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how to make an ATHEIST of MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

HOW TO MAKE AN ATHEIST OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

It's easier than you may think. Just fade him into the narcissistic background, midground, & foreground of America today--as limned by Christopher Lasch, Tom Wolfe, the upcoming film "Religion, Inc.," the books (beginning with Hodding Carter's) on the Reagan years on the greedizing of America, film-&-tube critics on the lustizing of America, culture theologians expositing the popularity of ecstasy-promising religion of the hot ("pentecostal") & cool ("metaphysical") sorts, & the cult-hero status now accorded Jos. Campbell since his six PBS sessions with Bill Moyers....which leads me directly to:

1....a newspaper column today. It cooks Jesus & King (how close in the calendar their "days," it exudes) in a Jungian broth stirred by Campbell. Mytholog ("follow your bliss") Campbell bloomed into media attention a generation later than Baba ("drop out, tune in" dopehead) Ram Das. For Campell, who died soon after doing his thing with Moyers, **Jungianism** was the drug of preference. A dropout piggybacking on a dropout.

2. Jung was a dropout from Protestantism, Campbell was a dropout from Catholicism. Instead of living out their birth-religion into the world, both went on a solipsistic-masturbatory journey into the interior, committing the sin of introjection & the idolatry of fusing soul & deity (the ultimate in self-congratulatory megalomania).

3. Since Jung was Campbell's model, guru, ideal, frame, a critical look at the former will give us a running start in understanding the latter. Then we can have a look at the stew in the column ("The Heroism of Martin Luther King," Mary Zepernick, CCT)....**Jung** piggybacked on Freud, modifying the latter's mythologization of the inner life. All three of our mythologs--Freud, Jung, Campbell--remind me of this in J.R.R.Tolkien (36f, "On Fairy-Stories," in THE TOLKIEN READER, Ballantine/66): *Children are capable of "literary belief," when the story-maker's art is good enough to produce it. That state of mind has been called "willing suspension of disbelief." But this does not seem to me a good description of what happens. What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful "sub-creator." He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is "true": it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken: the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside.* The child in me is alive enough to enter with blissful delight into Tolkien's hobbit-world of Middle Earth: he & I share the Primary World of classic Christianity. With the same ability but without the blissful delight I can enter into worlds created by dropouts from biblical faith to substitute for the biblical way of seeing & living in the world, viz, **theism**. In Freud's case, the atheism was part of the "ordeal of civility." In Jung's case, it was the oedipal introjection of his clergyman father, his father's church (the sanctuary transmogrified into the soul), & his father's religion. Now let's look at Campbell's airy mythopoetizing:

4. Philosophers (& scientists as "philosophers of nature") set out **theories**, paradigms, for testing-modifying-transcending (thus "heuresis" & "conation"). Campbell paraded himself as a philosopher, & was the darling of artists who felt that in him they had a house-philsopher who relieved them of the burden of theism: an atheist philosopher of art. What Campbell started with was not a theory but a **dogma**--which makes him a preacher (a worthy profession), not a philosopher or (what he also claimed to be) a scientist. His sacred text is Jung, & here's his sermon (since his first publishing on myth, 1943, without change since): (1) Myth is essential to meaning, & moderns are in turmoil because mythless, modern life accordingly being meaningless; (2) Why no myths? Science killed them at the literal level; (3) What's really real about myth can't be killed by science: it's its symbolic level; (4) True psychology knows the symbolic meaning of myth; (5) Jung knows the real meaning of myth & is therefore the true psychologist; (6) Jungianly under-

over

stood, the mythic dimension does not offend moderns, who are allergic to religion's scandals of history & of particularity; (7) Boiled off of religion & condensed, myth makes a brandy the modern palate delights in--so much so that life once more takes on meaning, & in consequence the turmoil of modern society subsides.

5. Thus we have a sermon Rainer Maria Rilke told the children he couldn't preach, a sermon **leaving God out**, a God-bypass sermon. So common is this syndrome in American life today that it strikes most folks as strange when God is included, as in an occasional comment of Surgeon Gen. Ev. Coop, an evangelical Christian. Is the sermon logical? No, sermons don't have to be; they should hang together, but that's something else: cohesion serving the coherent "Secondary World" of biblical faith which, for the faithful, is the "Primary World." Some sermons can be logical; Campbell's single sermon is anecdotal. Instead of arguments, he gives us examples on end (Frazer's GOLDEN BOUGH style--you could say C. is F. Jungianized). But his examples, being subject to interpretations other than his, do not prove his case but only give it plausibility (by what logicians & literati call concatenic variations, a flower's petals all pointing to its center). Further, he's somewhat cavalier about his dogma, like a dilettante qualifying or even contradicting it. (In scribal religion, proof-texts do what examples do for C.)

6. Our columnist is bewitched by C. from having junkied herself over the holidays on "all six of the videotapes, 'The Power of Myth'" (C./Moyers). She goes for C.'s substitution of the vitalistic for the semantic: C. taught myth "not so much" as search for meaning as "an exploration and expression of the experience of being alive." This vitalism conjoins neatly with the current "wellness" movement, therapeutic cults, & therapeutized liberal religion. She's an activist from the 1960s & likes C.'s glorification of the hero: "Campbell contends that the adventure a hero is ready for is the one she or he gets. All this made me think of Martin Luther King Jr. This is the time of year to mark his life, as Christmas marks the birth of Jesus Christ--mythic heroes both." Jesus & Martin captured together in one swoop of the mythic-heroic net! I knew Martin well enough to imagine him cringing at this **blasphemy**, for he was an evangelical Christian.

7. Now we come to the Jungian interiorism: "C. speaks of heroes as those who listen to the demands of their own heart....Such a hero is King, who listened to his heart and got the adventure he was ready for." Brother Martin would have laughed at the wording & scorned its meaning. He was particularly unfond of what he heard when he listened to his **heart**,* & willingly captive to what he heard when he listened to his **God**. It's sappy, devious, perverse, pernicious, degenerate to represent the former as an adequate translation of the latter. King was a God-filled, God-intoxicated man in heart & mind. As to the latter, his BU PhD was on God. (It's unpublished; I've read the photocopy of it in the library of N.Y. Theological Seminary. Unlike C., K. was a philosopher as well as a preacher. His PhD dissertation tries, tests, compares the God-ideas of Whitehead, whose works I know well, & Wieman, under whom I had seven courses.) Somebody ought to precis the dissertation so as to fight our secular society's tendency to mythologize Martin into a Jungian atheist. (Only the naive would think Jung not an atheist. His famous "I don't believe in God, I know" means only that he holds to his own de- & re-mythologization of the biblical deity, the resultant deity being hard to distinguish from the soul--a pathology that took a lower cultural form in the Rev. Jim Jones, who became a god of death for 912 of his followers.)

8. King's favorite hymn is worth repeating in order to show his evangelical-fervent-personal piety: *Precious Lord, take my hand, lift me up, let me stand.....*Prayer, not introspection. How pale by contrast are the words of C. with which the column closes: "We have not even to risk the adventure alone, for the heroes of all time have gone before us. The labyrinth is thoroughly known. We have only to follow the threat of the hero path, and where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves. Where we had thought to travel outward, we will come to the center of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we will be with all the world."

* "The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart."--Jeremiah 17:9f.