactions to the numinous and, respectively, explosions. If there are effects, they must have a cause. Jung postulates the existence of the archetype as conceptual necessity.

Any image of God is valid and therapeutically useful, unveiling the stage of the individuating process attained by the individual. The primitive images, on one hand, and the search for religiosity beyond one’s own religion (whose representations of God are perceived as obsolete and irrelevant), on the other hand, signal positions in different stages. At the end of the individuating course, as believed by Jung, the individual will no longer need religious images. Their place will be taken by the images of the Self.

Jung also resorted to the older philosophical idea of the impossibility to access another world than the psychical one, with a view to protecting his own ideational system of testing, as shown by Palmer. For Jung, it is true what is psychically true. The psychical experience of the encounter with the image of God is admitted as true, as it is felt as true. The existence of the archetypal images confirms religion, as fundamental activity of the psyche and as expression of the collective unconscious [7]. Jung did not prove the existence of the collective unconscious, but he admitted it as part of the explicative hypothesis as regards the parallelism of the images.

Human experience is psychical; the human being can meet (that is experience) God only psychically, in the depths of the unconscious. In order to achieve the individuation, the adoption of a religious conception meant to enable this encounter was deemed necessary by Jung. The individuation is religious, because it is archetypal; and any orientation towards the archetypes is religious. The individuation is religious also because God as an archetype and the Self cannot be empirically distinguished (they are based on an identical numinous factor) [6].

Jung was accused of agnosticism and Gnosticism, of mysticism and materialism; he was considered an atheist and a religious leader; a source of ideas for the Catholic and Protestant theology alike, as shown Palmer.

I dare say this wide range of interpretations is determined, on one hand, by the aforementioned ambiguity of Jung's writings; and, on the other hand, by an open, generous and non-privative approach of the religiosity, whereto, also I will return. The criticisms formulated by Palmer to the theoretical construction elaborated by Jung mainly target its logic-epistemological weaknesses:

a. Jung is not an empiricist, as shown by Palmer. The archetypal apriority admitted by Jung turns the claimed knowledge of the psyche into a complete, structurally closed knowledge. Likewise, the Swiss psychologist's care for the protection of his statements against direct verification does not belong to the empiricist tradition.

b. If the immediate experience is the one that guarantees the archetypal character of the images, any image can be admitted as archetypal, as highlighted by Palmer. Yet, in this way, the religious experience and the schizoid manifestation can no longer be objectively discerned and differentiated; and to attribute the discerning and differentiating ability only to the supporters of the theory of the archetypes, means to grant this one, a larger credibility, than to the evidence. The validation of the archetypal images by means of their psychical effects is the expression of a rough pragmatism; and the subjective certainty is neither measure, nor condition of the truth of an assertion, as emphasized by Palmer.

c. Inferring from the observation of the parallel images, to the existence of the archetype they come from, Jung inductively and analogically proceeds, as shown by Palmer. His reasoning does not prove the existence of the archetypes. Jung avoids such an error as the affirmation of the antecedent from the existence of the consequential (the error of the logic-empiricist theory of the confirmation) postulating the existence of the archetypes and of the collective unconscious, which holds them as conceptual necessity. Yet, proceeding in this way, Jung ignores the possibility of explaining the same effects, through different causes. Palmer mentions simpler variants than the existence of the collective unconscious, as seat of the archetypes, in order to explain the parallelism of the images (shared human experiences from the individuals'

childhood, for the Freudians; acculturation and cultural compliance, at G. Allport), showing that their possibility does not falsify Jung's hypothesis; yet it suggests its improbability. For Palmer, the real weakness of Jung's reasoning consists in the inference from the empirical experience to the existence of a supra-empirical reality, qualitatively different. In this context, the justificatory invocation of the Kantian moral argument is not legitimate, as claimed by the theologian from Oxford: Kant does not originate the moral norms in a transcendental reality.

d. As he similarly argues in the case of the archetype of God as in the case of the collective-unconscious theory, Jung can be also brought similar objections, as shown by Palmer: the universality of the images of God does not necessarily suppose an aprioric capacity to create them. Yet, Jung argumentatively force, showing that both faith and unbelief (owed to the ignorance of the collective unconscious) are equal proofs for the existence of the archetype of God and religious instinct. Thus, the inborn character of the archetype of God must be acknowledged its necessity.

e. Palmer also signals Martin Buber's accusation, which he agrees with. Jung operates an illegitimate psychological reduction of God's transcendence: Jung's religion of psychic immanence does not suppose a relation with the transcendent; the revelation of God is the revelation of the human being in him. Jung's answer, also mentioned by Palmer, is not quite to the height of the accusation: the archetypes are autonomous and objective; confronting them might be perceived as an encounter with the Stranger. Yet, it is another Stranger that Buber and Palmer talk of.

f. Palmer also signals the difficulty of interpreting the Evangelic excerpt "No one comes to the father, except through Me" (John 14:6) in the context of equalling the images of Christ with any other images of

the Self-realization (Buddha, Purusha, etc). In the same context, the theologian from Oxford reminds that to deem Christ as the latent divine essence in the human soul means to reiterate the old Gnostic heresy.

g. Supporting the religious character of the individuation process resorts, as shown by Palmer, a circular tautological argument: asserting the religiosity of the Self-images is tautological, as the religious images are Self-images. Moreover, in accordance with the ethic principle of the individuation, the human behaviour is moral if it is oriented towards satisfying the requirements of the Self; and Palmer signals the difficulty of managing the conflicts between the requirements of the various individuating processes, developing in parallel (any action in and for the Sine can be deemed as religious), doing thereby justice to Don Browning: "the Jungian theory of the moral obligation rather seems a form of ethical egoism, having taken on religious attire" [apud 8, p. 275]. In this way, what Jung calls "religios", as shown by Palmer, cannot describe a sustainable lifestyle. In this context, to the theologian from Oxford, it seems "difficult to understand why Jung says that the *religious attitude* is necessary for the individuation, while religion claims nothing that had not already been involved in our archetypal desire of individuation" [8, p. 276].

Jung's argumentation is constitutively circular, as concluded by the theologian from Oxford: what comes from the psyche is validated by the psyche. This type of argumentation protects Jung from the possible attacks for verification purposes; yet renders him vulnerable to the accusation of psychologism. Jung operated with a self-justified psychical world, wherein the psychic effect of the images of God validates the latter, equating them, at the same time, with any kind of transforming images.

### 3. Potential of assuming the theory of the collective unconscious theory as religious

Jung accused Freud of intellectual dishonesty and metaphysical arrogance. The accusation dwelled on his building psychoanalysis based on Freud's personal preferences and on rejecting the contrary proofs [8]. Yet, Jung, in his turn, can be accused of exactly the same things and he did not seem aware. Here, we could have a situation of unawareness of the researcher's Shadow, an archetype in a state of projection. But it could also be about Jung's assumption of his own individuating path. It's fascinating unveiling might have placed between parentheses the critical reserves of Jung as a scientist, turning his psychological writings into confessions (in the religious sense of the term, as regards his encounter with the divine).

The stages of the individuating process are characterized, as shown by Jung, by different relations between Ego and Self. Their succession describes a cycle, whose beginning and end can be overlapped: The Ego identifies with (it is undifferentiated from) the Self, in childhood, alienates from the latter in early adult life and reunites, thereafter, individuating terms, with it [Edinger, 1985, apud 9]. The analogy of the circular individuating process with the path of the Hegelian Idea, which emerges, naked, from the Self, so as to come back, full of the world's determinations, is accessible.

The religious experience is the experience of God within the Human being. As an archetype generating numinous experiences, God is collective, immanent and transcendent, at the same time. In this sense, religion is necessarily collective. The human desire to integrate is the desire to access the eternal archetypal layer – substrate of the psyche [8]. Another analogy easily stands out here: to deem religion as a result of the projection of the affiliation and

sharing feeling from the community's force (mana), at Emilé Durkheim. Also in this case, the religion is necessarily collective and the divinity is perceived as both immanent and transcendent.

Of course, these analogies can be the fruit of a set of great ideas, wherewith humanity has managed, throughout history, the self-representation and that of the world. Yet, they can also signal similar intuitions, as regards the relation between the human being the supernatural.

Palmer related to Jung's ideational system, as an arbitrary theoretical construction. Here, I use "arbitrary", in the sense of freely elaborated, not imposed to the author by other constraints, except those of explicative coherence and therapeutic utility. The opposite of "arbitrary" is, in this context, "revealed". I think Palmer does not truly consider the possibility for Jung to have really assumed his own confrontation with the archetypes, to be religious, despite his having described them as numinous.

I propose to accept here this possibility, as argumentative exercise; and, as its consequence, the fact that the theory of the collective unconscious as seat of the archetypes that support the individuation, is the expression of a revelation. Let's suppose that what Jung experienced, throughout the episode of dramatic individuating confrontation with his own psyche, was the access to another dimension of the real.

He "experienced" means, in this case: he is convinced it did happen. The already mentioned insistence wherewith Jung attempted to impose the psychical experiences as real, because they are felt, as real, might be, in this context, an approach of self-confirmation. Therefore, I propose to admit that, throughout this experience, which, I dare say we are not in the wrong to call mystical, Jung was revealed the other dimension of the real and the status of interface with the archetypes, alike.

This other experimented dimension can be transcendent or immanent; both variants being capable of enhancement, in this exercise. In the former case (that of a transcendent reality), postulating the archetype of God would be a confession upon the instrument that the human disposes of, with a view to his meeting the superhuman. Several arguments can be brought, in support of this interpretative variant. As aforementioned, Jung claimed that the archetype of divinity was the soul's possibility to form a relation with the divine essence. Jung also claimed "Our psyche is configured in accordance with the structure of the Universe, and what happens to a large extent, also takes place in the smaller and more subjective dimension of the soul. Therefore, the image of God is always a projection of the inner experience, in front of a powerful *vis-à-vis*." [5, p. 336] and deemed to be a blasphemy, the thought that God, who can reveal Himself anywhere, could not do it in the human soul [12]. Even the controversial "I need not believe. I know." In the BBC interview, from 1959 [1, p. 72] can be interpreted in this sense.

In the second case (of an immanent reality), postulating the archetype of God might be a confession upon the instrument to access the divine in the human being, which means the reactivation of the Gnosticism, which accusation was, in fact, brought to Jung.

In both variants, the presentation of the theory of the collective unconscious becomes a confession and Jung's attitude is religious. Then why, if they are the expression of a religious attitude, Jung's writings are, nevertheless, so ambiguous, in highlighting the relation with the other dimension of the real? I will advance here two possibly complementary answers: a. the works on the archetypes are only a part of the revelation, the one referring to the human instruments to access the superhuman. They are works on the human

being, not on the superhuman; b. Jung tried to say as much as possible, giving to Caesar what belonged to Caesar, to wit considering the contemporary requirements of the scientific method. What remained unsaid are really not covered by psychology; they could have made the object of another work.

Continuing the exercise, if Jung's writings are admitted as expressions of a revelation, many of the criticisms lose their justification and many of Jung's surprising assertions clarify their meaning, unveiling themselves as justified.

In this way, the postulation becomes the most adequate way to communicate the revealed existence of the collective unconscious. Likewise, Jung's huge boldness to speak of God's shadow and its being ignored, in Christianity, becomes more easily understandable, if it is not arbitrary, but grounded in a revelation. Likewise, if his works are confessions upon the revelation of the archetypes as instruments to access the divine, then the possible deviations from the requirements of the logic would no longer be necessarily punishable. Jung himself deemed that all religious affirmations were about physical impossibilities (otherwise, they would have belonged to the science of nature, not to religion) and that, in psychological terms, only the paradoxical, antinomical statements on the divinity are correct [apud 12, p. 132].

Taking Palmer's criticisms, one at a time, a. Jung, who declared himself to be an empiricist, would be right. The facts that are in accord with the theory would not be irrelevant (as in the case of the arbitrary establishment of the archetypal apriorism); they would be searched, in order to corroborate the theory. What Palmer critically signalled as intentional choice of the proofs, in accordance with the theory, would be the discovery of the proofs in convergence with the revelation.

b. John Hick, a theologian whereto I will return, suggests, as criterion to detect he authentic religious experience, its effects in the long run. I think this criterion be also used in the case of the separation of the religious experiences from schizoid manifestations, if the archetypes are instruments to access the divine: if the images prove to be edifying, by their consequences, they are archetypal.

In terms of subjective certainty, which is not sufficient, with a view to imposing the truth of an assertion, the things are different in the case of the mystical experience: the mystically revealed truth is as subjective as possible.

c+d. I dare say the manner in which Jung interferes (from the noticeable existence of the archetypal images to the archetypal apriorism) is not less legitimate than any adductive reasoning, of the many, which are used in the scientific practice. His reasoning is not simply an illegitimate inductive inference, with a conclusion of a different ontological rank from the premises, as considered by Palmer. It is the inference that Jung really considers towards the best explanation. Not being able to prove the existence of the archetypes, he could only postulate them, out of conceptual necessity. This approach has something of the appropriateness of the symbolic language (just because the symbol is, by definition, the expression of a necessary inadequacy) to the formulation of the religious expression: one needs a discontinuity in the rigorously logical reasoning, with a view to enabling the establishment or the postulation of the transcendent signified.

The explicative alternatives submitted by Palmer as simpler (shared experiences, in childhood; acculturation; cultural confirmation, etc.) are reductionist; they turn religiosity an accidental human feature. Palmer considers that the postulation of the archetypes, beyond human experience, disqualifies Jung's pretension to supply the

best explanation as regards the parallelism of the images. I dare say Jung's explanation is a good non-reductionist explanation.

e. If the archetypes are the instruments at the human's disposal, with a view to his accessing the superhuman, then the unveiling of their existence does not reside in the human, but in the superhuman.

f. If the image of Christ is really one of the images of the Self, then the significance of the Evangelic passage, which Palmer considers inadmissible (hence unjustified as) exclusivity ("No one comes to the Father, except through Me"- John 14:6) can be metonymically recovered as universally valid.

g+h. The circular arguments and the tautological formulations become, in this context (of the non-arbitrary, revealed theory of the collective unconscious) expressions of the limited human possibility to describe the superhuman. They are similar expressions to the Biblical "I AM WHO I AM", of the divinity.

Palmer reckons as difficult to understand why Jung had claimed the necessity of the religious attitude in the individuation (when whatsoever would religion suggest has already been involved in the psyche's archetypal orientation towards individuating self-actualization).

I dare say that, by supporting the necessary religious dimension of individuation, Jung proceeded as Wittgenstein in the elaboration of the *Tractatus* [13]: the individuation/understanding process is a climbing that ends with the removal of the scale (that is religion/ metaphysics).

As aforementioned, Jung considered that the images of God would be replaced with images of the Self, at the end of the individuating process. It is necessary to use them along the way, because, as also mentioned before, by proposing the variant of the recessively relation between the two types of images, the religious images most

easily carry and convey the numinous.

The consequences of the admission of the Swiss psychologist's religiosity seem to be coherent among themselves and with the whole of Jung's writings, in the proposed argumentative exercise. Why did Palmer not consider this variant, which was at hand and whom he should have agreed with, as it supposed relating with the superhuman? I can insert here two complementary answers: a. The Christian theologians manifest inertia in going beyond the representation of the psyche as a matter of nature, earth(ly), bodi(ly), a representation discussed by Wehr [12]. I think it is more prudent to say "most Christian theologians". They are not yet willing to consider the representations of the world, as outlined by D. Bohm, F. Capra, B. Nicolescu [10-11], which converge towards alleviating the differences between matter and spirit, individual and Universe, human and superhuman. The theologians do not expect revelations from the psychologists, but external confirmations, by compatibility, of their dogmas; b. The religiosity that might be acknowledged to Jung is certainly not canonically Christian (in its sense of accordance with the aforementioned dogmas). This remark might underpin the appreciation of Jung's writings, by Palmer, as dangerous to Christianity. Anyway, if this is the case, the logical-epistemological defense strategy adopted by Palmer is not the most adequate, as religions has its own logic, Simmel said [9], and formulates non-falsifiable Popperian judgments.

What Jung experienced, attempting thereafter to adequately express, might be a more comprehensive structure of the world, than the one outlined by Christianity. This representation would justify Jung's attempts to ideationally recover the Oriental religions, the alchemy, the tarot etc. and draw closer, by synchronicities, to quantum physics. His approach is similar in nature to the other aforementioned unifying

approaches. His stake might be the scientific recovery of a wide religiosity, superordinated to the Christian one. And, to close the circle of the references to the criticisms brought to Jung, in this sense of the religiosity, to consider God as being energy, as mentioned by Glover, would become pertinent.

For the sake of this possible stake, based on its convergence with other credible representations of the totality of the world, and based on its coherence, I dare say the variant of relating to Jung, submitted as argumentative exercise, should not be dismissed as unrealistic, before being closely examined. In fact, the attitude of accurate epistemological research supposes considering all possible variants; and Popper linked the rise in knowledge to the proper management of the spectacular hypotheses.

I dare say Christian theologians should, in their turn, seriously consider the variant of a revealed knowledge, in Jung's case, daring to ask what might all these mean, to their dogmatic configurations. Anyway, as soothingly highlighted by Olivier Clément [2], God has answers to all questions that might formulated by people.

I would like to end with the example of a similar boldness, the one of John Hick. I have already mentioned the criterion he had submitted, in order to differentiate the authentic religious experiences from the false ones.

#### **4. Cognitive freedom and religious experience**

John Hick [4] appreciates that, despite the contemporary and technical attempts to clarify the relation between mind and brain, the nature of human consciousness remains a mystery. In this context, the possibility of a non-physical reality beside the physical reality remains open; and the diagnosis of all religious experiences in neural-

psychological terms is abusive.

Our pretensions of certain knowledge (sure, of the truth) can only extend over the immediate contents of one's own consciousness and over the analytical, tautological judgements. In terms of the other judgments of knowledge, as shown by Hick, we operate with the implicit principle of the critical trust: "we accept what seems to be present as being present, unless perchance we have grounds for doubt." [4, p. 207]. The sensory experience and the religious experience can be equally considered authentic, as expressions of the immediate contents of the consciousness. The fact that the former is imposed, universal and homogenous is not a sufficient reason (in accordance with the principle of the critical trust) to consider the latter as being illusory: we operate on different signification levels, to whom we attach different degrees of cognitive liberty. We assume more freedom, in the case of the experience of the Transcendent, than in the case of the pragmatic trust in one's own senses, wherewith we survive.

Returning to the religious experience, as it is not imposed, it is neither uniform, nor universal, as shown by Hick. It is only different from the sensory experience. Once admitted the possibility of genuine religious experiences, it becomes necessary to postulate the existence of the Transcendent, whereto, if authentic, the religious experiences should represent answers. The argumentative approach is similar to the Kantian one, referring to the grounds of the moral behaviour. As a matter of fact, Hick explicitly enhances the Kantian scheme referring the thing in itself/ phenomenon, with a view to justifying (unbiased) the variety of the religious experiences: The transcendent cannot be described or understood; it is ineffable and beyond any category. There is an inborn human capacity to become aware of the presence of the Transcendent, by virtue of its

immanence in its own nature. People are variedly aware of the transcendent reality in the different cultural traditions.

Once admitted (justified) the variety of the authentic religious experiences, Hick extends the sphere of the authentic answers over the presence of the Transcendent, including therein the manifestations of human solidarity, in the secularized West. Political and/or social activism is a secular and democratic form of sanctity.

Therefore, religions are human answers formed in different cultures and using different conceptual systems to the manifestation of the ineffable transcendent real, within human consciousness. Hick does not explicitly confess his belief in the existence of the Transcendent (called this way, in order to signal its non-confinement in the theist form of the religious experience). To resume, Hick says that, if the religious experience is not an illusion, it needs a Transcendent in guise of support and that it is possible for the religious experience not to be an illusion. This is more than Jung dared to claim, starting from the similar premise of the reality of the psychical experiences.

## 5. Conclusions

Jung considered that the human psyche was oriented towards individuation, which means self-actualization. He further believed that the individuating process, supposing the confrontation with the archetypes, necessarily has a religious nature and that, in the collective unconscious, there is an archetype of God.

The Christian theologians' difficulty in admitting the religiosity of this ideational configuration, might indicate a problem of the theologians, not of Jung. His writings might be the expression of the assumption of a representation of the world, which is religious, without being Christianly dogmatic.

Now, it is one of the many such representations. Perhaps, they prefigure a change of paradigm, meant to bring the human being, an additional prestige, in his relation with the divine.

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