

# ***Aion – Toward a Gnostic Reformation***

**Robert Tulip**

**Canberra Jung Society, 5 May 2017**

In his book *Aion - Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, Carl Jung analysed archetypes of the collective unconscious against the identity of Jesus Christ as a model of psychological wholeness, providing ideas about cultural transformation into a New Age. Building upon Christian traditions, Jung reinterpreted the Christ story through astronomy, examining how images of Jesus provide symbolic reflection of slow changes in the visible stars, with a focus on the archetype of the fish. Jung applied the old hermetic idea from the Lord's Prayer, 'on earth as in heaven', to explore how Jesus symbolises eternal truths, aiming to develop a scientific psychology of religion rather than accepting any claims from traditional dogma. My reading of *Aion* is that Jung's symbolic cosmology presents a pathway to a Gnostic Reformation of Christianity, pointing to a paradigm shift that uses knowledge to reconcile religion with logic and evidence. *Aion* investigates a radically different interpretation of Christian historical origins as primarily Gnostic and cosmological.

An archetype is a pattern with strong symbolic meaning in human life. Archetypes can include common patterns of character, action, situation and art. The universal symbols emerging in archetypes are not generally understood, and can exercise social power through popular resonance in concealed unconscious ways. In *Aion*, Jung applied methods of analytical psychology to uncover hidden meanings in powerful collective symbols of Christian religion, aiming to bring unconscious spiritual tendencies and energies out of the irrational realms of mythology and into conscious awareness. As an exercise in the philosophy of culture, Jung studied how widely shared experiences manifest in enduring rich archetypal forms of expression.

*Aion* explored "the myths that underlie Christianity and the whole of mythology as the expression of a universal disposition in humanity". Jung saw symbolic archetypes of Christian faith, such as the Christian fish, the snake, the cross and the stone, as "complex thought-forms which [are] unconscious organizers of our ideas."<sup>1</sup> For Jung, archetypes and the collective unconscious come together in the person of Jesus Christ as "an ever-present archetype of wholeness".<sup>2</sup> As he explained in the Foreword, "the archetypal image of wholeness, which appears so frequently in the products of the unconscious, has forerunners identified very early with the figure of Christ."

The subtitle of *Aion - "Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self"* - signified Jung's intent to analyse human selfhood in general terms. Phenomenology is a method in philosophy that tries to see things as they appear, without preconceptions, an approach that is highly complex in psychology. Jung sought to provide a general objective description of what a self really is as a whole, analysing how structures of the conscious ego combine with unconscious factors that form human identity.

As a doctor of the soul, Jung found therapeutic value in exploring the spiritual identity of Jesus Christ as a mythological model of wholeness. Jung said his aim in *Aion* was to investigate the "relations between the traditional Christ-figure and the natural symbols of wholeness, ... considering how certain things could be understood from the standpoint of our modern consciousness, to remedy our philosophic disorientation by shedding light on the psychic background and the secret chambers of the soul." This theme of wholeness in psychology opens issues in healing, therapy and recovery from trauma. Wholeness is linked to ethical values such as integrity, truth, disclosure, identity, authenticity, forgiveness, love and reconciliation. Jungian psychology in general examines barriers and constraints to wholeness, in the effort to improve personal and social cohesion and coherence.

*Aion* explored how Christian ideas can help to address the clash between neurotic disturbance and an image of integrated selfhood. For example, Jung saw Gnostic discussion of the cross<sup>3</sup> in terms of a path to integrated wholeness. The cross is an allegorical symbolic archetype whose meaning extends beyond literal traditions of the death of Christ. Jung argued that the cross archetype gives cosmic form to wisdom, serving to fix boundaries and leading to a redeeming freedom.

The passion story of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ presents an archetypal psychology of separation and integration. The gospels show a path from crisis to wholeness. The abandonment of Christ depicted at Golgotha represents broader problems of separation such as alienation, isolation, ignorance and despair. The cross is a symbol of conflict, hatred, destruction and loss, and of the

---

<sup>1</sup> 278

<sup>2</sup> 73

<sup>3</sup> n.86

absence of true community and belonging. At the same time, in its link to the resurrection, the cross is an integrating symbol of how wholeness can overcome social and personal neuroses.

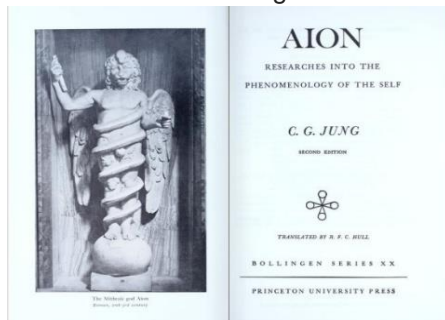
The Christian view uses the resurrection as a symbol of renewal and wholeness to give theological support to ethical values of faith, hope and love. Christianity has been only partly effective in applying these moral principles, with problems linked to the tendency to find comfort in fantasy. Freudian atheism sees major problems of incoherence and projection within the supernatural dogmas of traditional faith. Jung's ideas in *Aion* came from this Freudian milieu. Rather than proposing a world without faith, Jung instead sought constructive reform of religion, suggesting Christian ideas can be transformed through a scientific vision to find meaning for a modern secular outlook.

Jung set this reform of faith against the crisis of war. Pervasive psychological problems of disorientation and lack of direction appear in "the confusion and uprootedness of our society", the loss of "contact with the meaning of European culture" and the great danger of "the utopian mass-psychoses of our time." Wholeness and the positive potential of Christian myth stand as a counter to the evil of Nazism and other delusional ideologies. Jung said in *Aion* that "until 1933 only lunatics would have been found in possession of living fragments of mythology. After this date, the world of heroes and monsters spread like a devastating fire over whole nations, proving that the strange world of myth had suffered no loss of vitality during the centuries of reason and enlightenment."

The vitality of myth resides in the collective unconscious, always with potential to emerge into public influence, for good or ill. The rise of Nazism showed how myths can engage with a mass audience to provide false social meaning in ways that are not consciously understood. Such bad myths, fed by centuries of trauma and delusion, are extremely dangerous, representing an upwelling of psychic wounds from unconscious sources, with strong potential to produce catastrophe. The world wars involved what Jung called in *Aion* "a false spirit of arrogance, hysteria, woolly-mindedness, criminal amorality, and doctrinaire fanaticism, ... shoddy spiritual goods, spurious art, philosophical stutterings and Utopian humbug, fit only to be fed wholesale to the mass man of today. That is what the post-Christian spirit looks like."<sup>4</sup> The chapter *Christ, A Symbol of the Self* opens, "The dechristianization of our world, the Luciferian development of science and technology, and the frightful material and moral destruction left behind by the Second World War, have been compared more than once with the eschatological events foretold in the New Testament concerned with the coming of the Antichrist."<sup>5</sup>

Such religious discussion, placing the politics of war and peace against the apocalyptic myth of an imagined cosmic clash between Christ and Satan, sits uneasily against the secular temper of today's world. Many now would welcome the 'dechristianisation' that Jung condemned, seeing effort to discard the errors of religion as a positive moral step to achieve a more rational society. Jung is a helpful source for such difficult questions. Endeavouring to be a rational spiritual guide, he sought calm discussion of topics that often provoke strong emotions and assumptions. My sense is that Jung's methods can assist us to enter dialogue about the potential benefits of religion, where we might otherwise want to abandon all hope of finding any meaning. Within his focus on psychology as an empirical science, Jung saw a therapeutic function in good myth, especially in the healing potential of the archetypal cosmic myth of Jesus Christ as a symbol of wholeness.

In *Aion*, Jung developed a positive approach to Christian faith through a surprising method, using the astronomy of the ancient world as a prism to help deconstruct the underlying meaning of conventional religion. He saw the authentic origins of the Jesus story in ancient Gnostic wisdom traditions, while viewing the literal claims of the Bible as only a veiled lens. This approach amounts to a Gnostic Reformation of Christianity, and involves a return to lost authentic origins of Christian faith in the symbolic language of forgotten mystery wisdom traditions. *Aion* looked to excavate real meaning from beneath the archaeological rubble of Christian culture. This effort to rediscover a spirit of wholeness



and integrity and redemption in a newly reformed Christian faith offers promise to reconcile religion with the modern scientific ethic of evidence and logic.

The postulated Gnostic origins of Christianity in mystical wisdom are illuminated by the mythological figure of Aion, who provides the rather mysterious title for Jung's book. Aion was the ancient Gnostic and Mithraic God of Time, related to Kronos and Saturn. This statue of Aion from the Vatican is placed by Jung on the frontispiece of *Aion*, and is an image with deep riches of symbolic meaning.

<sup>4</sup> 67

<sup>5</sup> 68

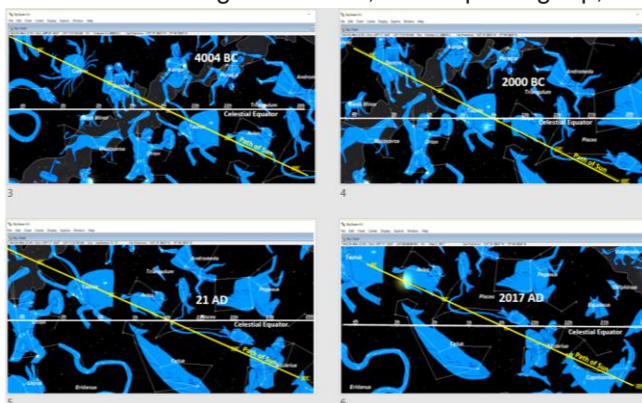
Aeons are the successive ages of the world, variously discussed at historical, geological and astronomical time scales, respectively covering thousands, millions and billions of years. At the millennial scale of religious myth, world ages provide a framework for deep history, with cultural roots in the observation of the cosmos by ancient astronomer-priests. Jung explored millennial ideas in *Aion* against the mythology and science of the astronomical star clock of the earth provided by precession of the equinox. Precession is the astronomical motion that causes zodiac ages. The use of zodiac cosmology in *Aion* makes it a core document for Jung's vision of a new paradigm. He said his "investigation seeks, with the help of Christian, Gnostic, and alchemical symbols of the self, to throw light on the change of psychic situation within the "Christian aeon", [seeing] the Pisces aeon as the synchronistic concomitant of two thousand years of Christian development."<sup>6</sup>

*Aion* explored how this mysterious visual cosmology could restore a connection between psychology, theology, and astronomy. Some readers find these ideas unsettling or difficult, both from the view of conventional faith, and also for those who perceive associations with irrational popular New Age movements. For example, Dr David Tacey, in his book *Jung and the New Age*, presented a study of the new age mainly in terms of the hippy counterculture, and did not discuss *Aion*. In my view, the relation between Jung and the New Age, in its authentic rather than its popular meaning, is grounded in the rational cosmology presented in *Aion*. For Jung, the value of approaching Christian traditions by reference to the symbols of ancient visual cosmology was to support a new scientific effort to analyse religion on a sound evidentiary basis. The framework of the Ages of Aries, Pisces and Aquarius that he used for this analysis rests upon empirical cosmology, while extending this factual framework to ask about the unconscious drivers of popular symbols.

Jung explained that "far from cherishing any missionary intentions, I am not concerned here with confessions of faith but with proven scientific facts." In *Aion* we encounter a rigorous mystical approach, using psychology to analyse the collective unconscious meaning of symbols of faith. Jung's method of investigating faith by reference to zodiac ages has broad scientific and social potential, but this introduction of astronomy and its magic sister astrology into religion appears mysterious at best, so it is essential to see how Jung is using obscure ideas such as the zodiac age in empirical ways.

Astronomy enters the picture in *Aion* with Jung's hypothesis that "cosmogonic myths are, at bottom, symbols for the coming of consciousness."<sup>7</sup> A cosmogony is a cosmic theory of origins. The main theme in *Aion* is Jung's interpretation of the Zodiac Age cycle as a hidden cosmogony for Christianity, seen through the coming of the Christian fish as an unconscious symbol. This hidden zodiac cosmogony of Christianity appeared for Jung as an origin myth, and a key to the mythological consciousness that informed the Bible. Jung's analysis of ages used empirical science to assess these long periods of history against collective unconscious archetypal symbolism. The resulting cosmogony that Jung described is very different from the Christian literal myths encountered in the Bible. *Aion* aimed instead at a new scientific paradigm, interpreted against what Jung called "the approach of the next Platonic Month, namely Aquarius."<sup>8</sup>

A 'Platonic Month' is a Zodiac Age, and is an empirical product of Earth's orbital motion. Our planetary axis has a slow regular wobble, like a spinning top, completing one circle in a period calculated by



astronomers at 25,771.5 years. This axis wobble causes the cross in the sky formed by the intersection of the celestial equator and the path of the sun to slowly travel backward around the stars, a motion known as precession of the equinoxes. The Zodiac Age is a stable unit of time, over two millennia in length, defining earth's star clock. The slow movement of the seasons against the stars, one constellation every 2148 years, is shown in the attached star maps, which I made with the astronomy program SkyGazer 4.5.

In 4000 BC, the northern spring equinox was close to the Milky Way at the horns of Taurus. The equinox point precessed into Aries in about 2000 BC, into Pisces in precisely 21 AD, and now stands between Pisces and Aquarius. This speed of

<sup>6</sup> ix

<sup>7</sup> 230

<sup>8</sup> 142

motion is one degree in 71.7 years, or one sign in 2148 years, and is undetectable except by careful long term measurement. Discovery of precession is generally credited to the Greek astronomer Hipparchus in the second century BC. Babylonian, Egyptian, Indian and Mayan astronomers may also have discovered precession much earlier.

At the time of Christ, the March equinox occurred when the sun was between the stars of Aries the Ram and Pisces the Fishes. The equinox point will soon enter the constellation of Aquarius, hence the New Age idea that we are at the dawning of the Age of Aquarius. Jung early on recognised this empirical structure of time. His interest in precession appeared in his early art work, for example with this detail from the first folio of *Liber Novus*,<sup>9</sup> showing the sun between the astrological glyphs for Aquarius on its right and Pisces on its left, indicating the current time nearing the dawn of the age of Aquarius.



This astronomy can be explained fairly simply, even though its implications are far reaching for our understanding of reality. Copernicus, the founder of modern astronomy, explained 500 years ago that our planet has three motions, the day, the year and the spin wobble, which is now known as the Great Year. Formed by the stable cycle of twelve Zodiac Ages, measuring the eternal return of the same, the Great Year is also termed the Platonic Year, for its link to the ideas of Plato, whose dialogue *Timaeus* said an X in the sky formed by two great circles produces identity and difference.<sup>10</sup>

Modern astronomy has found this regular orbital precession is a main cause of earth's glacial cycle, in research that can help us to think about the real impact of zodiac ages.<sup>11</sup> The slow wobble of earth's axis caused the ice ages through interaction with other orbital cycles, dumping walls of ice two miles high across North America and Europe 20,000 years ago, and dropping the sea level by 400 feet. To illustrate the power of this slow orbital motion, Long Island in New York is a glacial moraine<sup>12</sup> caused by the ice bulldozer from the North Pole. Long Island can be considered a cosmic calling card showing the impact of precession of the equinox.



Astronomy software SkyGazer 4.5 shows that the equinox precessed across the first fish of Pisces in 21 AD. This movement of the stars was predictable for astronomer-priests in the centuries before Christ, albeit at decade scale rather than at the precise resolution now possible. Prophecy of the advent of Christ in books such as Daniel and Isaiah may have been based on this observation. This ancient astrology is behind Jung's analysis of the relation between the Age of Pisces and the Christian era, although as he explains, the cause and effect relation between the Christian fish symbolism and observation of the sky is complex, and may be largely unconscious.

Jung expressed doubts about the speculation of theosophy that Jesus Christ was conceived as the avatar of the Age of Pisces, arguing instead that there is no evidence for conscious intent by the Gospel authors to link Jesus to Pisces. Jung's caution shows proper scholarly method given the data

<sup>9</sup> Detail from the first folio of *Liber Novus*, showing the zodiacal precession of the equinoxes. *Liber Novus*, *Liber Primus*, folio i recto. From *Jung and Aion: Time, Vision and a Wayfaring Man*, Lance S. Owens, Psychological Perspectives, Vol 54.3, 2011

<sup>10</sup> <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/timaeus.html> "two parts, which he joined to one another at the centre like the letter X, and bent them into a circular form, connecting them with themselves and each other at the point opposite to their original meeting-point; and, comprehending them in a uniform revolution upon the same axis, he made the one the outer and the other the inner circle. Now the motion of the outer circle he called the motion of the same (identity), and the motion of the inner circle the motion of the other or diverse (difference).

<sup>11</sup> Milankovitch Cycles: "Serbian geophysicist and astronomer Milutin Milanković in the 1920s theorized that variations in ellipticity, tilt, and precession of the Earth's orbit resulted in cyclical variation in the solar radiation (insolation) reaching the Earth, and that this orbital forcing strongly influenced climatic patterns on Earth."

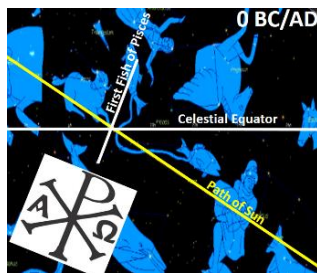
<sup>12</sup> <http://slideplayer.com/slide/6825294/> Glaciers and Glaciation

available to him. My view is that there is much more evidence linking Jesus to astronomy as an intentional cosmic construction than Jung was aware of.

Jung's research<sup>13</sup> suggested the Christian fish symbol first appeared in Alexandria around A.D. 200. He said "a direct astrological aspect of Christ's birth is given us" in the story of the Magi, which "proves that Christ, possibly even at the time of the apostles, was brought into connection with astrological myths, confirmed by the apocalyptic utterances of St. John." Zodiac age symbolism in the Bible is a topic I have researched in some depth. There is clear precessional or stellar symbolism in major stories such as the loaves and fishes, the fishers of men, the holy city, the tree of life, the river of life, the queen of heaven, the alpha and omega, and the dragon giving his seat to the leopard-bear-lion. The man carrying the water jug in the gospel account of the path to the upper room related by Mark and Luke appears to be a deliberate reference to the Age of Aquarius.

As Jung said, it is a "well-attested fact that glimpses of astrological mythology may be caught behind the stories of the worldly and otherworldly life of the Redeemer." He contended that "all this points to no more than the fact that the fish symbols and mythologems which have always existed had assimilated the figure of the Redeemer; in other words, it was a symptom of Christ's assimilation into the world of ideas prevailing at that time. But, to the extent that Christ was regarded as the new aeon, it would be clear to anyone acquainted with astrology that he was born as the first fish of the Pisces era, and was doomed to die as the last ram of the declining Aries era."<sup>14</sup>

Jung asserted that "no connection of any kind can be proved between the figure of Christ and the inception of the astrological age of the fishes,"<sup>15</sup> seeing only "simultaneity of the fish symbolism of the Redeemer with the astrological symbol of the new aeon." This cautious scepticism reflects his intent "to throw light on the multifarious aspects of an archetype that manifests itself on the one hand in a personality, and on the other hand synchronistically, in a moment of time determined in advance, before Christ's birth."



Jung's discussion provides a basis for analysis of symbols which show much more widespread precessional imagery than he was aware of. For example, the major Christian symbol the Chi Rho Cross shows how the original Christ story used astronomical observation of the slow shift of the heavens as its foundational structure. The arms of the chi (X :  $\chi$ ) match to the heavenly circles of the path of the sun and the equator, while the Rho (P :  $\rho$ ) matches the line of stars in the first fish of Pisces, making this core symbol, based on Plato's cosmology, a map of the heavens at the alpha and omega moment when the spring point crossed into Pisces in 21 AD.

This esoteric meaning, if it really existed, was that Jesus as the 'p' symbolises the first fish of Pisces, while the  $\chi$  symbolises the sun path and the equator. Any such discussion would have been hotly suppressed by Christendom as Gnostic heresy. The Roman Empire made any questioning of dogma or possession of heretical literature a capital crime as part of its incorporation of the literal gospels into



its security and stability doctrine from the settlement of Constantine. This intimidating literal approach to faith remained the dominant social paradigm of western Christendom for over a thousand years, only starting to break down with the scientific enlightenment. Even so, secret esoteric traditions appear to have continued through the hidden byways of western mysticism. These Russian icons from the fifteenth century use the Chi Rho structure to depict the resurrection, in images that also reflect, consciously or unconsciously, the observation of the sky at the moment of the dawn of the Age of Pisces at the time of Christ.

The ancient origins of this cross symbolism are indicated in Jung's comment that, "long before, the archetype had been written in the heavens by projection." Old Testament books such as Genesis, Daniel, Isaiah and Ezekiel can be studied in this light, interpreting the prophecies of the incarnation of Jesus Christ as symbolising the astronomical prediction of the movement of the spring point of the sun into Pisces as the expected messianic dawn of a new age. Such a prediction of the movement of

<sup>13</sup> 145

<sup>14</sup> 147

<sup>15</sup> 148

the equinox would have been within the ability of Babylonian astronomers and their Jewish captives, as it is less complex than their documented ability to predict eclipses from around 1000 BC.

Aeon is a term that appears throughout the New Testament, translated as Age, World and Time. The apocalyptic idea of the end of the world at doomsday is discussed in the Bible as the end of the age, but more as a time of transformation and renewal than of destruction, for example in the line from Revelation 21:5 'behold I make all things new'. Jung interpreted this transition as the end of the cosmic age of Pisces and dawn of the Age of Aquarius, in a reading that harks back to Gnostic discussion of the twelve ages, termed the 'duodecad of the aeons'.

Such Gnostic cosmology was condemned by the Catholic Church as heresy, and Gnosticism became a capital crime for the millennium of Christendom, producing a highly intimidating political psychology which still cripples theology as an intellectual discipline. One example in the Bible to illustrate the tensions between Catholics and Gnostics is the description of Jesus as the King of Ages (Aionen) in Revelation 15. This was later edited to the rather similar Greek terms King of Nations or King of Saints (Agionen), with the apparent purpose to degnostify the faith by removing a cosmic reference. The church viewed language about zodiac ages, with its implicit comparison of Jesus to the sun, as unacceptable for literal orthodox faith. My sense, building on Jung's analysis in *Aion*, is that the solar allegory of zodiac ages is central to the Jesus story.

Ancient Gnosticism, and its successor movements in mystical traditions, endorsed the Christian view that the world is in the grip of mass delusion, but interpreted this delusion differently. Gnostic ideas were in turn twisted by the false memes of heresiologists, concealing how gospel critiques of humanity as spiritually blind and deaf align to the Gnostic views that the world rulers are evil, and that very different ideas are needed to bring a paradigm shift to prevent a slide into catastrophe.

Jung's sympathy for the Gnostic moral framework offers pointers towards a new paradigm, a new scientific framework of interpretation, integrating depth psychology with scientific cosmology and Christian theology. The new paradigm that Jung intimated in *Aion* is a Gnostic Reformation aiming to reconcile Christian faith with reason and knowledge in a scientific approach to religion based on visual cosmology, rekindling an older deeper wisdom. By interpreting Jesus Christ as a symbol of the connection between earth and the visible heavens seen in the Pisces Ichthys Fish imagery, Jung opened all the Bible stories to a similar level of scrutiny and scepticism as applies to any other factual claims. In *Aion* he wove psychology together with astronomy and theology to develop an interdisciplinary account of the whole of reality as perceived from an imagined universal human perspective. Religious cosmology aims toward an ideal viewpoint that places the whole of reality under the eye of eternity, connecting the shifting uncertainty of mundane existence with the stable certainty of a constant truth. This goal of connection between time and eternity is something that Christology has traditionally asserted in its dogmatic union between the temporal Jesus and the eternal Christ. In *Aion*, Jung applied the tools of depth psychology, especially the analysis of unconscious meaning in symbols, to explore these old teachings of Christ as mediator against the empirical basis of zodiac symbols.

Jung's aim was to see how ancient visions connecting the world and the cosmos in the person of Jesus Christ provided symbolic meaning that remains relevant and transformative today. In a move that may appear surprising and heretical, he approached this big conceptual topic against the ancient claim to find meaning in the stars through astrology. By psychoanalysing the Christian symbol of the fish against the slow movement of the heavens visible to the ancients, and against related astrological symbols, Jung presented the precession of the equinoxes as a key to interpreting the Gospels.

The Zodiac Age of Pisces is defined by the precession of the equinox through the constellation of Pisces the Fishes. Jung analysed this concept of a Zodiac Age as a cosmic framework of the collective unconscious, a visible pattern reflecting messianic symbolism of Jesus Christ, a story of 'on earth as in heaven.' By using astronomy to explain the hidden psychology of faith, Jung sought to integrate theology into a scientific hypothesis. His research aimed to methodically analyse Christian origins and history, looking to place Christian symbols and beliefs within a coherent story. Joseph Campbell drew on such ideas from Jung in his study of the power of myth to argue that our sense of cosmic awe seeks rational explanation to underpin social ritual and personal identity. This psychological connection between reverential wonder at the cosmos and authentic selfhood underpins Christian identity in the Ichthys fish symbol denoting Jesus Christ, Saviour, Son of God. My view is that the early Christian use of this secret Piscean symbol could well have indicated shared understanding of the story of Jesus as representing the new age of the fishes seen in the shift of the skies.



For Jung, Gnostic ideas linked to hermetic mystery and alchemy had a psychological importance forgotten by the church. To illustrate how the Gnostics had a deep wisdom, analysis of the statue of the God Aion in the frontispiece of *Aion* can help us see how ancient mystery religions could have



interpreted time as the framework of existence. The statue of Aion is a figure known as a tetramorph, uniting four living creatures in a single body. Aion has a lion's head and man's body with eagle wings encircled by six coils of a snake.

This bizarre and monstrous image, linked to the snake-lion demiurge, may appear a surprising choice for Jung, but its symbolism is profound. Aion was the Mithraic God of Time, and is an iconic symbol for Gnostic ideas. There is an obvious cosmic meaning in this statue, linked to Christian discussion of the cross. The star groups of Leo the Lion and Aquarius the Man are opposite each other in the sky, and therefore provide the axis illustrated by the man-lion of Aion, inverting the sphinx. There are six months between the time when the sun passes through these stars each summer and winter. So each coil of the snake symbolises one month, or one zodiac sign.



Further to this annual meaning, the snake also depicts the long-term framework of precession, and this looks closer to the meaning Jung sees. The head of the snake, like the divine royal Egyptian Uraeus, appears at the forehead of the lion. My reading is that this use of the snake as a symbol of cyclic wisdom indicates the Gnostic cosmology of zodiac ages. Other Aion statues show him atop a globe crossed by an X, illustrating the intersection of the sun path and equator that forms the precession measure, a forerunner of the Christian Chi Rho cross. This Roman fresco of Aion makes the zodiac theme explicit, with the God standing within the zodiac circle.<sup>16</sup>



The snake in the Aion statue coils six times around the man-lion axis followed by a seventh point of integration at the heads. This structure can be considered against the Biblical cosmology from the Genesis myth of six days of creation followed by a Sabbath rest. The zodiac ages have two thousand years for each cycle. The tribulation period of 3.5 ages (times, time and half a time<sup>17</sup>) correlates with how the church fathers saw the



Genesis week of creation as allegory for the seven thousand years from fall to redemption. Bishop Irenaeus used the Biblical theme from 2 Peter and Psalm 90 that a thousand years are as a day for God to predict a Sabbath millennium of reconciliation, integration and repair after six thousand years of fall from grace into corruption, saying "in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded."<sup>18</sup> Numbers 21.9 presented the snake theme with Moses venerating a snake on a pole<sup>19</sup>, which as Jung noted in *Aion*, is an image repeated in John 3:14 as the symbol of the cross, where Jesus says "just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up."

Given that the Gospels say Jesus only spoke to the public in parables, we can explore this archetype of the snake on a pole with its connection to the cross as allegory for the same cosmic vision of the structure of time portrayed in the statue of Aion, under the framework of cultural evolution. A hypothesis that I find persuasive is that the Gnostic origins of the Christian idea of the Logos or word made flesh used the real cosmic pattern of time visible in precession, with Christ imagined as an earthly reflection of the real heavenly pattern of time seen in the zodiac ages. My key point in this paper is that this symbolic model coheres with the real structure of time observed by ancient visual astronomy, and that this observation is reflected in different ways in successive mythologies.

<sup>16</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aion\\_\(deity\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aion_(deity))

<sup>17</sup> Daniel 7:25; Revelation 11:2-3

<sup>18</sup> Irenaeus *Against Heresies*, Book 5, Chapter 28 <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103528.htm>

<sup>19</sup> Mural from All Saints' Anglican Church, Margaret Street, London UK.



The myth of Aion reflects a profound ancient story of the structure of time that provided intellectual foundations for Christian myths. In the big arena of cultural evolution, Aion therefore appears as a precursor to the Christian icon of Christ in Majesty, seen here in the mandorla depicting the cosmic Christ in the intersecting 'Vesica Piscis' fish circles surrounded by the four living creatures the lion, man, eagle and ox. The continuity and meaning of this tetramorph has its source in observation of the stars, symbolising the four corners of the visible heavens marked by the constellations of Leo the Lion, Aquarius the Man, Scorpio the eagle/scorpion and Taurus the Bull. The Christian quaternity is a variant of Aion's use of the lion, man, eagle and snake. Jung explored this cultural evolution by comparing it to an older myth that shows the power of this image of the four corners of the heavens, in which "Osiris climbed up to heaven. The floor of heaven consists of an iron plate. The four corners of the iron plate rest on four pillars, corresponding to the four cardinal points."<sup>20</sup>

Imagery of Aion is implicitly linked, through the six coils of the snake, to Jesus Christ as the mythical King of Ages, a Biblical idea that draws from the Gnostic idea of twelve ages as the cosmic framework of time, a theme interpreted in Biblical texts such as the prologue of John and the cosmic hymn of Colossians 1 as the logos or eternal rational word of nature. At the time of the Christian incarnation story, with Jesus perceived as marking the alpha-omega moment at the turning point of time, the spring point of the sun left the first constellation Aries and entered the last constellation Pisces. Ancient observation of this event correlates to the myth of the word made flesh as a symbol of cosmic harmony and wholeness at the transition point between last and first, a theme also present in the timing of Christmas and Easter as the turning points of light and life in the year.

These ideas uniting astronomy and theology tell a story about the collective unconscious in visions of the cosmos with deep meaning for psychology. Ancient astronomy provided a basis for symbolic interpretation of the movement of the sun through the fishes over the Age of Pisces. This observational cosmogony provides a scientific framework for religious perception of the structure of time, culminating in a new idea implicit in *Aion*, that the old myth of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ can be interpreted as the dawn of the New Age of Aquarius.

Jung introduced these themes in *Aion* by noting that "historical speculations about time were influenced, as the Apocalypse shows, by astrological ideas [of] the symbol of the Fishes for the Pisces aeon as the synchronistic concomitant of two thousand years of Christian development." Jung's invocation of synchronicity, the idea that everything happening at one moment in time shares a common character, united in the single river of time, provides a way to explore these speculative questions in a rigorous way.

Jung's proper scientific approach led him to recognise the great uncertainty about this material. He expressed doubt about whether the connection between Christ and Pisces was an intentional construction by the first Christians, asking instead if it may all just be an unconscious coincidence, given the absence of simple proof. All we have are the fugitive traces of allegory. My view, building upon Jung's foundation, is that these traces deserve attention to research how empirical cosmology was connected to Christian symbolism. This research builds upon Jung's observation that the idea of the 'Christian aeon' presupposed an end with the Second Coming, coinciding with the astrological conception of the "Platonic month" of the Fishes, and emerging from a milieu "saturated with Persian and Jewish ideas about the beginning and end of time."

Jung assessed these world historical ideas by analysing the general psychology of the self, looking at to what extent these religious symbols are conscious. But rather than starting from the isolated conscious ego of Descartes' cogito, seen in the method of scientific enlightenment with its myth of the individual, Jung began by recognising the unconscious as "the unknown in the inner world." Seeing the connection between Christian fish symbols and zodiac ages requires analysis of the features of human identity that are "impersonal and collective. ... an omnipresent, unchanging, and everywhere identical quality or substrate of the psyche per se." Depth psychology can analyse the unconscious in concepts such as the shadow, the anima and the animus, complexes and projections, all based on Jung's theory that "the contents of the collective unconscious are invariably archetypes that were present from the beginning." Far from a simple Cartesian rationality, Jung contended that our "projections change the world into the replica of one's own unknown face", and that when the

<sup>20</sup> 187

unconscious is not considered we descend into “an autistic condition in which one dreams a world whose reality remains forever unattainable”. He described the unconscious feminine force called the anima as “an unconscious factor which spins the illusions that veil our world.”

Jung saw wholeness emerging in “symbols of unity and totality”, which he said “necessarily bring us to Christ, because he is the still living myth of our culture. He is our culture hero, who, regardless of his historical existence, embodies the myth of the divine Primordial Man, the mystic Adam.”<sup>21</sup> It is worth pausing to note Jung’s reference here to the possibility that Jesus may have been entirely fictional, which if true would make the literal truth of the Gospels irrelevant to the salvation message. More important for Jung than what really happened is the purely mythic idea that Jesus “occupies the centre of the Christian mandala, and is the Lord of the Tetramorph, i.e., the four symbols of the evangelists, which are like the four columns of his throne. He is in us and we in him. His kingdom is the pearl of great price, the treasure buried in the field, the grain of mustard seed which will become a great tree, and the heavenly city. As Christ is in us, so also is his heavenly kingdom.”<sup>22</sup> Jung said “These few, familiar references should be sufficient to make the psychological position of the Christ symbol quite clear. Christ exemplifies the archetype of the self.”<sup>23</sup> “Christ represents a totality of a divine or heavenly kind, a glorified man, a son of God unspotted by sin. As the Second Adam, Christ corresponds to the first Adam before the Fall, when Adam was still a pure image of God.”<sup>24</sup>

This Biblical material brought Jung to an extended discussion of how “the God-image in man was not destroyed by the Fall but was only damaged and corrupted, and can be restored through God’s grace.” He saw the clash between “spirituality striving for the heights” and “materialistic earth-bound passion” as producing “the colossal role that evil plays in the world.” Jung contended that evil is “a daemonic claim to power on the part of the unconscious, an unavoidable consequence anticipated in the figure of the Antichrist and reflected in the course of contemporary events, whose nature is in accord with the Christian aeon of the Fishes, now running to its end.”<sup>25</sup>

Jung said “In the world of Christian ideas Christ undoubtedly represents the self. The psychological self is a transcendent concept, expressing the totality of conscious and unconscious contents...; as an archetypal symbol it is a God-image and therefore universal and eternal, ...the world-soul slumbering in matter.” This link drawn by Jung between the authentic self and the soul of the world is like WB Yeats’ poem *The Second Coming*,<sup>26</sup> with its “vast image out of spiritus mundi waking from twenty centuries of stony sleep”, a sphinx with similarity to Aion. Mentioning Yeats as a Gnostic mystic, it is worth noting that his book *A Vision* ranks with *Aion* as a key document for the new paradigm based on the temporal framework of precession.

Jung said<sup>27</sup> the parallels between Christ, the self and the fish need not involve an assertion of metaphysical faith. Rather, after Feuerbach,<sup>28</sup> Jung interpreted images of God and Christ as psychological projections of religious fantasy, leading him to ask why the ancients believed that they had said something important about Christ with their fish symbol. Like an art historian,<sup>29</sup> Jung sought “to trace the influences which have contributed towards the formation of a particular Christ-image”, seeing the archetype as “a living and ubiquitous psychic fact”, attaching “greater importance to the immediate and living presence of the archetype than to the idea of the historical Christ.”

This Christology of living presence led Jung to discuss the fish<sup>30</sup> symbol as “one of the oldest allegories”, seeing ICHTHYS, the old Greek fish acrostic for Jesus Christ Son of God, Saviour, as “the symbolical designation for something far more complex,” “an object that is not completely knowable.” Jung said<sup>31</sup> the source of the fish symbol is astrology, and asserted that Danish theologian Friedrich Münter<sup>32</sup> was the first to draw attention to the stellar link, in the early nineteenth century.



---

<sup>21</sup> 69

<sup>22</sup> 4

<sup>23</sup> 5

<sup>24</sup> 3-5

<sup>25</sup> 114

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/43290>

<sup>27</sup> 122

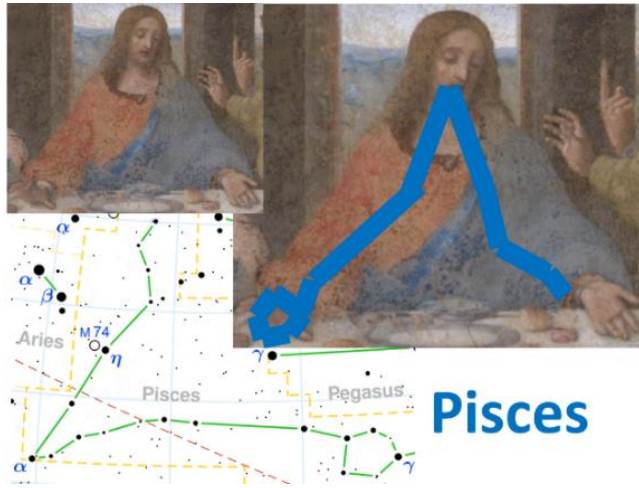
<sup>28</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ludwig-feuerbach/>

<sup>29</sup> 123

<sup>30</sup> 127

<sup>31</sup> 128

<sup>32</sup> [http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb10222411\\_00005.html](http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb10222411_00005.html) p60



My own research shows earlier use of the zodiac fish in Christianity, including, in a remarkable instance hidden in plain sight, in *The Last Supper* by Leonardo Da Vinci, where the figure of Christ is modelled on the constellation of Pisces and the twelve apostles are modelled on the stars of the zodiac in order. In looking at the extensive role of psychological suppression in religion, Leonardo's secrecy about this cosmic template shows the danger of this heretical material. The failure of anyone to notice and publicise his use of the stars for five centuries despite its obvious use and coherence with Leonardo's broader hermetic views looks like a symptom of the mass psychological trauma

inflicted by literal Christian orthodoxy. Similarly, the failure to notice how the Chi Rho cross maps the precession is a highly repressive indicator.

In discussing ancient knowledge of precession of the equinoxes, Jung said<sup>33</sup> the Church Father "Origen, helped out by the observations and calculations of Hipparchus, used precession as a cogent argument against an astrology based on constellations." He said Origen's *Commentary on Genesis* mentioned "a theory that the zodiacal circle, just like the planets, is carried from west to east within a century by one degree." Noting how the vision of zodiac ages aligns to the Biblical idea of 7,000 years from fall to redemption, Jung observed that the future movement of "the spring-point into Aquarius, the next aeon, that of the Water Carrier" was understood by ancient seers. Jung said in *Aion* that modern astronomy calculates the total cycle time of the Great Year as 25,725.6 years. Showing the difficulty of precise measurement, more recent astronomy has refined this number up by 46 years to 25,771.5 years. Jung's thoughts<sup>34</sup> on "the approach of the next Platonic month, namely Aquarius," led him to a complex moral discussion of whether evil is an absence of the good or a cosmic principle.

Jung summarised his argument in *Aion*, saying<sup>35</sup> "through the precession of the equinoxes, the spring-point moved into the sign of Pisces and thus inaugurates an age in which the "fish" was used as a name for the God who became a man, who was born as a fish and was sacrificed as a ram, who had fishermen for disciples and wanted to make them fishers of men, who fed the multitude with miraculously multiplying fishes, who was himself eaten as a fish, and whose followers are little fishes.... Widespread knowledge of astrology would account for at least some of this symbolism in certain Gnostic-Christian circles."

But then Jung appeared on the surface to backtrack into scholarly caution, saying of the Gospels that "we have no reason whatever to suppose that those stories are disguised astrological myths. On the contrary, one gets the impression that the fish episodes are entirely natural happenings and that there is nothing further to be looked for behind them."<sup>36</sup> This presents a challenge in how we might read the Gospels as presenting a precessional cosmology, although Jung mocks his own comment by calling the fish images in the Bible 'Just So' story, and his 'entirely natural' comment includes miracles which appear more parabolic than literal. More recent scholarship is providing evidence to answer Jung's doubts. Independent theologians such as Richard Carrier, Earl Doherty and DM Murdock argue the most elegant explanation for the New Testament is that the Christ story evolved as fiction from older myths, with no individual Christ from whom the stories sprang. My view is that the hypothesis of Jesus as a myth emerging from Gnostic mystery wisdom schools provides a plausible basis to analyse the fish symbolism as conscious allegory for the precession of the equinox into the constellation of Pisces.

Jung answered his question of the lack of explicit data by positing that the authors of the gospel may have kept their celestial blueprint secret, in view of the abundant correlations. He said: "Being the twelfth sign of the Zodiac, Pisces denotes the end of the astrological year and also a new beginning. This characteristic coincides with the claim of Christianity to be the beginning and end of all things, and with its eschatological expectation of the end of the world and the coming of God's kingdom."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> 136

<sup>34</sup> 142

<sup>35</sup> 148

<sup>36</sup> 148

<sup>37</sup> 49

“Thus the astrological characteristics of the fish contain essential components of the Christian myth; first; the cross; second the moral conflict and its splitting into the figures of Christ and Antichrist; third., the motif of the son of a virgin; fourth, the classical mother-son tragedy; fifth, the danger at birth; and sixth, the saviour and bringer of healing. It is therefore not beside the point to relate the designation of Christ as a fish to the new aeon then dawning. If this relationship existed even in antiquity, it must obviously have been a tacit assumption or one that was purposely kept secret; for, to my knowledge, there is no evidence in the old literature that the Christian fish symbolism was derived from the zodiac.”<sup>38</sup>

The reasons Jung cited for the absence of records of early knowledge of precession, recognising the possibility of deliberate secrecy among secret societies, do not include what may have been the real cause – that the late Roman Empire adopted dogmatic Christian faith as its security framework and therefore it and its successors actively destroyed records of perceived heresy. Any suggestion that the cosmic New Age of Pisces provided the celestial blueprint for the imagination of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Son of God would have been destroyed by imperial censorship throughout Christendom, given its close link to the heretical idea that Jesus did not really come in the flesh. In saying “There are no grounds whatever for supposing that the zodiac of the Fishes could have served as the Ichthys prototype,” Jung neglected the problem of deliberate destruction and suppression – that the imperial dogma of the historical Jesus actively suppressed, ignored, denied and forgot the Gnostic mystery origins of Christianity. Even the Gospel writers adopted the stratagem of presenting their real ideas in coded spiritual allegory, indicating that the surrounding culture was highly repressive and incomprehending. My view is that the fugitive traces of a cosmic Christ seen in the New Testament provide compelling grounds to see that the Gospels contain abundant precessional imagery, seeing the new age as the zodiac Age of Pisces, and looking back to the earlier Age of Aries and forward to the Age of Aquarius as the time of the Last Judgment.

Looking at the Pisces constellation, Jung said<sup>39</sup> “The northerly, or easterly, fish, which the spring-point entered at about the beginning of our era, is joined to the southerly, or westerly, fish by the so-called commissure.... Since then the spring-point has moved along the southern edge of the second fish, and will enter Aquarius in the course of the third millennium. Astrologically interpreted, the designation of Christ as one of the fishes identifies him with the first fish, the vertical one.”

Jung suggested “it is possible that the fishes in our text are not a conscious reference to astrological ideas but rather a product of the unconscious. That the unconscious is quite capable of “reflections” of this kind we know well enough from dreams and the analysis of myths and fairytales. The image of the fishes as such belonged to the common stock of conscious ideas and may unconsciously have expressed the meaning in symbolic form.”<sup>40</sup> While Jung’s suggestion of unconscious infusion of the Pisces imagery into the Christ story is a hypothesis worth exploring, the extent of concealed precession imagery in the Gospels and Revelation makes deliberate concealed intent the more plausible explanation. For example, the miracle of the loaves and fishes, which appears six times in the Gospels, can be read as a parable for the observed shift of the equinoxes into Virgo and Pisces at the time of Christ as a symbol of abundant creativity, and of how this cosmic myth of as above so below was not understood by the public.

Jung’s argument about how the fish could have unconsciously become the basis of the Christ story involves a theory of neurosis which requires that the Gnostic mystery schools could not have mapped the heavens to earth as a blueprint for the symbolism of Jesus and that the abundant fish imagery in the Bible and Christian symbols only appears by accident. He says “the self is a part of that nature which was bodied forth by God’s original oneness with the world. This explains neurotic disturbances which arise from the fact that certain contents are constellated in the unconscious but cannot be assimilated owing to the lack of concepts that would “grasp” them. That is why it is so extremely important to tell children fairytales and legends, and to inculcate religious ideas (dogmas) into grown-ups, because these things are instrumental symbols with whose help unconscious contents can be canalized into consciousness, interpreted, and integrated.”

And yet despite this idea of the Pisces imagery as an accidental fairytale, Jung noted the potential for the ancient authors to understand this symbolism. The supposed ‘lack of concepts to grasp them’ is more a function of political benefit and control within literal orthodoxy than of inability to understand the allegory. The virulence of early church politics rapidly congealed into unquestioned dogma, making open discussion impossible.

---

<sup>38</sup> 177

<sup>39</sup> 149

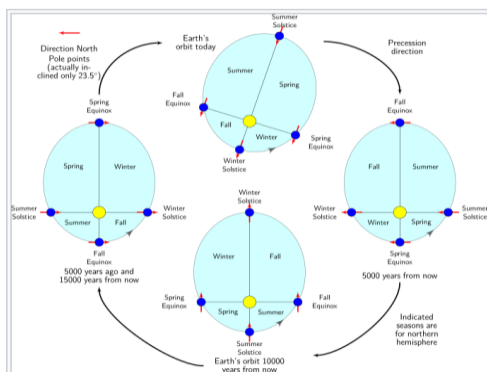
<sup>40</sup> 231

Jung said “Gnostic systems, with the help of Greek philosophy and the mythologies of the Near and Middle East, together with Christian dogmatics and Jewish cabalism, made extremely interesting attempts, from the modern point of view, to synthesize a unitary vision of the world in which the physical and the mystical aspects played equal parts. Had this attempt succeeded, we would not be witnessing today the curious spectacle of two parallel world-views neither of which knows, or wishes to know, anything about the other.”

These conflicting worldviews, Gnosticism and orthodoxy, provoked intense early conflict, with the Epistles of John and the Church Fathers condemning Gnosticism as heretical. A better explanation of the relationship is that Gnosticism understood orthodoxy very well as a political corruption of faith into literalism, whereas orthodoxy saw Gnostic cosmic symbolism as inadequate for building a mass movement, preferring the simplified literal reading of salvation through belief rather than the difficult path of knowledge reliant on education and literacy. This strategic rejection of Gnosis enabled the church to mediate between the masses and its ideas of God and to develop the alliance of throne and altar which then dominated European security throughout the centuries of Christendom.

On the timing of the Age of Aquarius, Jung said “since the delimitation of the constellations is known to be somewhat arbitrary, this date is very indefinite. It refers to the actual constellation of fixed stars, not to the zodiac divided into sectors of 30° each. Astrologically the beginning of the next aeon, according to the starting-point you select, falls between A.D. 2000 and 2200.”

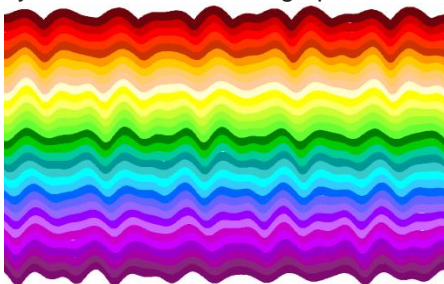
My view is that we can analyse this question against the objective framework of physical astronomy, seeing the old methods cited by Jung of determining zodiac ages from alignments to fixed stars as of more poetic than scientific interest. There are two primary scientific considerations, the role of precession in driving the ice age cycle, and the resonance between earth’s precession period and the overall solar system centre of mass.



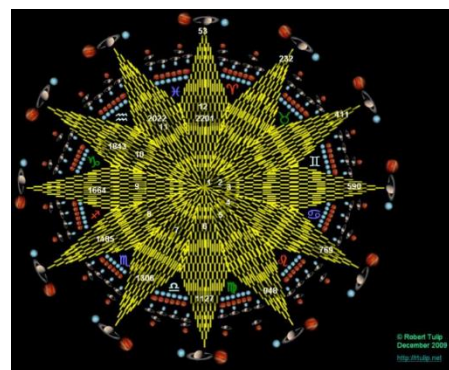
Effects of precession on the seasons (using the Northern Hemisphere terms).

The glacial cycle driven by precession had a low point in 1246 AD, when the closest orbital point to the sun, earth’s perihelion, crossed the December solstice, in its cycle of about 21,600 years as shown in this diagram.<sup>41</sup> The ‘cosmic year’ produced by this cycle puts the autumnal fall phase at 5000-0 BC, and the winter phase at 0-5000 AD. These phases are defined by the annual perihelion date which is now about 5 January and advancing by one day every sixty years. In the Holocene, the glacial pattern was masked by agricultural emissions. This natural framework of time corresponds to the old Indian myth of the Yuga, the cycle of light and dark symbolised by gold, silver, bronze and iron ages.

The second key astronomical factor in millennial age analysis, in my view, is solar system resonance. Alignment between earth’s spin wobble and the repetitive wave function of the gas giant orbits is seen in the recurring stable pattern of the solar system barycentre. I made these two empirical diagrams to illustrate this astronomy. The first is a map of the wave function of the solar system driven by the gas giant orbits using NASA data over 6000 years, with each twelve lines forming a zodiac age period, and the second is a star clock model of the gas giant cycles in the Age of Pisces. This systemic wave function of the solar system reinforces the age period of 2148 years produced by



earth’s wobble, providing a physical framework to consider the Age of Pisces as running from 53 AD to 2201, divided into twelve orbital periods of 179 years. The merit of this empirical structure of time is that



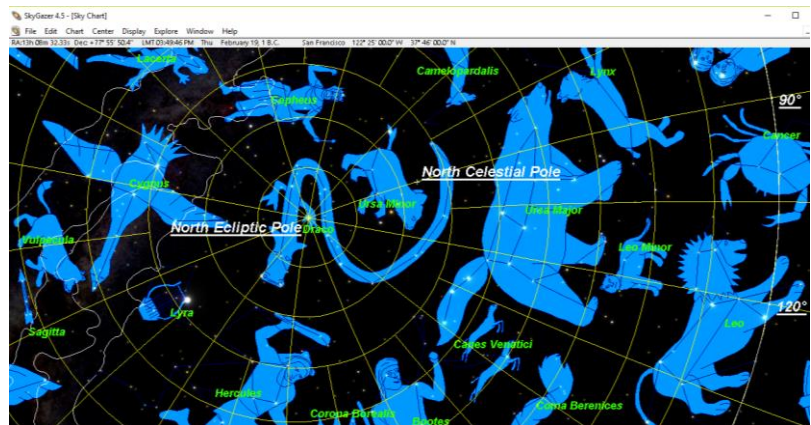
each of the twelve periods (or houses) in the age is opened by a triple conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn and Neptune, drifting in and out of orb over the age and moving through the twelve signs in order from Aries to Pisces.

<sup>41</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milankovitch\\_cycles#/media/File:Precession\\_and\\_seasons.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milankovitch_cycles#/media/File:Precession_and_seasons.svg)

Jung discussed precessional images in myth, saying “shepherd, ram, and lamb symbolism coincides with the expiring aeon of Aries. In the first century of our era the two aeons overlap, and the two most important mystery gods of this period, Attis and Christ, are both characterized as shepherds, rams, and fishes.”<sup>42</sup> Jung said the woman of Revelation 12 with “on her head a crown of twelve stars”<sup>43</sup> evokes the pagan myth of the mother goddess. “Virgo, the zodiacal sign, carries either a wheat-sheaf or a child. Some authorities connect her with the “woman” of the Apocalypse.”<sup>44</sup>

The psychology of such religious symbols is remarkably complex. Jung illustrated his high regard for the value of enduring spiritual practice and the need for a Gnostic Reformation of Christianity, by observing that without a coherent approach, culture is imperilled by false beliefs. Nazism and communism are the great examples of the dangers of false spirituality, where ideologies with weak epistemic grounds prevent expression of authentic vision and personality. Jung said, in a general critique of such ideologies, that “any uncertainty about the God-image causes a profound uneasiness in the self, for which reason the question is generally ignored because of its painfulness. But that does not mean that it remains unasked in the unconscious. What is more, it is answered by views and beliefs like materialism, atheism, and similar substitutes, which spread like epidemics. They crop up wherever and whenever one waits in vain for the legitimate answer. The ersatz product represses the real question into the unconscious and destroys the continuity of historical tradition which is the hallmark of civilization. The result is bewilderment and confusion.... the corollary, the sinister reality of which is now being demonstrated before our eyes by the splitting of our world: the destruction of the God-image is followed by the annulment of the human personality. Materialistic atheism with its Utopian chimeras forms the religion of all those rationalistic movements which delegate the freedom of personality to the masses and thereby extinguish it. The advocates of Christianity squander their energies in the mere preservation of what has come down to them, with no thought of building on to their house and making it roomier. Stagnation in these matters is threatened in the long run with a lethal end.”<sup>45</sup> Jung’s image of the church “building on to their house” to avoid stagnation requires rigorous review of the foundations of Christian faith, shifting away from fantasy and instead providing a contestable basis in scientific knowledge.

The North Celestial Pole is another important point for precession. Jung mentions that “the Pole in ancient Egypt was the abode of the four sons of Horus; likewise Marduk, as the highest god, world-creator and ruler of its courses, is the Pole.” The celestial pole is perhaps the most vivid precessional image in the Bible. Revelation 13:2 describes a beast like a leopard with feet like a bear



and a mouth like a lion, to whom the dragon gave his power, throne and authority. This famously obscure symbol can be readily explained by comparison to the historically observable precession of the North Pole, which as Jung noted is associated with power and throne and authority in myth. Over the last few thousand years the pole has perceptibly moved from the constellation of the dragon Draco into the bear Ursa Minor, as seen in this diagram of its position at the time of Christ, showing the analogy to this otherwise cryptic apocalyptic imagery.

Jung observed the weakness of orthodoxy in his comment that “the content of faith, of the symbolum, is continually crumbling away. What is still left of it? The person of Jesus Christ? Even the most benighted layman knows that the personality of Jesus is, for the biographer, the obscurest item of all in the reports of the New Testament, and that, from a human and psychological point of view, his personality must remain an unfathomable enigma. As a Catholic writer pithily remarked, the gospels record the history of a man and a god at the same time. Or is only God left? In that case, what about the Incarnation, the most vital part of the symbolum? Nobody really understands what it is all about. How else can one explain the notorious drift away from dogma? Dogmas are a condensation or distillation of “sacred history,” of the myth of the divine being and his deeds.” This observation from

<sup>42</sup> 162

<sup>43</sup> 163

<sup>44</sup> 166

<sup>45</sup> 170

Jung of the contradictions and enigmas within the creeds illustrates how simplified literal faith evolved to serve political purposes, while placing anathema on the complex cosmic wisdom behind the original symbols. The only way to save Christianity is a return to the symbolic allegories which created it.

Jung sought to look behind and beneath the popular creeds to see how faith evolved as an instinctive response to collective unconscious driving forces, saying: "if we wish to gain a closer understanding of dogma, we must consider first the myths of the Near and Middle East that underlie Christianity, and then the whole of mythology as the expression of a universal disposition in man... There is, therefore, no justification for visualizing the archetype as anything other than the image of the instinct."<sup>46</sup>

The broad question here in the psychology of myth and the problem of repression calls us to ask to what extent the original stories consciously hid their real meaning, or to what extent this factual substrate was unconscious. Jung's view was that "myths and fairytales give expression to unconscious processes, and their retelling causes these processes to come alive again and be recollected, thereby re-establishing the connection between conscious and unconscious. What the separation of the two psychic halves means, the psychiatrist knows only too well. He knows it as dissociation of the personality, the root of all Neuroses."

Perhaps the ancient authors deserve more credit that Jung's neurosis theory implies for knowing exactly what they were doing rather than presenting symbols in an unconscious way. A big factor in the history of religion is how western linear thought has assumed its own superiority over eastern cyclic traditions. Jung noted this conflict in *Aion* with his observation that "tao is where yang and yin are united. Tao is the "valley spirit," the winding course of a river." Such a natural Taoist theology conflicts with western constructed supernatural ideas, and again, invites us to consider to what extent the western empires succeeded in obliterating overt traces of a much more widespread ancient mystery wisdom culture, and then assumed their own false constructions were universal.

*Aion* provides important methodology for the reconstruction of coherent religious thought out of the ashes of literal orthodoxy. Jung quotes Jesus in saying "new wine should not be put into old bottles", and goes on to say that "like a snake changing its skin, the old myth needs to be clothed anew in every renewed age if it is not to lose its therapeutic effect." His explanation of Christian symbols under the framework of the cosmology of precession serves this purpose of therapeutic reformation, looking beneath the received views for a deeper and older wisdom.

He directly investigated this problem of finding meaning in old myth by reference to the cultural politics of the fall from grace, with a harsh critique of the absolute views of the scientific enlightenment and how materialist thought has enabled rationalist terror by communist regimes, saying "the present tendency to destroy all tradition or render it unconscious could interrupt the normal process of development for several hundred years and substitute an interlude of barbarism. Loss of roots and lack of tradition neurotize the masses and prepare them for collective hysteria. Collective hysteria calls for collective therapy, which consists in abolition of liberty and terrorization. Where rationalistic materialism holds sway, states tend to develop less into prisons than into lunatic asylums."

Gnostic thought has survived due to the ability of successive generations to think for themselves and see both the weakness of church dogma and the strength of what Jung called an 'affinity magnet' between Christ and unconscious enduring archetypes. One recent popular use of Gnostic ideas was in *The Matrix* film series, where the Christ figure Neo confronts the world-creating archons of the Matrix, evil intelligent machines which have deluded the whole world into believing fantasy. Jung pointed towards such a Gnostic vision in *Aion*, saying "I have tried to indicate the kind of psychic matrix into which the Christ-figure was assimilated in the course of the centuries. Had there not been an affinity magnet between the figure of the Redeemer and certain contents of the unconscious, the human mind would never have been able to perceive the light shining in Christ and seize upon it so passionately."<sup>47</sup> Asserting a complex mysterious psychological relationship between known and unknown factors in the evolution of myth, Jung says "the noncanonical fish symbol led us into this psychic matrix and thus into a realm of experience where the unknowable archetypes become living things."

Jung's analysis of the fish symbolism in the Bible and Christian tradition asked the central psychological question of how far it involved conscious cosmology and to what extent it is an instinctive response to correspondences between heaven and earth. The problem with the instinct hypothesis is that it means the ancients never noticed the match between the Pisces fish and the

---

<sup>46</sup> 7

<sup>47</sup> 283

Christian fish symbols, despite what Jung called their 'saturation' in a world of astrological symbols. Jung wrote that "the fish symbol is a spontaneous assimilation of the Christ-figure of the gospels, and is thus a symptom which shows us in what manner and with what meaning the symbol was assimilated by the unconscious." This 'spontaneous symptom' theory must reject any intentional creation of the fish symbol based on the precession, meaning the authors of the gospels did not apply the central 'on earth as in heaven' principle of the Lord's Prayer in their fish symbolism for Jesus.

Jung advanced the unconscious instinct theory by saying that when "Christ was invoked as "Ichthys," this name referred to what had come up out of the depths. The fish symbol is thus the bridge between the historical Christ and the psychic nature of man, where the archetype of the Redeemer dwells." Interpretation of the fish as 'out of the depths' of mystery contrasts to the 'down from the sky' theory of observation and plan of deliberate Gnostic cosmology. Such invocation of unconscious depths suggests modern analysts are smarter than the ancient seers, and only now can we start to deconstruct the real psychology of religious symbols. I prefer to think that so much wisdom was lost to the bullying mendacity of the church during its long period of domination of culture that we struggle to imagine the riches of ancient thought and to see its vulnerability to destruction. When we see a burnt field we cannot imagine the forest which once stood there. The lack of records of ancient secrets appears better explained by the view that they did not imagine their secret traditions could so readily be obliterated by fire and sword. Transmission by spoken voice to listening ear can readily be broken by concerted institutional suppression. We know the early Christians drew fishes in the sand as a secret symbol. The meaning and purpose of this action may be far better informed as a sign of the New Age cosmology of the Age of Pisces, which all could readily see in the sky after simple explanation.

Jung's analysis of the unconscious depth of the fish symbol is that "Christ became an inner experience, the "Christ within.", ... a new symbol in place of the fish: a psychological concept of human wholeness... expressed in a conceptual or "philosophic" symbol. This, compared with the mute and unconscious fish, marks a distinct increase in conscious development." I don't accept this implication from Jung that Christ was a more evolved spiritual image replacing the mute fish archetype, since we have even less reason to consider Christ evolved from earlier fish images than that the fish symbol of Pisces primarily arose at the time the Gospels were written.

Jung expressed his theory of Gnosticism as a bearer of unconscious symbols by saying "depths of the unconscious are an equivalent of the historical Christ figure. We meet these images and ideas in Gnosticism, [which...] was, in the main, a product of cultural assimilation and is therefore of the greatest interest in elucidating and defining the contents constellated by prophecies about the Redeemer, or by his appearance in history, or by the synchronicity of the archetype." Again Jung invites us to speculate that Gnostics were at the mercy of unconscious symbols, where I would contend the more compelling reading is that the Pisces fish symbolism in the Gospels was a deliberate plan for a cosmic messianic vision, initially published in concealed form in the Gospels in line with Christ's statement<sup>48</sup> that he would only speak in parables to the general public while reserving knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom for initiates. These secret doctrines were subsequently shattered into fragments by the power of literal barbarism, leaving behind only what the philosopher Martin Heidegger called 'fugitive traces'.

Jung concluded an extended discussion in *Aion* of symbolic meaning of images of God by exploring how "psychology can establish the presence of pictorial symbols [that...] have the character of "wholeness"."<sup>49</sup> In bringing us back to his original theme of wholeness, with its links to the healing power of integrity and vision, Jung saw deep unconscious meaning within mysterious Christian symbols such as the fish and the snake. This symbolic method builds a powerful platform to interpret the authentic ethics and ontology concealed behind the implausible surface of faith.

In this essentially spiritual work on what he called "the symbolism of psychic wholeness" Jung applied the sound principle that "psychology is not in a position to make metaphysical statements. It can ... never prove that the God-image is God himself, or that the self takes the place of God." Such caution about metaphysical overreach raises complex problems, since in a sense all abstract ideas (such as nature, reality, truth, beauty, time, causality and love) can be regarded as metaphysical, given their status as necessary truths of experience, even while they do not involve supernatural assertions. Jung used the term metaphysics in its popular meaning of supernatural belief, seeing the speculative and dubious basis of literal faith as a reason for the difficult reception such beliefs find in the secular world.

---

<sup>48</sup> [Matt 13:10 ff](#)

<sup>49</sup> 304

The psychological methods that Jung applied are evidence-based and therefore are conceptually superior to the traditional authority of theology, insisting on a theory of knowledge as contestable rather than alleging revealed truths. Consider this statement from Jung, that Christ “corresponds to what is empirically the most important archetype [man] and, as judge of the living and the dead and king of glory, to the real organizing principle of the unconscious, the quaternity, or squared circle of the self.”<sup>50</sup> Even in such a religious statement, Jung asserted that these traditional metaphysical symbols of Christ as judge and king have a real empirical basis observable by psychology, emerging in the paradox of a squared circle, seen in the iconic symbols such as the mandala.

He recognised the difficulty of finding an empirical meaning in obscure myths like the king of glory, but opened a path for this goal with his intuitive analysis of mysterious images such as the mandala with their concealed psychic power. Anticipating the complaints of the obscurity of such language, Jung argued “In saying this I have not done violence to anything; my views are based on the experience that mandala structures have the meaning and function of a centre of the unconscious personality.”<sup>51</sup>

And then in an astounding statement which can fruitfully reward our contemplation, “The quaternity of Christ, which must be borne in mind in this vision, is exemplified by the cross symbol, the King of Glory, and Christ as the year.” By linking Christ to the year, the direct implication is that Christ is a solar god, given the quaternary pattern of the seasons produced by the rise and fall of the sun with the year. The Christ=Sun equation is the key archetype of as above so below, in an idea most beautifully expressed by Leonardo da Vinci in his statement that “man is the image of the world”.<sup>52</sup> Jung continued Leonardo’s hermetic vision by linking the cross of Christ to the passage of the seasons as sharing the quaternary structure of terrestrial time.

The Gnostic church father Origen focussed on the cosmic correspondence of the spiritual inner man with heaven. This served for Jung “to give the reader a picture of the mentality of the first two centuries of our era.” Jung’s view was that “many of the Gnostics were nothing other than psychologists,” with a theory of psyche where “knowledge of man is the beginning of wholeness, but knowledge of God is perfect wholeness, facts that led psychologists to conjecture an archetype of wholeness, i.e., the self.” Jung held that symbols of wholeness appear in dreams and products of active imagination seen in circular and cruciform images. The cardinal points marking the four seasons and twelve months point both to a spiritual and an instinctual chthonic totality. The focus on the centre of the circle “leads easily enough to a relationship to the heavenly Pole and the starry bowl of heaven rotating round it.” All these images of the passage of the sun as the symbol of wholeness help to explain why ancient cosmology would have seen the movement of the spring point against the background stars as the primary marker of the turning of the ages.

My own interest in precession as a framework to analyse religion arose from comparing astrological claims about Pisces and Aquarius, leading to a view of history as evolving from the Piscean themes of compassionate mystical belief toward the Aquarian themes of innovative humanitarian knowledge. The material covered here demonstrates how *Aion* provides an astoundingly original and rigorous take on the meaning of Christian symbols. As we saw in the statue of Aion, the god of time, the coils of the snake represent both the year and the long slow patterns of time measured in zodiac ages, in a way that can be harmonised to the story of Jesus as an image of the connection between the human spirit and eternal truth. Jung said in *Aion* that the snake is an allegory of Christ, corresponding to the wisdom of the collective unconscious, and thereby symbolising the dragon guarding the treasure of enlightenment, as a symbol of wisdom, and hence of light, goodness, and healing.<sup>53</sup> The unconscious displays good qualities, such as normal instincts, appropriate reactions, realistic insights, creative impulses, etc. These questions of the moral quality of unconscious factors in personality were primary for Jung in his analysis of whether evil is more a distortion, a deformation, a misinterpretation and misapplication of facts than a rival cosmic principle to good. Jung said Gnostic theologians were influenced by the natural symbols of the Christian message. Distilling the message of *Aion*, Jung saw the integration of psychology, astronomy and theology as providing the basis for a Gnostic Reformation of Christianity, a return to authentic meaning of Christian symbols where their unconscious power emerges in their transmission of the main archetypal patterns of reality.

Robert Tulip has a Master of Arts Honours degree from Macquarie University for a thesis on [The Place of Ethics in Heidegger's Ontology](#) and a BA Honours from Macquarie for a philosophy thesis on precession in Christian cosmology. He lives in Canberra and can be contacted at [robert@rtulip.net](mailto:robert@rtulip.net)

---

<sup>50</sup> 65

<sup>51</sup> 66

<sup>52</sup> Leonardo da Vinci, Notebook 1162 <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5000/pg5000.html>

<sup>53</sup> 72