

**METHOD IN SOCIOLOGY**  
**On the Possibility of a ‘Consultational’ Sociology of Religion Based on  
the Work of Jung**

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**Introduction**

“The scientific study of religion by our department seems to me to be a science which criticizes and even refutes its object of research. I cannot be involved in a science that does not involve itself in its object of study.” Prof. Kishimoto Hideo, a reputed sociologist from Japan, recounts having received this reason from a student of his, who wanted to discontinue his studies.<sup>1</sup> On getting acquainted with the genesis of the field of Sociology of Religion (SoR), one peculiar feature is sure to grab one’s interest: it’s probable that few other disciplines have had, in the work of their foundational thinkers (in the case of SoR, Marx, Durkheim, and Weber) a strong prediction about the impending irrelevance and demise of the object of study (in the case of SoR, the phenomenon of religion itself). The persistence with which the pioneers of this field seem to implicitly regard religion as a phenomenon reducible to other primarily non-religious causes and dynamics can at times seem implicitly condescending to students of SoR.

In many ways, this situation continues to this day. But has this always been the case in this field? Are there signs of change? Are there any other paradigms that can be used in SoR that can provide us alternate methods of approaching religion? This paper explores one such possibility, through the work of Carl Gustav Jung. Before we enter into the question of how Jung could be used in SoR, it might be appropriate to gain a birds-eye-view of the history of the development of SoR.

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<sup>1</sup> Noriaki Akaike, “Sympathetic Understanding and Objective Observation,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 9/1 (1982) 53, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30234445>.

## 1. Overview of the field of Sociology of Religion

Sociology of Religion (SoR) is a field that differentiated itself against the background of the tumultuous birth of modernity in the West, a period marked by tensions between opposing systems of belief, lifestyle, economics, demographics, science, and geopolitics, among other factors. Thus, we can also discern internal tensions within this field.

Here we put it that the field of SoR can be understood to evolve through at least three distinct phases:

### *1.1 Classical Theory (from the late 19C to the 1940s)*

While it is commonly understood, especially among beginners that Marx, Durkheim and Weber stand tall among the founders of Sociology in general and SoR in particular, there were subtle differences in their views of religion. Thus, these three could be considered fonts of three different approaches to religion, and thus the tensions within SoR are evident right from the beginning:

***The Reductionist Approach:*** This perspective, perhaps parallel to the emergence of the hermeneutics of suspicion, and thus influenced by it, is instantiated by the works of Marx, who held that religion was an epiphenomenon, a social pathology that was based on the substructure of more fundamental non-religious dynamics.<sup>2</sup> This negative view of religion would later be supported by the work of Freud, for whom religion was a mass mental pathology—a global neurosis rooted in repression of wishes born in infancy and later considered unacceptable.<sup>3</sup>

***The Functionalist Approach:*** Durkheim, for whom religion was a necessary social institution, could be considered the pioneer of this approach. For him, religion was a functional mechanism which generated the moral, symbolic and ritual basis of social solidarity.<sup>4</sup> In his study of

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<sup>2</sup> James A. Beckford and N. J. Demerath III, *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (London: Sage, 2007) 104, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607965>.

<sup>3</sup> Michele Dillon, *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 97.

<sup>4</sup> Beckford and Demerath, *The SAGE Handbook*, 20.

totems, he concluded that the origin of religion was the implicit self-worship of society. This involved distinguishing the sacred and the profane. The sacred, which is a class of social entities set apart, possesses a functional property of producing unity in society, which the profane, or the everyday class of entities lacks. In fact, the unitive power of the sacred was both in positive, by providing the set of shared beliefs and practices focused on the sacred that produces unity in society, and also negative, by prescribing penalties for departing from orthodoxy and orthopraxis.<sup>5</sup>

***The Historicist Approach:*** The view of religion as a self-propelled cultural force, put forward by Weber, could be said to be at the bottom of this approach. Weber's research was wide, analysing the influence of various religious forms, especially their ethical force, on the dynamics of world history. He paid special attention to the influence of religion in the birth of modernity. He identified the Protestant Work Ethic, primarily in its Calvinistic, interiorized, this-world-focused prosperity-seeking asceticism, as a major driver of modern (Western, though he did not emphasise this distinction) capitalism.<sup>6</sup> For him, the emerging industrial society of the time was the current symbol of solidarity of the world social order, and to ensure that such useful symbols would continue to be born and develop, it was necessary that religious dimension of society should be allowed free reign to develop. The form taken by the religious dimension would vary across history, adapting itself to fit the social forms of the time. Thus, while Weber does have a strong structuralist bent, he also demonstrates a prominent impulse towards the historical-comparative approach to the study of religion.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> William A. Mirola, Michael O. Emerson, and Susanne C. Monahan, *Religion Matters* (New York: Routledge, 2016) 6, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315662909>.

<sup>6</sup> Beckford and Demerath, *The SAGE Handbook*, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Bryan S. Turner, *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 45, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444320787>.

### *1.2 The Subordination of Sociology to other Theoretical Concerns (from the 1950s to the 1970s)*

During this period, sociology experienced a loss of centrality in the academic discourse. This is because religion came to be viewed as marginal to society, with the dominant school of thought (functionalism) expecting religion to die a swift natural death in modern society. Another reason was that the very field of SoR was plagued by poorly defined niche problematics that were not a priority for the mainstream academic discourse (e.g., the church-sect distinction of Weber & Troeltsch).

### *1.3 Contemporary Recovery of Foreground and Transformations (from the 1980s onwards)*

The main impetus for this stage of the discourse was the fact that the predicted death of religion had not materialised. In fact, alongside the spread of globalisation, and the decline of colonialism after its heyday, religion was exhibiting new forms of vitality like the New Age boom, fundamentalism, and blooming religiosity in the Americas.<sup>8</sup> This revival of religion produced new theoretical research on it, which had the effect of re-aligning the concerns of the sociologists of religion with those of mainstream academic discourse once again.<sup>9</sup> This period produced several fresh theoretical understandings of the dynamics between religion and society, such as the rational choice (market) paradigm proposed by Rodney Stark and others, which held religion to flourish in a competitive arena, the fusing of the global and the local into one (the glocal) arena for religious expression, and the continued flourishing pluralism of religions, against the expectations of uniformization by the watchers of globalism,<sup>10</sup> and the new concern about the need to study ‘lived religion’—the concrete, dynamic, even messy collection of personal practices and beliefs of individuals, which may not always coincide with the priorities of organised religion.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Michele Dillon, *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 85.

<sup>9</sup> Beckford and Demerath, *The SAGE Handbook*, 61.

<sup>10</sup> Beckford and Demerath, *The SAGE Handbook*, 71.

<sup>11</sup> Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 15.

## 2. Dissonances Within the field of Sociology of Religion

As can be expected, a field with such a jumbled history has, of recent times, taken a self-critical turn. The worry that SoR has lost touch with lived religion and spirituality has been voiced within the SoR discourse. The tendency of sociology to see religion in terms of other social phenomena has also been critiqued. Also, the notion that modernity is essential secular has been questioned in what has come to be considered the current post-secular phase of history.

Some of the critiques of SoR that have come to the fore in recent times are listed below:

1. Classical sociology, waiting for the death of religion, was ambivalent towards religion at best, especially because most of the theory of religion came from early anthropology where religion was de-facto more a problem than a feature in society.<sup>12</sup>
2. Whereas among the three major founding fathers of sociology, Marx had very little to actually say about religion, it was on him and Durkheim that most of SoR's views of religion were based, with Weber's views getting very little traction in the discourse.<sup>13</sup> While Weber actually gives credit to religion for shaping the lives of people qua religion (i.e., by providing answers to existential yearnings),<sup>14</sup> we are able to see only some aspects of Weber's work that have been incorporated piecemeal in sections of SoR (e.g., the Protestant Ethic, rationalisation, and disenchantment, which typically lend themselves to reductionist analyses of religion), and not his deeper existential grappling with religion on its own terms, and how this plays out in social contexts. Thus, the ideas of Weber have not really shaped the discourse as they should have.
3. SoR has had consistent partiality towards the quantifiable aspects of social religious phenomena. This has led to crucial aspects of human

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<sup>12</sup> Gavin Walker, *Psyche, Science and Society* (London: Routledge, 2023) 2, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429456268>.

<sup>13</sup> Walker, *Psyche, Science and Society*, 58.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Adair-Totef, *Max Weber's Sociology of Religion* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016) 3, <https://doi.org/10.1628/978-3-16-154430-9>.

everyday life like subjective spiritual experiences, emotional engagement, and embodiment receiving very little attention until recent times. In the study of spirituality as distinct from religion, modern SoR characterises them as instances of ‘self-authority’ the fledgling field of the ‘sociology of spirituality’ reduces its subjects to mere individuals, blind to their contextual depth as social actors.<sup>15</sup> This field is also marked by an uncritical acceptance of the respondents’ self-evaluation, as the proper tools to analyse this phenomenon critically are lacking.<sup>16</sup>

4. In the history of SoR, theoretical frameworks that have taken a reductionist approach to religion have been largely favoured. If the field of SoR is neglectful of psychoanalysts like Jung, it is perhaps of a piece with its history of neglecting the work of certain historical anthropologists like Radin and Lowie, and the fuller range of the thought of Weber,<sup>17</sup> who represent a non-reductionistic approach to religion. Roderick Main notes that experts in critical theory like D. Macey seem to be reluctant to incorporate Jungian thought into the mainstream of critical theory because Jung seems to be slanted in favour of “irrationalism and even mysticism.”<sup>18</sup> This might explain why Jung’s work has failed to take hold in mainstream SoR in spite of the fact that Jung’s approach, in itself, is capable of being integrated into a sociological conceptual framework which analyses religion. The sociological compatibility of Jung has been commented upon in existing literature, which recognises that the systematic thought of Jung, “while not itself sociology, assumes society and the sociological point of view as the basis for its interpretation of individuals.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Jung’s resistance to reductionist approaches in analysing religion could be why the expectation of Proffoff, who, writing in 1953, predicted that the thought of Jung would be

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<sup>15</sup> Turner, *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, 267, 650.

<sup>16</sup> McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Walker, *Psyche, Science and Society*, 58, 59.

<sup>18</sup> Roderick Main, “In a Secular Age: Weber, Taylor, Jung,” *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 18/3 (2013) 171, <https://doi.org/10.1057/pcs.2013.10>.

<sup>19</sup> Main, “In a Secular Age,” 170.

integrated into the social sciences, has not been fulfilled in any wide sense.<sup>20</sup>

5. Walker has elaborated on this neglect of certain approaches in SoR by borrowing from the grid-group theory of Mary Douglas.<sup>21</sup> This analysis, rooted in the work that derives from Durkheim, classifies cultures based on their position in a graph of two axes, one of them being how much membership in a bounded group influences individuals (the group axis) and the other being how much expectations or classifications laid up on an individual restrict their behaviour (the grid axis). Conservative hierarchists would be in the high grid/high group quadrant. Those with liberal and progressive views, especially those who function in society as individuals (e.g. entrepreneurs) would fall into the low-grid / low group quadrant; outliers like dissenters would fall into the low grid / high group quadrant, and those who are intentionally isolated or excluded would fall into the high grid / low group quadrant. Those mainstream approaches to SoR holding a reductionist view of religion, would fall into the low grid, high group quadrant. Those approaches assuming a non-problematic relationship between the religion and the status quo would fall into the high-grid high-group quadrant. Thus the majority of SoR approaches in the mainstream take either of two positions: that of structural determinism or that of consensus (even Marxism, which ought to have generated a conflict view, being based on the Hegelian dialectic translated into the material realm, has been co-opted into a consensus view). The potential SoR approaches corresponding to the other two quadrants, which would emphasise agency and conflict, have been lacking.
6. By largely ignoring the psychoanalytic tradition other than Freud, the mainstream of SoR has developed a scotoma for the dimension of depth psychology in social analysis.<sup>22</sup> This led to the cultivation of several narrow internal debates within SoR which failed to

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<sup>20</sup> Ira Progoff, *Jung's Psychology and Its Social Meaning: An Introductory Statement of C G Jung's Psychological Theories and a First Interpretation of Their Significance for the Social Sciences* (New York: Delta, 2013) 8.

<sup>21</sup> Walker, *Psyche, Science and Society*, 63-65, 68-69.

<sup>22</sup> Walker, *Psyche, Science and Society*, 70.

accurately characterise the lived experience of subjects in several cases and also led to a disconnect from mainstream sociological discourse.<sup>23</sup> Incidentally, though Freud is confidently accepted as one of the club by some sociologists, this is by no means a consensus view, as shown by the opinion of Howard G. Schneiderman, (introducing the work of Cipriani,<sup>24</sup> who emphatically states of the commonly accepted co-founders of sociology of religion—Durkheim, Weber, Marx, Freud, Malinowski, William James, and Niebuhr—that while Weber and Durkheim were ‘obviously indispensable,’ of the other five, ‘While it is certainly true that these men wrote about religion, and often in very influential ways, except for Malinowski, none were even remotely social scientists, let alone sociologists.’

It is the thesis of this paper that the work of Jung offers an opportunity to work around these issues. In order to justify this claim, we shall first look at a basic outline of Jung’s views on religion. After this, we shall examine, using the work of Charles Taylor, why attempting Jungian approaches to SoR would be appropriate for our current secular age.

### 3. Jung’s Views on Religion

Unlike some other theorists, Jung cannot be said to have a single overarching thesis that forms the basis for his views on religion. Rather, his work is an exploration of the universal dynamics of the human psyche. The autonomous functions of the mind driven towards wholeness, and thus generating religious experience, was the focus of his work, which studied the unconscious as the foundation for religion, the process and duty of integration given to each individual, and the symbolic manifestation of religion in the collective unconscious.

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<sup>23</sup> Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2008) 4-5, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Roberto Cipriani, *Sociology of Religion: An Historical Introduction* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2015) xiv.

### 3.1 The Collective Unconscious

For Jung, the collective unconscious was the ‘primordial source’ from which originated all the archetypal symbols we see in human history.<sup>25</sup> This is not the personal unconscious, which holds all that which is repressed. This is an impersonal and intricate psychic system, which each human is born into and thus inherits.<sup>26</sup>

### 3.2 The Numinous Faculty of the Soul

The human soul has a ‘religious function’ which is expressed as an urge directed towards integration.<sup>27</sup> Jung arrived at this conclusion after studying multiple religious and mystical patterns across the world, in order to understand the divine truth diffused within them, and thus, for Jung, this Divine Truth was essentially syncretic. This religious experience was not something invented but something spontaneously felt, and which left a cultural imprint.<sup>28</sup> This deeply imprinted cultural heritage is activated in individual cases by ‘Numinous encounters’ which, for Jung, are experiences independent of the will.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the symbols and archetypes in the collective unconscious are manifestations of the Numinous.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.3 The Imago Dei as a Given

Given Jung’s notion of the numinous faculty of the soul discussed above, we could say that the experienced archetypal divine image is not to be considered something conceptually built; rather, it was something

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<sup>25</sup> Progoff, *Jung’s Psychology and Its Social Meaning*, xv.

<sup>26</sup> Susan F. Greenwood, “Emile Durkheim and C. G. Jung: Structuring a Transpersonal Sociology of Religion,” *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 32/2 (2013) 43.

<sup>27</sup> David Tacey, *The Jung Reader* (London: Routledge, 2012) 206, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203721049>.

<sup>28</sup> Punita Miranda, “C. G. Jung on Religion,” *Self: Revista do Instituto Junguiano de São Paulo* 4/1 (2019) 7.

<sup>29</sup> Tacey, *The Jung Reader*, 206.

<sup>30</sup> Miranda, “C. G. Jung on Religion,” 5.

impressed upon the human psyche; it is to be considered a given.<sup>31</sup> Jung took this to be a psychological fact, refraining from metaphysical assertions about the transcendent reality of this beyond human experience. He considered his work more scientific than philosophical. He is known to have used comparisons to anatomy, atomic physics and biology to explain the kind of work he saw himself as doing.<sup>32</sup> The scientist works with the demonstrable. In fact, Murray Stein observes that as Jung's thought matured, he avoided using the phrase "Psychology of Religion" to describe this aspect of his work; rather, he preferred to speak of "Psychology and religion," even making it the title of a series of lectures he gave at a later stage in his life.<sup>33</sup> As his thought matured, Jung grew uncomfortable with an approach that was implicitly reductionistic and preferred to take a dialogical, critical-constructive approach to religion. Jung made it clear that while the transcendental reality of God cannot be empirically demonstrated, the symbol in the psyche can be demonstrated to exist at the psychological level.<sup>34</sup> This process involves overcoming the inner tension arising from the 'conflict of the psychic opposites,' which are the ego vs the shadow, or the conscious content vs the unconscious content (sub-personalities, complexes). Without this painful effort, the psyche is not integrated.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, when Jung used (rather extensively, throughout his writings) the term "Imago Dei," he meant a divine archetype of the self, which he distinguished from the ego. While the self was a given right from the beginning of an individual's life, the ego was a substitute for the self. Its capacities develop during individuation. This is the identity of each individual that (s)he constructs over his/her life. In contrast, the self is analogous to the Christian concept of the Imago Dei in that it is the

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<sup>31</sup> C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) 43.

<sup>32</sup> James W. Heisig, "Jung and the 'Imago Dei': The Future of an Idea," *The Journal of Religion* **56**/1 (January 1976): 88–104, <https://doi.org/10.1086/486469>.

<sup>33</sup> Murray Stein, "Imago Dei: A Study of C. G. Jung's Psychology of Religion; James W. Heisig," *The Journal of Religion* **61**/1 (January 1981) 119–120, <https://doi.org/10.1086/486842>.

<sup>34</sup> Victor White, C. G. Jung, and Hans Frei, *God and the Unconscious: An Encounter Between Psychology and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1982) 71, <https://www.amazon.com/Unconscious-Jungian-Classics-Victor-White/dp/0882145037>.

<sup>35</sup> White, Jung, and Frei, *God and the Unconscious*, 248.

implanted (logically, by the Divine, about which, as archetype *per se*, Jung repeatedly insisted we could say nothing) archetypal image in human nature which has no development but is discovered to be a given from the beginning.<sup>36</sup>

### 3.4 The Process of Individuation

Based on his studies of religious systems, Jung concluded that the goal of the inner religious impulse is to achieve 'mystical unity' with the divine. In other terms, Jung came to propose the Imago Dei as a general model for human development. At the psychological level, this meant the realisation of the Self (the integrated totality of the psyche).<sup>37</sup> The process of achieving this is what Jung termed 'Individuation.' The pre-integrated personality consists of multiple parts. All these need to be integrated into the Self.<sup>38</sup> The experience of integrating the Self is equated with experiencing the 'Inner God.'<sup>39</sup>

The collective unconscious, with its accumulated archetypes, thus becomes a primordial fountainhead from which religion, mysticism, and art find expression.<sup>40</sup> Thus, these symbols function as bridges between the individual and the collective unconscious,<sup>41</sup> and they become mediators of the ineffable aboriginal numinous experience,<sup>42</sup> which contains 'psychoid' archetypes. This ineffable source of all religiosity escapes conscious scrutiny. As the individual is aware of psychic images originating from here without the involvement of his/her conscious will, Jung labels the

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<sup>36</sup> Murray Stein, "Imago Dei on the Psychological Plane," *Jung Journal* 10/4 (October 2016): 15–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19342039.2016.1225245>.

<sup>37</sup> Edward F. Edinger, *Ego and Archetype: Individuation and the Religious Function of the Psyche* (New York: Penguin, 1973), [https://bvbr.bib-bvb.de:443/F?func=service&doc\\_library=BVB01&local\\_base=BVB01&doc\\_number=005329661](https://bvbr.bib-bvb.de:443/F?func=service&doc_library=BVB01&local_base=BVB01&doc_number=005329661).

<sup>38</sup> Progoff, *Jung's Psychology and Its Social Meaning*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Edinger, *Ego and Archetype*, 3, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Walker, *Psyche, Science and Society*, 70.

<sup>41</sup> Maja Mandic, "Carl Gustav Jung's Three Views of Religion: Religious Symbolism And Syncretism And Mystical Experience Of God And/Or The Self," *Mostariensia* 27/1 (2023) 141, <https://doi.org/10.47960/2831-0322.2023.1.27.125>.

<sup>42</sup> White, Jung, and Frei, *God and the Unconscious*, 242-243.

unconscious the ‘objective psyche.’<sup>43</sup> The various religious expressions across time and space are thus analogous to languages communicating an ineffable primitive experience. The symbols of these religions are thus the psychological transformers of the unconscious so that it becomes conscious execution. These symbols are also feedback loops that correct the conscious mind, preventing the error-state of one-sidedness.<sup>44</sup> When these culturally present symbols fail in effectiveness, pools of neglected psychic content form (these are unassimilated sub-personalities/complexes which Jung labelled the Shadow). Once sufficient energy has accumulated here, these manifest in the culture as collective dysfunction.<sup>45</sup>

From this, the duty of individuation becomes crucial for society. Only by a sufficiently large number of individuals who have revitalised themselves by making contact with the *numinosum* can creative force re-enter society for the common good.<sup>46</sup> Thus, a healthy society depends on integrated individuals.<sup>47</sup> It is because organised religion can offer individuals a comforting ambience which dissuades them from this painful and difficult inner work of individuation, and thus becomes for them a barrier to any vitalizing ‘confrontation with the *numen*’ that Jung was at times critical of organised religion.<sup>48</sup>

#### 4. The Japanese Critique of ‘Sympathetic Detachment’

Due to Sociology’s empirical slant, SoR soon moved away from a substantive view of religion to a functional view. This led to what Wilson<sup>49</sup> defined as ‘sympathetic detachment and disinterested

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<sup>43</sup> Rafael Krüger, *PISTIS: Demystifying Jungian Psychology* (Kindle ed., self-published, 2025) 76.

<sup>44</sup> Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 365, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvx5wbkw>.

<sup>45</sup> Progoff, *Jung’s Psychology and Its Social Meaning*, 162 – 163.

<sup>46</sup> Krüger, *PISTIS: Demystifying Jungian Psychology*, 42.

<sup>47</sup> Polly Young-Eisendrath and Terence Dawson (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Jung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 59.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Mehrrens, “The Religious Impulse in the Human Being,” *Jungian Center for the Spiritual Sciences*, October 12, 2023, <https://jungiancenter.org/the-religious-impulse-in-the-human-being/>, accessed on 20/02/26.

<sup>49</sup> Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

involvement' becoming the default approach in the study of religion.<sup>50</sup> However, even Wilson could not help getting involved in legal issues of communities he studied.<sup>51</sup> Commenting on Wilson's method, sociologists like Yanagawa<sup>52</sup> appeared to call for something more, by emphasising "deep consideration and sympathy." Wilson's proposed approach to the sociological study of religion generated an animated discourse in 1982 (Apparently, they were not reacting to his 1983 paper,<sup>53</sup> in which he had put forward his thesis in full clarity, but to the advocacy of this approach which Wilson had expressed in previous other works—the position of 'sympathetic detachment' was something Wilson had held to almost throughout his work) involving him with several Japanese sociologists, among which the most acerbic could be said to be Araki, who argued that Wilson was blindly rooted in the 'old Western mythology of and belief in science,' leading to the production of an ontological/epistemological gap between the sociologist and the believer, whom the sociologist ends up othering.<sup>54</sup> Thus, SoR was reduced to a mere science of behaviour incapable of providing deep understanding of the phenomenon of religion.

He also critiqued the widespread implicit (and sometimes explicit) characterisation by SoR of itself as rational/objective and religion as merely subjective/irrational. Morioka pointed out that the assumption that the tension between sympathy and detachment is maintainable or

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<sup>50</sup> Ole Riis, "Methodology in the Sociology of Religion," in *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. James A. Beckford and N. J. Demerath III (London: Sage, 2009) 236, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588961.013.0013>.

<sup>51</sup> Eileen Barker, "Bryan Wilson's Contribution to the Study of New Religious Movements," *Social Compass* 53/2 (2006): 147–153, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768606064294>.

<sup>52</sup> Keiichi Yanagawa, "From a Science of 'Behavior' to a Science of 'Understanding,'" *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 9/4 (1982), <https://doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.9.4.1982.285-294> (289).

<sup>53</sup> Bryan Wilson, "Sympathetic Detachment and Disinterested Involvement: A Note on Academic Integrity: In Reply to Professor Horowitz," *Sociological Analysis* 44/3 (1983) 183, 193 and 184 articles, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3711498>.

<sup>54</sup> Michio Araki, "Toward an Integrated Understanding of Religion and Society," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 9/1 (1982): 65–76, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30234446>.

would even be desirable for an accurate grasp of reality betrays rationalistic bias.<sup>55</sup> This Western-centric attitude would end up producing a cleavage between theory and empirical research, especially when applied to contexts like Japan. Shimazono accused traditional Western religion-science-conflict-models of being incapable of transcending institutional dogma, embracing ambiguity, and acknowledging the possibility of the discovery of truth in the ‘self’ and in the accumulated religious praxis and wisdom of the common-folk.<sup>56</sup> Wilson responded to his interlocutors, standing firm by his commitment to his chosen method centred on ‘sympathetic detachment.’<sup>57</sup> His ‘riposte’ considers the arguments advanced by all his interlocutors, and addresses them in a balanced manner, yet without yielding ground; however, he did not appear to engage with the deeper questions of Araki, choosing to focus more on the irate tone of his response, which is regrettable, as a deeper engagement might have yielded some fruitful conceptual and operational developments.

Most significant in this discourse for our current exploration is the response of Sonoda.<sup>58</sup> Written after the ‘riposte’ of Wilson, it not only has the advantage of providing a comprehensive view of the debate but also is notable for its equitable, balanced, and painstaking approach to the debate, giving each point of view ample benefit of doubt. To give an example of the balance characterizing Sonoda’s writing on this topic, let us consider his criticism that Wilson has not really plumbed the depths of what Shimazono meant when he spoke of plurality. Wilson only engages with the interpretation of plurality which deals with people adhering to multiple religions living together. But Sonoda points out that Shimazono’s analysis went further, describing a plurality of religious affinities within the individual subject. In fact, Shimazono also considers the co-existence of

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<sup>55</sup> Kiyomi Morioka, “Methodological Problems in the Sociology of Religion in Japan,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 9/1 (1982) 44, 46, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30234444>.

<sup>56</sup> Susumu Shimazono, “The Study of Religion and the Tradition of Pluralism,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 9/1 (1982) 84-86, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30234447>.

<sup>57</sup> Bryan R. Wilson, “A Riposte,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 9/1 (1982) 91-92.

<sup>58</sup> Minoru Sonoda, “The Study of Religion as a Human Science,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 9/1 (1982) 303-304, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30233283>.

affinity to religious and scientific viewpoints within a given individual. Sonoda appreciates Wilson's zeal for academic rigour. However, Sonoda performs an analysis of the concept of objectivity. He shows that this originally had the meaning, of subtracting the subjective aspect from the knowledge relationship between humans and things. This would leave us with the relationship between things alone, which is an ideal achievable, or even worth aiming at, only in the physical sciences. Given this understanding, Shimazono questions whether sociology should cling to this ideal of objectivity. Obviously, such a goal is problematic when that which is being studied is the human being. Holding up the human/social sciences to this unattainable standard would cause either snobbery or loss of self-respect in the sociologist. He thus advocates, for the entire field of the social sciences, a shift in the foundational standpoint from desired objectivity to subjective reality, which he elaborates into an intersubjective cultural system.

### **5. A Potential Jungian SoR as Appropriate for the Secular Age**

The impact of such 'sympathetic detachment' vs. a more nuanced attitude (to be teased out later in the paper) on the ability of investigators to arrive at deeper insights might be more clearly illustrated by comparing the work of one of the pioneers of SoR, Weber, with one of the more contemporary philosophers and political/social theorists whose work has been influential in sociology—Charles Taylor.

#### *5.1. The Lack of Tension between Empiricism and Religion in Weber*

Main notes that the development of Weber's thought came to a point where he considered disenchantment (driven by intellectualisation and rationalisation) to be characteristic of the current era.<sup>59</sup> Weber thus implicitly views any attempt by modern humans to turn to organised religion, or even to seek meaning within the physical sciences as species of weakness. For Weber, attempting re-enchantment was equivalent to shirking the duty of intellectual integrity. Jung, in a similar vein, describes the modern world as being 'desacralized' by a historical process of 'despiritualisation.' Like Weber, Jung too predicted that people would seek out religious experience as a reaction against the 'one-sided rationalism of

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<sup>59</sup> Main, "In a Secular Age," 172.

science.’ The difference between Weber and Jung is that while Weber observes this attempt to return to religion with detachment and implicit disdain, Jung encourages this drive towards re-enchantment, even holding up ‘seeking a deeper source for the spiritual life’ as a moral obligation for modern man.

### *5.2. The Tension Between Religion & Empiricism in Jung*

We see in a Jung a tension between religion and empirical science, a tension absent in Weber. Jung, the son of a clergyman, saw religion as a positive factor in therapeutic and cultural terms, though his positive view of religion was more about individualised religious experience. He was quite critical of organised religion. This same tension is visible in history of the development of Jungian concepts. The mature version of Jung’s archetypes, for instance, was posited as having both biological and immaterial poles. In addition to the archetypal images experienced in the psyche of the individual, Jung would also come to attribute an independent existence to the “archetype-in-itself,” considering it ineffable and transcendent. Other core Jungian concepts like the collective unconscious, individuation, the self, and synchronicity are marked with this same tension.

Jung saw his very life work as participating in this tension. While psychoanalysis contributed to disenchantment through withdrawal of projections, he also saw this same psychoanalysis as leading to a re-vivification of the sacred. Significantly, this revivification in Jung remains intrapsychic and leaves the external world untouched. John Vervaeke, a contemporary researcher in cognitive science who has also found fame outside academic circles for his work on relevance realisation (partly due to his self-positioning as a consultant and partly due to the existence of contemporary online platforms which allow unscripted interactions between academics in complementary fields to be published as long-form content, which attracts viewers and readers interested in overcoming perceived defects in themselves) has also drawn attention to this reduction in the domain of influence of Jung’s work.<sup>60</sup> He sees this as a defect in Jung, made evident by the contrasting

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas Steininger, “‘We Are Suffering from a Wisdom Famine in the West,’” *Emerge* (2021), <https://www.whatisemerging.com/profiles/john-vervaeke-edba633a-50b3-4dec-920b-967d8f0f2b01>, accessed on 20/02/26.

orientations in the work of Corbin and Heidegger. Vervaeke also claims that the work of Tillich, and also that of Barfield offers a possibility of aligning and synthesising the corrective orientations of Heidegger and Corbin with the insights of Jung.<sup>61</sup>

The crowning point of Jung's re-enchantment seems to be his notion of synchronicity (the claimed manifestation of archetypal patterns of meaning not only within the psyche but also in the external world—cf. the famous example of the scarab beetle recounted by Jung). However, a sober assessment would have to admit that synchronicity is still very far away from a complete re-enchantment of the world, even more so because of Jung's firm commitment, over and beyond everything else, to the scientific worldview, of which his psychoanalysis is a part; thus, even his re-enchantment is fraught with tension.

### *5.3 Tension as Maturity: Charles Taylor and the Immanent Frame*

In fact, as Main points out, this way of viewing Jung as caught in indecision, is exactly what Weber would make of him.<sup>62</sup> That we find this view easy to accept is perhaps an indicator of the influence of the view of Weber not only in sociology but also in contemporary intellectual attitudes in general. In fact, Taylor, in his analysis of secularisation is in partial agreement with Weber.<sup>63</sup> It is where he parts company with Weber that is significant for us. Taylor's characterisation of the self of the older ages of enchantment as a porous self and the self of the current age of secularisation as a buffered self, and his characterisation of religion being reduced to one option among many, and one which is difficult to choose leads further to his elaboration of what the 'immanent frame' leaves open—the issue of whether the transcendent is required for us.

Taylor further argues that this frame is conditioned by the presence of unformulated background 'pictures' which capture our thinking in dynamics he refers to as 'spins.' These spins could be either dynamics that prejudice the individual in their thrall to be open to the possibility of transcendence, or to be closed to this possibility. A large part of Taylor's

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<sup>61</sup> John Vervaeke, "Awakening from the Meaning Crisis, Episode 49: Corbin & Jung," YouTube video, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkykBqApP4A>.

<sup>62</sup> Main, "In a Secular Age," 179-180.

<sup>63</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) 3, 38, 594.

burden in this work is to clarify why the variant of the spin that predisposes individuals to be close to transcendence seems to be more compelling in society today. For Taylor, in spite of its extent and weight, it is not, for that matter, inevitable. For Taylor, the secular reality is not just what is left over once the religious enchantment has been stripped away. It is an achievement that has been painstakingly constructed by humanity, especially by the great competitive effort of both Catholicism and Protestantism to demythologise themselves.

This has produced certain assumed 'priority relations' that operate subconsciously. Some axioms of these priority relations are the notions that sees the self and its states as givens, even before one can consider external reality or the minds of others, and that the natural order of things is self-evident in a way that the transcendent is not. (i.e., the priority relations that the self is prior to external reality, and the natural is prior to the transcendent). This places the transcendent at the least credible extreme point in the epistemic spectrum. At the same time, notes Taylor, the contribution of modern phenomenology (especially in the work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty) has been to present a convincing case that these claimed entities of the self and the natural order only make sense if external reality, other selves, values and the transcendent order are already implicitly assumed.

Taylor also attributes the attractiveness of the spin that predisposes us towards being close to transcendence to an ethically positive aura of masculine heroism attached to a self-image of facing a godless cosmos unflinchingly. Catholicism and Protestantism have a huge contribution to the construction of this aura. There are two mutually opposed force-fields in modern society—one is the compelling, yet non-inevitable immanent frame, and the second is the awareness of its inevitability coupled with existing pockets of resistance in the form of surviving religious practice. Society is caught in the tension between these two pulls, though many are oblivious to this, being comfortably settled on one side, intentionally or unconsciously. The one aware of these 'cross pressures' has three options: to commit to the flow of de-sacralisation, to choose the difficult uphill path of re-sacralisation, or, (the option that Taylor chooses for himself) the also difficult (perhaps even more difficult than the previous option) state of choosing to stay in the tension, the zone which Taylor dubs the "Jamesian Open Space."

Taylor claims that a critical number of such people infused in society can function as fire-breaks in inflammatory situations, since they have cultivated the capacity of meeting and understanding others. This desire

strongly brings to mind the desire of Lonergan for the ‘not numerous centre’ that would become one of the pillars of his ‘Cosmopolis.’

There is bound to be formed a solid right that is determined to live in a world that no longer exists. There is bound to be formed a scattered left, captivated by now this, now that new development, exploring now this, now that new possibility. But what will count is a perhaps not numerous centre, big enough to be at home in both the old and the new, painstaking enough to work out one by one the transitions to be made, strong enough to refuse half-measures and insist on complete solutions even though it has to wait.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, Taylor outlines a space where the claims of both empiricism and of faith can be acknowledged. This space opened up for Taylor gives the work of Jung a chance to be used for sociological analysis. The work of Jung, too, is scientific without losing contact with religion and spirituality. Thus, like Taylor’s choice, Jung too implies a way of treating immanence and transcendence with equitable respect. Standing upon psychic reality as the only immediate experience, the above tension can be achieved. Mainis sure that though Jung’s formulation is meant to be used in settings of therapy, it can also work in ‘psychologically inflected sociological inquiries.’<sup>65</sup> He briefly outlines a way in which Jungian ideas can be used to analyse the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism. His thesis is that Jungian thought ought not to be disregarded (as it has been, in the domain of sociology, on the grounds of being open to religion) in the sociological study of problems that contain a psychological dimension as it can enable sociological analysis from angles that other methods normally don’t provide.

But the achievement of Taylor in providing (if unintentionally) space for Jung to operate in SoR does not stop there. It goes deeper, because by the outlining of the ‘Jamesian Open Space,’ he has attempted for Sociology what Lonergan attempted for philosophy and theology: the discovery of method (which, for Lonergan, means not what it meant for Descartes—the quest for clear and distinct ideas to act as an unshakable foundation, but “a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results”), which forms the preconditions for the construction of any hypothetical or theoretical

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<sup>64</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan and Robert M. Doran, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Collection*, vol. 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 113.

<sup>65</sup> Main, “In a Secular Age,” 185.

framework.<sup>66</sup> In this context, the warning of Walker that Jungian thought could be very much appropriate and useful in SoR “but not in terms of over-arching theory. Rather Jungian insights might be used to orient new enquiries, and for reflexive analysis of sociology’s methodological debates” gains special significance.<sup>67</sup> Various thinkers have been used to craft over-arching narratives in SoR which have then become outdated and stale with new data. This is the same situation that Lonergan was faced with in philosophy and theology. His response was to seek to understand the cognitive structure of human knowing, with the firm conviction which he expressed in this injunction: “Thoroughly understand what it is to understand, and not only will you understand the broad lines of all there is to be understood, but also you will possess a fixed base, an invariant pattern, opening upon all further developments of understanding.”<sup>68</sup> Lonergan was not interested in starting out with a metaphysics of all being. Rather, once the method of knowing and the responsibility of the knower to achieve objectivity through authentic subjectivity was clearly outlined, he could then move on to demonstrate how metaphysics and theology could be developed from this foundation.

Jung has the potential to fulfil the same role in the SoR. Taylor has already played a similar role in the understanding of Secularisation, which is one part within SoR. Jung’s work could provide us the tools to think through various aspects of SoR, without burdening us with an overarching narrative from the beginning. In addition to being open to theology and spirituality, this would also have the advantage of working on the realms of interiority and transcendental method, rather than being stuck in the realms (as characterised by Lonergan) of theory and common-sense as the previous overarching frameworks constructed in SoR were destined to do.<sup>69</sup> The direction pointed out by Sonoda—that of setting intersubjectivity as the home-base of SoR, can be seen to be within reach in the approaches suggested by Taylor, Lonergan, and most specifically, Jung.

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<sup>66</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 4.

<sup>67</sup> Walker, *Psyche, Science and Society*, 82.

<sup>68</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study in Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 22.

<sup>69</sup> John D. Dadosky, “Is There a Fourth Stage of Meaning?” *Heythrop Journal* 51/5 (2009) 769-770, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2009.00518.x>.

#### 5.4 Jungian Psychology as Method in Sociology

We shall now attempt to explore the fittingness of the Jungian approach to Sociology on the basis of the insights we have derived from Sonoda, Taylor, and Lonergan.

Lonergan's repeated warning against conflating knowledge with 'simply taking a good look'<sup>70</sup> finds a parallel in the criticisms of Araki<sup>71</sup> and Sonoda<sup>72</sup> in Wilson's<sup>73</sup> approach, which they characterise as ultimately heading towards a positivist blunting of its potency for a full exploration of religion.

The extension of Lonergan's work by Doran to the aspect of psychic conversion, which goes beyond merely ordering the psyche or the control of the affections by the mind, could be characterised as the 'rigorous, explanatory appropriation of one's sensitive, psychic experience and its existential meaning.'<sup>74</sup> For our purposes, we could see this as the integration of the sensitive, affective and symbolic understanding of reality within the knower. This explanatory self-appropriation finds an echo in the high priority Jung gives to the task of Individuation. If we remind ourselves that what Sonoda desired was essentially a method firmly rooted in a disciplined and critical, yet subjective grasp of reality, we can see that the converted subjective psyche that is the result of the Jungian psychology fits the conditions for the sociologically rigorous standpoint that Sonoda is seeking.<sup>75</sup>

In other words, while Wilson advocates for the sociologist to take a vantage point external to the religious phenomena under study, the insights of Lonergan and Doran (and the example of what Taylor has been able to achieve) show us that if the sociologist of religion could be an involved participant, with an authentic subjectivity/psyche, reached through the demanding method of recursive conversions (intellectual,

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<sup>70</sup> John Cush, *A Concise Introduction to Bernard Lonergan* (Eugene: En Route Books, 2025) 83.

<sup>71</sup> Araki, "Toward an Integrated Understanding of Religion and Society," 70, 71.

<sup>72</sup> Sonoda, "The Study of Religion as a Human Science," 304.

<sup>73</sup> Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, 184.

<sup>74</sup> Robert M. Doran, *Psychic Conversion and Theological Foundations* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2006) 14; Cush, *A Concise Introduction to Bernard Lonergan*, 132.

<sup>75</sup> Sonoda, "The Study of Religion as a Human Science," 302.

moral, religious, psychic), (s)he would have a far richer vantage point to mediate and critique religious culture, leading to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of religion, without being limited to a study of behaviour.

The temptation to construct overarching narratives about religion, which Freud, being the very type of an Enlightenment thinker,<sup>76</sup> readily provided the field of SoR, is something that Walker is deeply sceptical of. The mobilisation of Freud to create overarching narrative syntheses by SoR is an instance of the institutional dogmas that Araki, Shimazono, and Sonoda critique Wilson for, and which the Japanese sociologists point out, are often the assumptions of the sociologist, often disguised as 'scientific objectivity,' and which deserve to be interrogated, since they are often the historically and culturally conditioned beliefs, characteristic of the Western Scientific programme.<sup>77</sup> Jung, who represented the Counter-Enlightenment, and who provoked Freud to re-examine his views, is not as amenable to be used to construct such overarching narratives.<sup>78</sup>

Just as the Lonerganian enterprise attempts to ground philosophy and theology in the authentic subjectivity of the self-appropriated subject, the enterprise of Jungian SoR would ground Sociology in the Individuated Psyche of the sociological knower. Such a sociologist would not be one who prides him/her-self in being a detached and neutral, albeit somehow sympathetic observer, but an unapologetically involved seeker motivated by the desire/eros for truth (unapologetic because (s)he is fully aware that his/her own authentically subjective Individuation is critical to the true objectivity of his/her observation.

Such a sociologist of religion would not be forced by his principles to hold himself unchanged by his/her research, as Wilson asserted about himself. Rather, the sociologist of religion who committed him/her-self to undergoing the process of Individuation, or in Lonerganian terms, the fourfold conversion, to attain authentic subjectivity or the existential

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<sup>76</sup> John Gray, "Freud: The Last Great Enlightenment Thinker," *Prospect Magazine* (2011), <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/culture/49771/freud-the-last-great-enlightenment-thinker>, accessed on 21/02/26.

<sup>77</sup> Araki, "Toward an Integrated Understanding of Religion and Society," 67.

<sup>78</sup> Joel Whitebook, "Chapter 8: Jung and the Counter-Enlightenment," in *Freud: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 234, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139025119.009>.

consciousness demanded by Sonoda, would also be the investigator desired by the Japanese sociologists—the scientifically involved student of religion who would need to show that (s)he has been, (and thus has been capable of being) changed by their research—something Wilson prided himself on not being.

Such a sociologist would be equipped with insights such as the individuation, archetypes, shadow, complexes, etc., enabling him to see new avenues of investigation such as collective pathology, and be able to challenge methodological biases within him/her-self and within the discipline of SoR, providing the much-needed reflexive analysis. And this sociologist would have gained all this flexibility without necessarily having to disown any of the prior heritage of SoR (not even Freud!) or having recast the entire discipline in the mould of yet another over-arching synthetic (this time Jungian) theoretical framework.

At this point, the alert reader would be excused in asking, “It seems that Lonergan alone would be sufficient to construct a SoR that is founded in the authentic subjectivity of the investigator. Why bother with Jung at all?” We admit it might be possible to construct method in SoR upon the foundation of the work of Lonergan (or perhaps, for that matter, the work of any process philosopher like Alfred North Whitehead; if one were looking for a basis for a method in theology or economics, one might look to Lonergan directly, or if one were interested in applying systems theory to sociology, it is possible that a direct application of Whitehead would be effective; but we are discussing religion here, and Jung has already a lifetime’s worth of work in this field, and thus it would be expedient to explore the advantages his work offers us in SoR, while not neglecting others who can complement his work), but Jung offers us something more than just a mere foundation. As Lonergan scholar Cush notes in his explanation of Doran’s development of Lonergan’s work by adding the level of the psychic conversion (which incidentally, was based on the work of Jung), at this level of explanatory self-appropriation, symbols, rituals, and affectivity assume immense importance.<sup>79</sup> Jung has already produced a large body of work related to the symbolic realm of religion as part of the human psyche. As Doran has explained, there is a complementarity between the works of Lonergan and that of Jung, which makes them mutually reinforcing methodological tools appropriate for the ‘third state of meaning,’ where meaning is ‘controlled neither by mythical or practical

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<sup>79</sup> Cush, *A Concise Introduction to Bernard Lonergan*, 82.

common sense, nor by theory, but by a reflexive process of self-appropriation.’<sup>80</sup>

Thus the work of Jung, can be considered, like that of Lonergan, to be ‘a new series of ranges of schemes of recurrence in the world process whose immanent intelligibility is an emergent probability that becomes intelligent intelligibility in human consciousness.’ More to the point, Doran sees Lonergan and Jung as figures of two aspects of human cognition that have been opposed for the last three millennia. Thus, placing them into dialectic would induce a reconciliation of the maternal imagination and theoretical reason, which have been severed since the ‘Greek discovery of the mind,’ in which mythical thinking was superseded by theoretical thinking. Doran asserts that ‘transcendental method and the collective unconscious...are the constants of the human self, the permanent features of all human subjectivity,” and since understanding the psyche was not a priority for Lonergan, and since the work of Jung seriously lacks a treatment of human intentionality, and thus concludes that a ‘heuristic integration’ of the two paradigms enables the understanding of the mechanism of social transformation by religion as a movement from object-relations to imago-dei relations. A SoR built upon this foundation would go a long way towards remedying its historical oversight of the primacy of the aesthetic/symbolic/spiritual subjective experience in religion.

Thus, a Jungian SoR would recognise religion as an irreducible psychic reality indigenous to the human condition (since, as Jung pointed out, humans are *Homo religiosus*),<sup>81</sup> instead of reducing religion to non-religious dynamics (as Marxist SoR does) or to classify religion as psychological mass pathology (as Freudian SoR does). Such a SoR would be able to acknowledge religion as an essential psychological given in human nature, which the need for self-integration drives forward.<sup>82</sup> Though the religion intended by Jung is in the last analysis naturalistic

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<sup>80</sup> Robert M. Doran, “Insight and Archetype: The Complementarity of Lonergan and Jung,” in *Theological Foundations*, vol. 1, ed. Robert M. Doran (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995) 63, <https://media.bernardlonergan.com/media/pdf/22820DTE070.pdf>.

<sup>81</sup> C.G. Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, volume 11: Psychology and Religion: West and East (Princeton University Press eBooks, 2014) 9-10, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400850983>.

<sup>82</sup> Mandic, “Carl Gustav Jung’s Three Views of Religion,” 125, 127.

(and thus amenable to integration into a scientific theoretical framework) and is thus divergent from the particular nature of any credal faith in the world arena today, religionists are often not offended by the views of Jung as they are by those of Freud, because Jung includes an inherent and irreducible teleology into his notion of religion, which is thus made *sui generis* and necessary.<sup>83</sup>

Perhaps the current time is conducive for SoR to recognise the value of Jung, for, while Walker<sup>84</sup> has given us several possible historical reasons for the neglect of Jung in SoR till now, Jakelić<sup>85</sup> notes approvingly of an emerging awareness of the need for SoR to interact horizontally with other disciplines, an indication of the self-awareness of some quarters of SoR of its historical and contingent limits, and a sign of maturity. The need for a synthetic approach has been expressed for several decades already. For instance, Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran theologian who opposed Hitler and was executed for it, asserted that the Church could not be understood either by theology or by sociology alone.<sup>86</sup> The problematic dimension in the default approach of current SoR to religion, as it is widely perceived by religionists, is captured by Wheeldon: ‘the sociological enterprise is viewed by many (inside the field and certainly inside the church) as undermining the notion that a God exists who actually spoke to anyone.’<sup>87</sup>

In philosophical terms, sociology, whether intentionally or unintentionally, provides a competing metanarrative to that offered by religion.’ Wheeldon proposes ‘consultation’ as the model for interaction between theology and sociology more appropriate than previously used models such as integration (which often falls victim to the assumption that one discipline is to be subordinate to the other) and engagement (which has militaristic metaphorical overtones).<sup>88</sup> He thus prefers ‘consultation’ as a model because of three reasons: first, it implies equality between two

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<sup>83</sup> Walker, *Psyche, Science and Society*, 121.

<sup>84</sup> Walker, *Psyche, Science and Society*, 57, 81-82.

<sup>85</sup> Slavica Jakelić, “The Promise and Limits of the Sociology of Religion,” *SSRC - The Immanent Frame*, February 26, 2010, <https://tif.ssrc.org/2010/02/25/the-promise-and-limits/>, accessed on 21/02/26.

<sup>86</sup> Jeff Wheeldon, “Theology as Sociology, Sociology as Theology,” *Journal of Sociology and Christianity* 6/2 (2016) 11, <https://sociologyandchristianity.org/index.php/jsc/article/view/4>.

<sup>87</sup> Wheeldon, “Theology as Sociology, Sociology as Theology,” 18.

<sup>88</sup> Wheeldon, “Theology as Sociology, Sociology as Theology,” 19.

practitioners; second, each practitioner recognises the limits of one's own field; third, it implies that practitioners on both ends are sincerely working towards the same end (attaining a grasp of reality). This model is suitable for our current analysis too. Jung places a premium on integration of the self. For this to happen, the sub-personalities and complexes within the self must communicate through dialogical forms of therapy. In that way, we could also view sociology and religion as sub-personalities in society, each of which can have pathologies of their own. For a better grasp of reality on either side, a consultation dynamic should be established between them so that an integrated view of religion emerges. If this consultation can also take place within the mind of the investigator, (in case (s)he has acquired proficiency both in sociology and in theology), this would fractally instantiate the desired social dynamic at the individual level.

## **6. Acknowledgement of Limitations and Some Cautions**

Since much of what we have proposed is sociologically novel, there is no readily available sociological data regarding these. For instance, we have presented individuation as something desirable for society, but this is not to be taken as a sociological fact. At present, this suggestion is at the level of a methodological wager, pending future availability of data about this.

Likewise, the characterisation of the unintegrated shadow presenting as social dysfunction is currently a heuristic analogy, not a causal claim. Moreover, when we refer to the Jungian notion of synchronicity, we don't mean to suggest that this is a scientifically proven fact; we refer to it as a subjective phenomenological meaning-experience.

Our claim that Jung could do for sociology what Lonergan has done for theology or what Taylor has shown to be possible in political science, is obviously hyperbolic. Jung, while extensive and meticulous in his work, is obviously not as epistemologically or methodologically rigorous as Lonergan. However, his expansive body of work, and the work of others in the analytical psychology tradition gives us the confidence of putting this work to use through the methodological apparatus of Lonergan and others.

In the section below, we proceed to outline an admittedly ambitious programme of implementation. The implicit assumption behind this programme is that those who execute it will have a reasonable grasp of theology, philosophy, and depth psychology. Such a combination of

formation is admittedly difficult to find in reality, but it is not an impossible obstacle to surmount, given the potential benefits.

Further, when we speak of the ‘converted subject’ or ‘individuated sociologist,’ no implication of belonging to an elite group is intended, as we wish to avoid the introduction of any condescending attitudes whatsoever. We only mean to refer to the immense responsibility before the one who will undertake such a study.

### 7. Making it Practical

What would such a Jungian approach to SoR look like in practice? Given that Jung was known to be rigorously empirical in his approach to therapy,<sup>89</sup> and also given that we have already noted a resonance between Lonergan’s priority to the clarification of method and Walker’s warning against the trap of building overarching narratives fated for obsolescence, we are confident in proposing that the method proposed by Lonergan for use in theology can be easily repurposed for use in sociology.<sup>90</sup> We claim this not just because Lonergan has proposed this as a Generalised Empirical Method, but also based on the precedent demonstrated by Dunne in applying the functional specialties of Lonergan’s method to derive a method for ethical analysis.<sup>91</sup>

Lonergan’s list of eight ‘functional specialties’ is supposed to be a proposal for a method in theology similar to the scientific methods proposed by Aristotle and Francis Bacon. Lonergan had implicitly used this method in his doctoral thesis on grace and freedom. Later, during his teaching career, as he became aware of the importance of historical consciousness to bring clarity to the study of theological problems, he began to formulate this methodological approach explicitly. This set of functional specialties forms the second part of his method. The first part deals with the acquisition of authentic subjectivity by following the transcendental precepts “Be attentive! Be Intelligent! Be Reasonable! Be

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<sup>89</sup> Krüger, *PISTIS: Demystifying Jungian Psychology* (Section 1.1), <https://www.amazon.in/PISTIS-Demystifying-Psychology-Rafael-Kr%C3%BCger-ebook/dp/B0D5JPBMDM>, accessed on 22/02/26.

<sup>90</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 22.

<sup>91</sup> Tad Dunne, *Doing Better: The Next Revolution in Ethics* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010).

Responsible! Be in Love!” that follow logically from an understanding of human understanding and the universal invariant cognitive process.<sup>92</sup>

The eight functional specialties proposed by Lonergan are divided into two groups of four (research, interpretation, history, and dialectic, in the first group, and foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communication in the second group), corresponding to the two phases he identifies in theology. The first phase, the mediated phase, involves retrieving what theologians of the past have codified in their contexts. The second phase, the mediating phase, involves communicating what has been retrieved and implications born of understanding it, to potentially interested persons in the present context. This eight-stage method comes with a weighty implied inter-disciplinary undertaking. It has to be a communal effort, since the specialisation of the theological sciences today is so vast that no one individual can master everything that is required. This heavy responsibility has both an objective aspect—in the retrieval phase, and a subjective aspect (in authentically communicating what has been retrieved to the present context)—in the articulation phase.<sup>93</sup> The four specialties in each phase are related to the four levels of the intentional consciousness explained in Lonergan’s cognitional theory: Attention, Knowledge, Judgement, Responsibility, (arising from the ordered operations in conscious intentionality, namely experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding) in the forward order in phase one, and in the reverse order in phase two.<sup>94</sup>

LaFontaine points out that the faith-stance of the investigator is not presupposed in this method, though the impact of this foundational commitment is appropriately accounted for by the responsibility imposed on the investigator in this method.<sup>95</sup> We offer below a possible way in which the concerns of SoR and Depth Psychology may be mapped onto the two phases of the functional specialties:

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<sup>92</sup> John P. Cush, “Lonergan’s Communal Novum Organon,” *Church Life Journal* (November 2018) 4, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/lonergans-communal-novum-organon>, accessed on 22/02/26.

<sup>93</sup> Frederick E. Crowe, *Method in Theology: An Organon for Our Time* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980) 26.

<sup>94</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, 274.

<sup>95</sup> Raymond LaFontaine, “The Development of a Moral Doctrine: Religious Liberty and Doctrinal Development in the Works of John Henry Newman and John Courtney Murray” (PhD thesis, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome, 2001) 46.

**Research:** The objective focus of this phase would be the gathering of historical, social, and textual data, as is customarily done in SoR. The subjective integration that modifies this would be the intentionally attentive collection of data on symbolic indications of the psychic condition of the group under study, such as data on myths, dogmas, doctrines, symbols, rituals, and the adequacy of current socially extant symbols to this group to perform the task of mediating between the conscious and the unconscious.<sup>96</sup> The idea is to make all relevant data available for a Jungian SoR investigation.

**Interpretation:** The objective focus of this phase would be the determining of external meaning and describing the cultural context of the religious traditions of the group under study, as is customarily done in SoR. The subjective integration that modifies this would be the use of symbolic hermeneutics to gain understanding regarding the symbols, dogmas, doctrines, myths, and rituals, collected earlier, so that we are able to produce hypotheses about how these form the living expressions of the collective unconscious in this sample space. This stage is important in gaining theoretical insights on how symbolic communication with the subconscious complexes happens in this demographic.

**History:** The objective focus of this phase would be the formation of judgements and crafting of accounts of the socio-religious history of the demographic of interest, as is customarily done in SoR. The subjective integration that modifies this would be based on the recognition that the psyche itself is historically conditioned (Walker, 2023), and would seek to gain a deeper understanding of the origins and historical contents of the psyche of the demographic.<sup>97</sup>

**Dialectic:** The objective focus of this phase would be the unravelling of harmonies and conflicts concerning facts, meanings, and experiences in the demographic of interest, as is customarily done in SoR. The subjective integration that modifies this would be the attempt to critically analyse the conflict between credal faith and living religion, the spiritual impulse of the eros, the expression of the unconscious.<sup>98</sup> This would involve

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<sup>96</sup> Mandic, "Carl Gustav Jung's Three Views of Religion," 128, 141.

<sup>97</sup> Progoff, *Jung's Psychology and Its Social Meaning*, 160.

<sup>98</sup> Walker, *Psyche, Science and Society*, 70.

identifying positions and counter-positions in the psychic content identified and made explicit.<sup>99</sup> Once these conflicting horizons (in Lonergan's terminology, the limits of an individual's knowledge) are made explicit, the investigating sociologist of religion is on the threshold of the required multi-level conversion that needs to be effected in oneself to retrieve the past.<sup>100</sup> This concludes the first stage, and the investigator is ready to proceed to phase two, in which the objective and subjective knowledge gained is translated into sociological contributions to the current social context.

**Foundations:** Here, the subjective and objective realms are synthesised in a transpersonal SoR methodology to articulate the resulting new horizon, thus outlining the researcher's authentic subjective stand.<sup>101</sup> This new horizon is achieved by going through the multiple conversions, and most crucially for the field of SoR, the psychic conversion outlined by Doran.<sup>102</sup>

**Doctrines:** Here, the subjective and objective realms are synthesised in a transpersonal SoR methodology to distil into explicit form the resulting truths and values implicitly present in the foundations articulated in the previous stage. This stage makes use of the Jungian insight that the Self is empirically "indistinguishable from a God-Image" to understand the teleology of the psyche of the demographic.<sup>103</sup>

**Systematics:** Here, the subjective and objective realms are synthesised in a transpersonal SoR methodology to derive from the truths and values identified earlier, distinct doctrines that can function as social prescriptions, and to arrange them in a coherent fashion. This would involve the construction of a transpersonal sociological ethic,<sup>104</sup> which could be comprised of prescriptions for the micro and macro

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<sup>99</sup> Cush, "Lonergan's Communal Novum Organon," 4.

<sup>100</sup> Cush, *A Concise Introduction to Bernard Lonergan*, 95.

<sup>101</sup> Vernon Gregson, *The Desires of the Human Heart: An Introduction to the Theology of Bernard Lonergan*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1988) 86.

<sup>102</sup> Cush, *A Concise Introduction to Bernard Lonergan*, 82, 132.

<sup>103</sup> Mandic, "Carl Gustav Jung's Three Views of Religion," 130.

<sup>104</sup> Greenwood, "Emile Durkheim and C. G. Jung: Structuring a Transpersonal Sociology of Religion," *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 32/2 (2013) 43, <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2013.32.2.42>.

sociological levels, thus synthesising prescriptions of psychology into sociology.<sup>105</sup>

**Communications:** Here, the subjective and objective realms are synthesised in a transpersonal SoR methodology to present the properly curated final results to the current context (the cultural matrix in its current particular historical form in time and place), and also keeping in mind future stakeholders.<sup>106</sup> This communication emphasizes that the solution to collective social dysfunction requires the personal inner work and transformation of individuals.<sup>107</sup> Such a communication is a call to authentic flourishing.<sup>108</sup>

This proposed methodology simultaneously addresses several concerns mentioned above. It is mindful of Walker's warning against constructing overarching narratives and opts instead for a methodological shift.<sup>109</sup> What is kept at the centre here is the invariant method, not a particular doctrinal commitment. This approach remains aware of the limitations of each specialist and systematically differentiates tasks, objectives and required data.<sup>110</sup> This approach rejects the temptation of 'one-sided totalitarian ambitions' as pointed out by St Amour while keeping the responsibility for the Individuation process at the centre of the inquiry.<sup>111</sup> Such an approach fulfils Sonoda's desire for a SoR that is a fully human science. This approach seeks to attain objectivity through authentic subjectivity, which Lonergan insisted upon.<sup>112</sup> Being a dialectical approach between subjective and objective concerns, this also fulfils Wheeldon's recommendation of the consultative paradigm, as well as

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<sup>105</sup> Walker, *Psyche, Science and Society*, 4.

<sup>106</sup> Gregson, *The Desires of the Human Heart*, 132.

<sup>107</sup> Miranda, "C. G. Jung on Religion," 8.

<sup>108</sup> Cush, *A Concise Introduction to Bernard Lonergan*, 1.

<sup>109</sup> Walker, *Psyche, Science and Society*.

<sup>110</sup> Chris S. Friel, "The Inequality of Insight: Bernard Lonergan's Early Social Theory," (2017) [https://www.academia.edu/34735274/The\\_Inequality\\_of\\_Insight\\_Bernard\\_Lonergans\\_Early\\_Social\\_Theory](https://www.academia.edu/34735274/The_Inequality_of_Insight_Bernard_Lonergans_Early_Social_Theory), accessed on 23/02/26.

<sup>111</sup> Paul St Amour, "Functional Specialization and the Future of the Love of Wisdom," November 12, 2022, 144 <https://journals.library.mun.ca/index.php/jmda/article/view/2514>.

<sup>112</sup> Michael H. McCarthy, *Authenticity as Self-Transcendence* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015) vii.

makes a start at the programme of co-operation between Jungian and Durkheimian views as desired by Greenwood.

### **Conclusion and Future Work**

Our exploration above has shown that a Jungian SoR is not only theoretically defensible and practically feasible but also socially desirable. Moreover, it would not be just one more overarching theoretical framework among others, but rather, would be a methodological paradigm shift in the field of sociology. In the current climate of increasing fundamentalism and extremism, the Jungian analysis of the archetype-rich collective unconscious would function as a base to explain and analyse religious belief, praxis, and ritual (and it would do this all the more admirably if complemented with a Lonerganian intentionality analysis). Destructive social religious phenomena like flaring extremism or religion-based aggression, for instance, could be analysed as failures of symbolic systems and eruptions of unintegrated shadow archetypal content in such social contexts. The Jungian emphasis on individuation could provide a pattern for the formation of a healing minority that functions as a methodological fire-break against extremism not only in religion, but also within SoR itself, in which case they would be a voice of integrated reason/unconscious against intellectual extremism, inflexible dogmatism, and the inverse snobbery currently often meted out to religion by self-righteous sociologists of religion.

We note that a Jungian SoR offers much scope to interface with currently ongoing discourses in various corners of academia. However, what we have outlined is a mere hypothetical proposal. It has several weaknesses, as we would be the first to admit, which need consideration and polishing in future work. For instance, in its current shape, it is vulnerable to the accusation that it is unfalsifiable. Thus, we need to work out a mechanism to acknowledge disagreement between individuated investigators. Further, we are aware our claims are completely lacking any empirical backing. Some pilot studies showing the feasibility of such an approach are very much necessary.

As we have already noted, by the very fact of being Jungian, such a SoR would be open to the insights of those who came after Jung and either

developed this tradition like Campbell,<sup>113</sup> Moore<sup>114</sup> or Neumann<sup>115</sup> or even transcended it like Doran.<sup>116</sup> It also has the advantage of being able to interact with contemporary interlocutors like Peterson,<sup>117</sup> who has attempted to understand the individuation of the Self within a postmodern context, and Vervaeke,<sup>118</sup> whose work on relevance realization has garnered attention for its potential to combine advances in cognitive science with the philosophical tradition and with scientific paradigms like chaos-complexity theory. In fact, even decades ago, some of the significant contributors to sociology like Rabinow and Sullivan,<sup>119</sup> Vanfossen, Berger, and Kellner<sup>120</sup> provided indications that the field was ripe for such new paradigms (We have already seen how Greenwood brought to light that several researchers have insisted on the urgent need for a Jungian approach which would complement the Durkheimian approach, and which the Durkheimian approach actually calls for. This call has yet to be responded to in a systematic manner.)<sup>121</sup> We feel confident in saying that these indicated avenues of opportunity have not been fully explored and a SoR based on the insights of Jung would be a very effective way to do so, as we hope to show in future work.

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<sup>113</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Novato: New World Library, 2008) 42.

<sup>114</sup> Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

<sup>115</sup> Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*.

<sup>116</sup> Doran, *Psychic Conversion and Theological Foundations*.

<sup>117</sup> Jordan B. Peterson, *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* (New York: Routledge, 2002), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203902851>.

<sup>118</sup> John Vervaeke, "Awakening from the Meaning Crisis (Complete Lecture Series)," YouTube video, 2019.

<sup>119</sup> Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader* (California: University of California Press, 1979).

<sup>120</sup> Beth E. Vanfossen, Peter L. Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, "Sociology Reinterpreted: An Essay on Method and Vocation," *Contemporary Sociology* **12/2** (1983) 239, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2066822>.

<sup>121</sup> Greenwood, "Emile Durkheim and C. G. Jung: Structuring a Transpersonal Sociology of Religion."

**ABSTRACT**

Here, we propose, via Jung, a methodological shift in Sociology of Religion (SoR). We seek an invariant non-reductionist method in SoR regarding the depths of religious experience. We hypothesise that, encouraged by Taylor's characterisation of secularisation, taking the authentic subjectivity (in the Lonerganian sense) of the sociological investigator of religion as starting-point, and the consultational recommendation of Wheeldon as the interaction paradigm, we would have a prototypical methodological toolbox for a non-condescending approach in SoR. The proposed approach evades the trap of overarching narratives, while retaining commitment to scientific rigour, without discarding the existing theoretical heritage of SoR.