

Towards an imaginal dialogue

Archetypal symbols between Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Islam

This paper explores the potential for a dialogue between religious traditions based on art, in order to complement the dominant channels that rely on conceptual meanings. Building on a theoretical framework of post-Jungian archetypal psychology – as developed by James Hillman and Henry Corbin – we propose that the utility of such a dialogue inheres in the notion of an imaginal realm, or mundus imaginalis. In the first part of the paper we highlight three key features of this notion: the distinction between the imaginal and the imaginary; the significance of a culturally differentiated collective unconscious; and a reflection of the imaginal in practice rather than conceptually. We emphasize the materiality of sacred symbols that emerge from the imaginal realm. In the second part, we illustrate the importance of two archetypal symbols: the fish and the chalice. The significance of these symbols in history and in the practices of communities of believers is discussed. Thirdly, we discuss specific features of the dialogue emerging from these ubiquitous archetypal symbols.

Introduction

Since the 1980s intercultural dialogue has been a major field in efforts to manage the newly recognized cultural and religious diversity in all countries of the world. The term was adopted by the United Nations and the Council of Europe, among others, as the basis for promoting tolerance (Besley and Peters 2012). Despite the presence of all kinds of cultural conflicts, including along ethnic lines, arguably the defining divide in our times is inter-religious. Even when political or economic factors may be at stake, nevertheless ‘religion sometimes constitutes the fault line along which opposing sides are divided’

(Timmerman and Segaert 2005: 9). While engaging with the religious other is in part an individual activity, institutionalized platforms play a crucial role in defining that personal engagement (Keaten and Soukup 2009). There is also little doubt of the challenges in such endeavours. Journals, books, forums, and party political activities attest to the difficulty in sustaining interfaith dialogue.

Most experiences relate shared meaning as the central concern as well as a central obstacle (Bohm 1996). Shared meaning is crucial to dialogue at both the institutional and personal levels, but the search for commonality in meaning has proven elusive, especially in interfaith dialogue (Azumah 2002, Bohm 1996). However, few accounts break down what that meaning does, or could, consist in. The most common approach is epistemological. There is a reliance on conceptual dialogue, which assumes that meaning is a universal feature of any concept; that it may be confused by users, but that confusion may be readily sorted out by means of discussion if only people were to sit across from each other and do so. There is, of course, much criticism of this standard account.¹ Yet, decoupling meaning from fixed universals opens up a space for dialogue that has not been fully explored. In this paper, we make a contribution to this space within the field of comparative religious

1 A strong strand of critique follows the later Wittgenstein in showing that this relies on an incorrect notion of meaning. Meaning, for Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), is in most cases application in practice. This theme runs parallel to our argument, but we do not connect it here for lack of space. For a Wittgensteinian account of dialogue see, e.g., Strandberg 2006.

studies by showing the potential for dialogue beyond assumed universal concepts.

To do so, we rely on the theory of an imaginal realm, which builds on a 'poetic basis of the mind' and emphasizes the role of images. Drawing on the work of psychoanalyst Carl Jung – star student, later rival, of Freud and a foundational figure in psychoanalysis – this line of thinking has been developed by director of the Zurich Institute for Analytical Psychology, James Hillman, as well as by the French Islamic Studies scholar Henry Corbin. The theory builds on Jung's notion of archetypes shared by humanity's collective unconscious – a sort of 'deep culture' in the anthropological sense.

As Jung and post-Jungians have done, we explore these archetypes and the imaginal realm in religious traditions. By the term 'tradition' we don't mean a collection of some archaic beliefs and outmoded practices. Rather, we use it in the sense of living traditions, involving perpetual handings-on of teachings, practices, ethics, truths and so on. A tradition's contemporaneity is what makes it relevant. As Vladimir Lossky (1976: 236) puts it, 'tradition is not merely the aggregate of dogmas, of sacred institutions, and of rites which the Church preserves. It is, above all, that which expresses in its outward determinations a living tradition.' What defines practices as traditions is their conscious sense of historicity (Gadamer 1987). In this sense, modernity (including all the varieties of secular outlooks) is a tradition as well. In some ways it is the defining tradition of our times, as it connects to all of our lived experiences as well as how we perceive the world today (on the pivotal role of secular modernity, see especially Taylor 2007). As traditions, we are especially interested in the practices of people living out their faith, not only what they profess or believe.

We choose the living traditions of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and South Asian Islam as illustration here due to our own long-term, ethnographic fieldwork amongst Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Finland, Pakistan, Russia, and South Africa between 2006 and 2016. The interconnections between the traditions is, in general, under studied. Our data includes some of this ongoing engagement and conversations with interlocutors, as well as popularly accessible images. Our focus is on developing the theoretical argument that dialogue through images supplements conceptual dialogue by tapping into universal, archetypal symbols to move beyond cognitive barriers. We illustrate this with two archetypal

symbols: the fish and the chalice. The brief discussion of features of these symbols is not meant to 'prove' the argument, but rather to highlight the variations in its utility for imaginal dialogue. More empirical work is needed to flesh out practical instances of the role these two symbols play in the life of the faithful and in underpinning dialogue.

There is no unavoidable reason to choose these particular two symbols; in fact, the very point of the collective unconscious is that it is populated by numerous such pre-agenic symbols and personifications. In his researches into cultures across the globe and over time, Jung had identified numerous archetypal symbols and personae (Jung, *Collected Works* (CW, 1979) 9, parts I and II). His purpose was to identify how these could be used to analyse psychopathology or to help patients improve their self-awareness. However, our purpose in choosing the symbols is to exemplify our argument for a cross-tradition dialogue that does not rely on individual imaginations reaching out to each other, but rather on subtle tapings into pre-existent archetypes.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section we discuss our theoretical framework, briefly outlining the concepts of the imaginal realm and the cultural unconscious. Since this framework is not immediately familiar for many, we discuss the key elements in some detail. The next two sections outline two symbols that we argue are archetypal in the sense that they are pervasive worldwide and have had the potential to move people throughout history. We describe very briefly here the symbols of the fish and the chalice. In each case we give some examples of historical and some of contemporary usage in both Eastern Orthodox and Islamic lived traditions. The final section discusses the potential utility of these symbols for imaginal dialogue.

The imaginal realm: theory and practice

Mundus imaginalis: from imaginary to imaginal

From the imaginal these themes
enter awareness
Ghalib, the whisper of your pen across paper
is the sound of an angel
(Mirza Ghalib, d. 1869, India, Urdu poet)

The theory of a *mundus imaginalis* was developed by the famous Sorbonne Islamic studies scholar Henri

Corbin in his extensive study of Sufi saints, especially Suhrawardi (d. 1191) and Ibn Arabi (d. 1240). Corbin's descriptions of the imaginal world are scattered throughout his oeuvre over decades (e.g. Corbin 1981, Corbin 1998), and summarized in a 1964 colloquium paper (Corbin 1964). In brief, *mundus imaginalis* is a circumscribed, intermediate realm of spiritual encounter: 'the place of the encounter between God's descent toward the creature and the creature's ascent toward God. Here human and divine imagination meet and the pure intelligible archetypes enter knowledge. ... [I]t mediates between the world of the Spirit and the world of the body' (Bamford 1998: xx). Relying on neoplatonic Abrahamic thought, Corbin ascribes an autonomous, ontological status to this world, the realm of *Malakut* (Soul) that lies in between the worlds of *Jabarut* (Intelligence) and *Mulk* (Human Corporality).

Corbin takes care to use the Latin term for *mundus imaginalis* in order to avoid contemporary Western usages that he says are caught up in a Cartesian dualism between body and mind, and that refuse to allow for the existence of an intermediate order of reality, or one that is populated by incomplete or invisible bodies. Corbin's coinage is a self-conscious attempt to avoid 'betraying' (Corbin 1964: 1) the sense of the Arabic and Persian term *'alam-al-mithal* (literally 'world of similitude' or 'analogies') in Sufi theological texts. Emphasizing the sense of 'world', Corbin offers wide-ranging evidence from Arabic, Persian and pre-Platonic Greek thought to describe this world as a 'land' and 'clime' having a navigable spiritual topography, and populated by identifiable 'subtle bodies'. As he puts it, 'This is no utopia, but a real country and a real space, yet one which has neither location nor climate in the world perceived by the outer senses' (Corbin 1998: 125).

A crucial aspect of Corbin's theory is that the kingdom of 'subtle bodies' of the *mundus imaginalis* is accessible to the spiritual traveller through her subtle organ: the 'active imagination' (a term employed by Jung). Corbin often identifies the active imagination (relying on much evidence from early Christian and Muslim mystical texts) with the organ of the 'heart' – although of course not the physical muscle in the chest. This organ of cognition is 'distinct from both pure intellect and from the senses' (Bamford 1998: XX), and its elements are emotion rather than cognition, empathy rather than judgment, awe as opposed to awareness, as evident in eerie and uncanny images

(Qadir and Tiaynen-Qadir 2016). In contrast to its mere fantasy-making side, the subtle organ of the active imagination can also dedicate itself to the 'service of the Intellect, the *Noûs* ... thereby the organ of prophetic vision' (Corbin 1998: 127). The active imagination then functions as a 'mirror' to the super-sensible images of the intellect.

A feature of the *mundus imaginalis* is a distinction between the imaginal and the imaginary. Indeed, this was the very distinction that prompted Corbin's neologism:

I have proposed the Latin *mundus imaginalis*, because we must avoid any confusion between the object of imaginative or imagining perception, on the one hand, and what we commonly qualify as 'imaginary', on the other. For the general tendency is to juxtapose the real and the imaginary as if the latter were unreal, Utopian ... Let me again emphasize that what is involved is not imagination as we understand it in our present-day language, but a *vision* which is *Imaginatio vera*. (Corbin 1964: 10)

The autonomous existence of the imaginal realm, and its subtle objects, has significant consequences for Corbin. Among these is the point that images are not just the sensible pictures we can see and touch, but even those that can be described in language – as indeed mystics have done across traditions and time (Cheetham 2015).

Archetypal symbols and the collective unconscious

The concept of *mundus imaginalis*, more than anything else, led James Hillman to describe Corbin as the 'second immediate father' of archetypal psychology along with C. G. Jung (Hillman 1983: 3). Hillman has led the development (or, 're-visioning') of post-Jungian depth psychology that recognizes and seeks to re-balance the many-sidedness of human nature. The imaginal is essential to post-Jungian archetypal psychology in its view of the basic structure of human reality: 'Here I am suggesting both a *poetic basis of mind* and a psychology that starts neither in the physiology of the brain, the structure of language, the organization of society, nor the analysis of behavior, but in the process of imagination' (Hillman 1975: xi). The image is primal and irreducible (although it may be expressed verbally):

... allegory is a defensive reaction of the rational mind against the full power of the soul's irrational personifying propensity. ... Images are turned into pre-defined concepts We sin against imagination whenever we ask an image for its meaning, requiring that images be translated into concepts. (Hillman 1975: 8, 39)

Indeed, "Stick to the image" (Jung, CW 16: §320) (Jung 1979) has become a golden rule of archetypal psychology's method, and this because the image is the primary psychological datum' (Hillman 1983: 9). The imaginal is, crucially, 'personified', leading to the notion of the 'archetype' as an essential building block in Hillman's approach. Although taking clarification of the concept further than Jung – who believed that archetypes are models of people, behaviours and personalities – Hillman's account remains difficult to encapsulate. That is intentional, since the complexity of archetypes and their fundamental challenge to our naturalized, Cartesian way of conceptualizing things defy direct capture. Like art, society, wellbeing, and so on, archetypes too cannot be completely circumscribed or bounded, but can still be used (Ahmed 2002). Jung, Hillman and others prefer to elaborate the ways in which archetypes work rather than what they are ontologically (hence the focus on archetypal psychology). Still, as a starting point, Hillman suggests:

Let us then imagine archetypes as the *deepest patterns of psychic functioning*, the roots of the soul governing the perspectives we have of ourselves and the world. They are axiomatic, self-evident images to which psychic life and our theories about it ever return. They are similar to other axiomatic first principles, the models or paradigms, that we find in other fields. (Hillman 1975: xiii, italics in original)

For Hillman, as for Jung, archetypes are autonomous to the extent that individuals do not fantasize or 'imagine' them. We are, rather, living them, or experiencing the world through them. Indeed, 'All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes' (Jung, CW 8). In many ways, for post-Jungian thought, there is nothing deeper, nothing more primal, to human consciousness than archetypes. This irreducible emphasis can be likened to neo-Kantian social theory's recognition, after the

linguistic turn, that the basic structure of human cognition is based on language (e.g. Brown 1989).²

Archetypes reside in the autonomous realm of *mundus imaginalis*, but this realm is not merely accessible through rigorous esoteric training. In fact, it is reflected in the world around us through what Jung termed the 'collective unconscious'. With this term, Jung differentiated the homogenous unconscious, innovatively identified by Freud, into a personal and a collective aspect. The latter is that part of each person's unconscious that is shared across all of humanity (Jung, CW 7: §437ff). Over a lifetime of immersion in the symbols, myths and legends of cultures and religious traditions from around the world, Jung became ever more convinced of the universality and autonomy of the collective unconscious. He collected a veritable library of evidence of symbols appearing in the visualizations and dreams of people who could never have known of those symbols through personal experience: Europeans capturing ancient European, but also Eastern, symbols. In contemporary social theory, we might relate the collective unconscious to a 'deep' sense of culture in the anthropological sense (although this connection needs further social theoretic elaboration). In brief:

My thesis then, is as follows: in addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix), there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents. (Jung, CW 9, part 1)

Jung and post-Jungians such as Hillman analyse virtually any psycho-social condition in terms of the denial of a personality's collective features and of its inherent image-work. Pathology is often an

2 Recent arguments note that the poetic basis of human reality extends beyond language and into mental images that are not always described in language but that underpin social action (Alasuutari and Qadir 2016).

insistence on one-sidedness in the face of humanity's inherent plurality as evident in the multi-faceted collective unconscious. Literalism is:

an idol that forgets it is an image and believes itself a God, taking itself metaphysically, seriously, damned to fulfill its task of coagulating the many into singleness of meaning which we call facts, data, problems, realities. ... Remember: the enemy is the literal, and the literal is not the concrete flesh but negligence of the vision that concrete flesh is a magnificent citadel of metaphors. (Hillman 1975: 150, 74)

Again, Jung put it succinctly: 'Our true religion is a monotheism of consciousness, a possession by it, coupled with a fanatical denial of the existence of fragmentary autonomous systems' (Jung, CW 13: §51). Post-Jungian psychology, from Corbin through to Hillman, allows an unexplored move beyond singular, ego-dominated, and monocularly-moral visions of dialogue. Such work would free images from 'serving a narrational context, having to tell a story with its linear, sequential, and causal implications that foster first-person reports of the egocentric actions and intentions of a personalistic subject' (Hillman 1983: 15).

From the perspective of post-Jungian depth psychology, it is self-evident that archetypes exist in all traditions. Yet these archetypes are not static, and their configurations or appearances vary across cultures. It thus becomes important to map how precisely bridges can be built in the cultural unconscious. Against this backdrop we are interested in reoccurring imaginal themes across history (in religious images, texts and songs) and in contemporary ethnographic accounts of Christian Orthodoxy and Islam. Our contention is that these archetypal themes resonate in humanity's cultural unconscious, and it is this resonance that builds the platform for a dialogue of traditions.

Orthodox icons

It is important to keep in mind different histories of dealing with religious images in Orthodox Christianity and Islam (or others). For the former, we focus in this paper on icons, which have always been central to Orthopraxis (e.g. Weaver 2011). In Orthodox Christianity, icons have often come to be seen as 'windows on eternity', expressions of divine

presence and beauty in the created world (Munteanu 2013). While the basic meaning of the word 'icon' is 'image' or 'likeness', it has come to signify a religious painting, usually painted on wooden panels, and often considered to be divinely inspired (Cawthorne 2005: 8). Icons are usually two-dimensional images depicting saints, angels, Mary, the Holy Trinity, Jesus, or important events.

Yet calling an icon a religious image or a religious painting would be inaccurate from the perspective of Orthopraxis – their veneration is not the veneration of the material pictures, but is directed rather to the archetype of the painted icon (Hann and Goltz 2010: 12). Indeed, icons can be seen as having an agency of their own: an icon is considered successful not if the artist executes precisely the conventions of iconography, but if God has blessed him to convey what is normally invisible and unknowable, and the icon is popularly legitimated (Weaver 2011: 407).

Similarly, the early twentieth-century Russian Orthodox theologian and philosopher Pavel Florensky has pointed out that icons can be 'doors' to eternity (Florensky 1994). Saints and other heavenly beings depicted in icons emerge as living creatures of other realms:

I look at the icon and tell myself: 'This is She', not the image of Her, but She Herself, contemplated through mediation, with the help of icon-writing art. As if through the window, I see the Mother of God, the Mother of God Herself, and I pray to Her, face to face, not to the image. There is no image in my consciousness: there is a board with paints, and there is the Mother of God Herself. (Florensky 1993: 48, our translation)

Some icon writers are historically thought of as having had direct experience of the divine. For this reason, the icon-writing canon, which incorporated the revealed encounters of Church Fathers and saints, is strictly followed. However, many iconic styles have grown out of later Church authorizations of icons that had become popular. Whatever the role of the Orthodox Church was in legitimizing or authorizing the styles, the fact that such icons attracted huge popular followings – even attributions of miracles – points to their archetypal value. The highest form of icon painting, according to Pavel Florensky, is when icons convey 'all-human canons' (*kanony voistinu*



Figure 1a (left). Maryam and Isa. Persian miniature (nd). Figure 1b (right). The Prophet Muhammad meets the prophets Is'mail, Is'haaq and Luut on his Mi'raj night journey, Apocalypse of Muhammad (1436, Herat).

vsechelovecheskie). ‘The more ontological the spiritual comprehension, the more naturally it is received as something very familiar, longed for by all human consciousness’ (Florensky 1993: 69). ‘All-human canons’ can be roughly compared with archetypes, which icons are supposed to capture, while the figures in the icons can be seen as the inhabitants of the realm of the imaginal.

Islamic images

It has become almost a truism to point out aniconism, or even iconoclasm, amongst Muslims. Indeed, for various reasons Muslims have chosen to develop the art of writing to the almost complete exclusion of many other forms of art. Factors including political expediency were instrumental in defining what later became crystallized as (especially Sunni) dogma (Moosa 2014). Yet, arguably even the aniconistic art of calligraphy can be seen as a ‘visual representation of God’, representing divine presence in the world (Elias 2011: 127). There is a close relationship between Islamic art and Islamic spirituality (Nasr 1987), and images have been a core component of that. Vernacular practices of Islam reveal even more diverse attitudes and appropriations of images throughout history and in contemporary Islam.

Consider the multiple (stylistically iconic) depictions of the Prophet Isa (Jesus) and Maryam (Virgin Mary). This subject used to be a common classical depiction (Figure 1a). Likewise, the classical depiction of the Prophet Muhammad’s night journey was

frequently depicted (Figure 1b), although it is now common to blank out the face of the Prophet himself. Similarly, Muslim saints are often depicted in colourful paintings, posters and photographs placed in shrines or homes, which are experienced as ‘the shadow of mercy’ and the focus of ‘lived’ devotion within different mystically inspired practices of Islam in Pakistan (Frembgen 2011: 11).

The nature of Muslim practices around images varies from place to place. In West Africa, for instance, paintings and photographs of Sufi saints and their descendents are touched by devotees in order to receive *Baraka* (blessing, divine grace) (e.g. De Jong 2016). In South Asia, vernacular expression takes, for instance, the form of ‘truck art’, in which *Buraq* – the mythical steed that carried the Prophet Muhammad on his spiritual night journey – is still a common image (Ahmed 2011: 6).

However in no way do we reduce the real of the imaginal and religious aesthetics to images. Following the concept of material religion (Meyer 2011, Morgan 2005), we focus on the involvement of the body in religious practice. In Islam, as in Orthodoxy and other traditions, this includes mystical songs, the recitation of liturgical texts including in archaic languages, and so on, as domains of expressions of the imaginal. For instance, in much of the Muslim world, there is a tradition of devotional singing, often at shrines (*qawwaali*), in which audience participation through singing and dancing is essential to the performance. Although some of that is now coming

under interdiction (Bedford 2001), it remains a widespread vernacular practice and has been 'exported' to Europe (Bossius, Häger and Kahn-Harris 2011) and beyond.

The fish as an archetypal symbol

Jung devoted considerable attention to fish symbolism, beginning with a historical analysis of the symbolism of Christ as a fish:

The Christian fish symbol appeared in Alexandria around AD 200; similarly, the baptismal bath was described as a *piscina* (fish pond) quite early. This presupposes that the believers were fishes, as is in fact suggested by the gospels (for instance Matt. 4:19). There Christ wants to make Peter and Andrew 'fishers of men,' and the miraculous draught of fishes (Luke 5:10) is used by Christ himself as a paradigm for Peter's missionary activity. (Jung, CW 9, part II: §145)

Jung presaged a lengthy historical discussion on the astrological symbolism of Christianity: Christ's birth coinciding with the astrological Age of the Fish, being 'born as the first fish of the Pisces era, and ... doomed to die as the last ram (αρνίον, lamb) of the declining Aries era' (Jung, CW 9, part II: §147). A number of people since have used this symbolism in different ways (including to impute Christian overlays on pre-existing pagan symbolism), but Jung's own use is subtle: the same archetype manifests itself throughout history, in pagan astrological symbolism and myths, in Jewish practices (from Cabalistic studies concerning devout Israelites living in the water of the doctrine to images on the benediction chalice), and in the personality of Christ. The fish was an important symbol for early Christians, partly (but only partly) due to the anagram ICHTHYS (meaning 'fish' in classical Greek) of the words 'Iēsous Christos, Theou Yios, Sōtēr' or 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour' in English (Jung, CW 9, part II: §127).

A peculiarity of the fish symbol is often its dual nature: in many cases, the common Christian symbol is of *two* fish, either crossing horizontally and vertically as in early pagan representation, or as circling each other. As Jung discusses at length (Jung, CW 9, part II: §162ff), the dual fish is a potent symbol, indicating at the same time the divine/human nature of Christ, but also his presence/future-return and,



Figure 2. Fish symbol, 'Ichthys' ('fish' in classical Greek).

interestingly, the Mother/Son dyad. For pagans, the Mother Goddess was often a virgin (Virgo), such as the virgin Kore bringing forth the Aeon, and of course the ancient Greek symbol for Pisces was of two fish circling each other. The fountain of Hera was thought to contain the one fish caught by the 'hook of divinity' to 'feed the whole world with its flesh' (Jung, CW, 9, part II: §178), and an early representation of the 'lady of the beasts' show her with a fish between her legs as if about to give birth to it (Neumann 1955: plate 134). An account of an engraving on an early Christian lamp even shows two fish devouring each other (Jeremias 1911). All of these themes bring out the point that the archetypal characteristics of the fish contain many essential components of the moral meaning of Christ. The symbol of the fish (especially of two fish curling around each other) is often representative of Christ. Yet its significance goes beyond popular uses such as on cars to signify that the owner is a Christian (Figure 2).

The symbol of the fish appears unexpectedly in the religious practices of Orthodox believers, for instance on the altar of a member of an Orthodox church in Finland, who told us she felt it was 'right' to place the image above the icons in a bedroom where she usually prays (Figure 3). In our discussion with her, she mentioned that she 'felt' a connection between Jesus and the fish.

In classical icons, the fish often appears as a side image, for instance swimming in the water in the famous icon of the Zoodochos Pighi (Figure 4a), or commonly in symbolism used by Orthodox churches around the world. Although the fish was used widely in early Christianity as a symbol, it is now predominantly employed in popular Protestant culture. Yet, its persistence in Orthodox symbolism indicates its archetypal importance.



Figure 3 (left). Picture of a fish with an icon on a domestic altar, Finland. Figure 4a (middle). Zoodochos Pighi, Church of St Mary of the Spring (Istanbul). Figure 4b (right). Orthodox Church of America website.

The double fish symbol is – less commonly known – also prevalent in the Islamic tradition, for instance on a coin struck by the Mughal emperor Jahangir in seventeenth century India (Figure 5).

If we turn to more obviously religious depictions, there is an entire sub-tradition of depicting the prophets Khidr and Elias (Elijah) with fish (Figure 6).

The guiding figure in Surah 18 of the Quran (henceforth S.18, etc.), often associated with the Prophet Khidr by exegetes, appears after the Prophet Moses and his servant lose track of a fish (S.18: 59–61). Again, the Prophet Elias is generally depicted with fish, as in Figure 6a (note the *double* fish symbol). Khidr, the ‘Verdant One’ or ‘Green One’, is supposed to have drunk from the fountain of immortality and is a frequent guide to Muslim mystics. Despite the new dearth of imagery across the Sunni Muslim world, there are still many images that include the fish in vernacular practice, as for instance in posters used to illuminate a home or workplace with *Baraka* (Figure 7a).

Naturally, both the Quran and the Old Testament contain extensive references to the Prophet Jonah (Yunus) who was swallowed whole by a ‘whale’ when he tried to avoid God’s command of a

mission and was then spat back whole when he submitted (Figure 7b). In fact, the ‘whale’ was traditionally depicted as a large *fish* in both traditions, often with scales, rather than as a mammal. Most classical and contemporary interpretations of the Quran translate the word *huut* in the story as ‘fish’ (S.37: 142).



Figure 5. Picture of Islamic coins from Mughal dynasty, AD 1605–27. Heritage Auctions website.

The chalice as an archetypal symbol

The chalice is another emblematically Christian recurring symbol. Its most striking appearance is as the Holy Grail, a ‘mysterious and haunting image, which crosses the borders of fiction and spirituality, and which, for eight centuries, has been a recurrent ideal in Western literature’ (Barber 2004: 1). As Richard Barber shows, the mystery of the Grail lies not least in its constant inspiration for lay-people as the highest mystery of the Christianity, despite the fact that the Catholic and (many) Protestant Churches never officially recognized it (the Chalice of Benediction from I Corinthians 10:16 generally refers to the ritual of Eucharist/Communion). There is more scholarship on the Grail – from the question of its existence to the many quests it has inspired – than on almost



Figure 6a (left). The prophets Elias and Khidr at the fountain of life, late 15th century. Folio from a *khamsa* (quintet) by Nizami (d. 1209); Timurid period. Opaque watercolour and silver on paper. Herat, Afghanistan, at The Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Figure 6b (right). The Prophet Khidr on a fish, Western Asia (nd).

traditions and in a variety of practices (although see Jung and Franz 1998).

For post-Jungians, the chalice is an archetypal symbol *par excellence*; a cup of libation employed as ‘the container, that which receives, holds, and perhaps alchemically transforms’ divine wisdom as in the blood of Christ for Christians (Hollis 2000: 80). It occurs in the paintings, dreams, and visions of patients in depth-psychological analysis around the world and across time, and often stands for the soul. It appears in Jewish practice as the Kiddush Cup raised

any other Christian symbol except the cross, although little of it is based on Eastern Orthodoxy. Yet, most accounts tend to overlook the Grail as an instance of the chalice and even fewer relate the symbol to a pre-existent *imaginal* archetype rather than a symbol *imagined*, and least of all do they comment on the widespread prevalence of this symbol across

on the Sabbath, or the wine glass broken by the groom during wedding feasts. In ancient Greece, the chalice belonged to Dionysus, that ambiguous figure associated with women, wine, and Apollo.

In Orthodox Christianity too, chalice symbolism is multifaceted and diverse. Receiving Holy Communion from a chalice, the sacred cup for the

Ahmed 2011: 6-7

Wikipedia

Blog of Addis Ethiopia

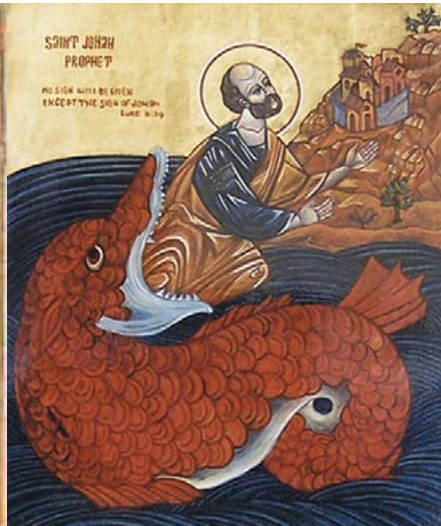
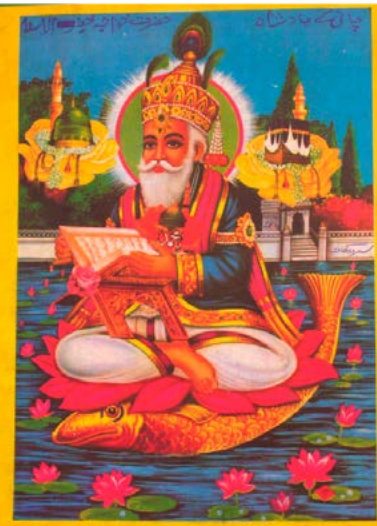


Figure 7a (left). Poster of Jhulay Lal, South Asian patron saint of travellers, revered by Muslims and Hindus alike and reported to have disappeared in the Sindh River in AD 1020. This poster is done in a Hindu style, but with the Ka'aba (Mecca) and Holy Mosque (Medina) in the background and the saint reading a Quran. The top left Urdu inscription refers to him as ‘Khidr’. Jhulay Lal sits on a fish. Private collection. See Ahmed 2011: 6-7. Figure 7b (middle). Jonah and the Whale in the *Jami' al-tawarikh* (c. 1400), attributed to Iran. Medium: ink, opaque watercolour, gold, and silver on paper. Held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Wikipedia. Figure 7c (right). Jonah and the ‘whale’, Blog of Addis Ethiopia, entry entitled ‘Prophet Jonah: Three thousand years later the story still significant’ posted on 21.2.2016.



Figure 8. Orthodox icon of Theotokos 'Inexhaustible Cup'.

wine in the Eucharist, is the quintessence of the Divine Liturgy. The bread and wine are not meant to *symbolize*, but rather are mystically transfigured to *become* the body and the blood of Christ (Merras 1992). The chalice is not only a symbol, but archetypically emerges within the mystery of the liturgy, in which the border between the human and imaginal realms is transgressed. In this sense, the liturgical service is not intended to be externally symbolic (Meyendorff nd). As discussed, the mystical and the theological are on the same spectrum in the Orthodox tradition (Lossky 1976); the Divine Liturgy, too, is not only a memento of the Last Supper but its active reliving.

The archetypal aspect of the chalice distinctively appears in the history and veneration of the 'miraculously revealed' icon of the Virgin, 'the Inexhaustible Chalice' (Figure 8), in which Mary 'in the light of the divine glory' contemplates her son, 'the Eternal God and Lord Jesus Christ, standing in the chalice' (Akathist nd). The icon 'miraculously' revealed itself to an illiterate, retired, alcoholic soldier in nineteenth-century Russia, and was accepted by the Church only after many reports of its healing cure. The icon's veneration became part of popular practices even before 'the Inexhaustible Chalice' was incorporated

into the icon-writing canon. Or rather, its incorporation could be seen as the result of the archetypal significance of the icon in vernacular Orthodoxy. It is now venerated internationally.

The Akathist hymn, devoted to the Theotokos 'the Inexhaustible Chalice' is full of church poetry, metaphorically glorifying Mary as 'the Inexhaustible Chalice who quenches our spiritual thirst', 'a cup of heavenly gifts who always remains full', 'the Fountain of Immortality' ('the Chalice of Life and Immortality' in church Slavic (Akathist nd), 'life-giving fountain of healing', and 'the sea into whom all passions sink' (*ibid.*). Jesus also emerges as the sacred Chalice, 'the mystery of the Divine Eucharist' (*ibid.*). The chalice is amply present in church symbolism and practice today. Alongside the Eucharistic chalice of wine, there is a vast chalice of water used during baptism, or, for example when water is blessed during the feast celebrating the baptism of Jesus. Infants are literally bathed in such a chalice when they are baptized into the Orthodox Church (Figure 9).

The Mariological 'Life-giving Spring' (*Zoodochos Pighi* in Greek, *Zhivonosnyi Istochnik* in Russian) is another and more ancient icon that discloses the imaginal realism of the chalice in an Eastern Orthodox sanctuary of the Greek Orthodox Church in Turkey. The icon of the 'Life-giving Spring' depicts Mary and Jesus sitting in a marble fountain in the shape of the chalice from which water flows (Figure 4a above). Two angels are hovering over their heads, and around the spring the emperor and ailing people are shown in attitudes of longing, drinking from the 'Life-giving Spring'. To the side is painted a small pond containing fish. Similarly, there is an actual marble basin beneath the icon, in which two fish are swimming. According to tradition, the fish have been there for centuries, and the Turkish name for the place is Balikli, which means 'a place with fish'. There are multiple stories of cures, miracles and divine inspiration linked to this place, and even more so in connection to holy wells, which for instance in Russia are traditionally devoted to the most holy Theotokos.

The archetypal aspect of the chalice – Mary as the 'Fountain of Life and Immortality' – is also revealed in contemporary vernacular Islam. Consider this example of a middle-aged Muslim Pakistani woman who unconsciously created an almost exactly similar arrangement of Mariological icons and the holy well of Balikli in her home (Figure 10). According to Laila, she 'always felt Mary especially close to her

heart'. This is not surprising given that the Virgin is the most honoured woman in Islam, 'whom Muslims look upon as the perfectly feminine' (Murata 1992: 318). The medieval Sufi Farid-ud-din Attar (of the famous *Conference of the Birds*, 1177) notes: 'When tomorrow on the Day of Resurrection the call goes up, "O men!", the first person to step forward into the ranks of men will be the Virgin Mary' (Attar 1967: 72; for a complete discussion on Mary's femininity and masculinity see Murata 1992).

Laila is a devout Muslim, and her home 'altar' includes numerous Orthodox icons of Mary, Hindu terracotta symbols and marigold motifs, as well as Islamic symbols of the Shia Hand-of-Five, blue pottery and various animals. There is also a Greek Orthodox icon of Mary and her parents, St Anna and St Joachim. To the left of the icons, behind the chalice, there is a statue of Mary in a blue garment, made by an illiterate Muslim artisan in a small village in the Punjab. The potter himself had put a figure of baby Jesus next to Mary to complete the divine couple of the Mother and the Son. There is an Islamic calligraphic print above Mary's figure, executed in traditional blue and white and in the shape of a perfect circle. Beneath the figures of Mary and Jesus there is a small pond with water and multiple ceramic chalices, from which the water flows, along with a ceramic fish. In the upper left corner above the calligraphy we may also observe a painting of a multitude of green fish.

Laila's domestic 'altar' – playing, at least in part, an aesthetic function in the living room of her home – is an illustration of the artistry and creativity to be found in vernacular religious practices (Primiano 1995), as well as of the kinds of synergetic combinations of various spiritual traditions in lived religion (Keinänen 2010). Yet above all, irrespective of the degree of conscious and unconscious choices made to arrange the altar in this specific way, Laila's altar's striking similarity with the Zoodochos Pighi in Turkey discloses the archetypal connection of the chalice, Mary, and fish in their hardly graspable complexity. Laila herself refers to a connection she 'feels' between Mary and the chalice.

To this, we can add the entire body of Sufi shrine music (*Qawwali*) from Central and South Asia in which the chalice appears ubiquitously as a carrier of divine wisdom (often wine). A curious example of this is found in the Shiite tradition of the Grail, a liturgical text used in ritual ceremonies in medieval Iran (Corbin 1998: 173–204). The ceremony –



Figure 9. A chalice with holy water prepared in a Finnish Orthodox church.

evocative of tales of Knights of the Round Table on a quest for the Holy Grail – involves a 'ritual of the cup'. Corbin's description of the ritual performed by the Shia Abul-Khattab and since repeated in esoteric circles, includes a central role for the Grail, as for instance when invoking Salman the Persian (a companion of the Prophet) with the words 'In his right hand he holds a Grail (or chalice) in which is found the servant of the Light', or again when a chalice is passed around the community before lifting it up to be refilled from the imaginal realm.

Discussion: towards an imaginal dialogue

In this paper we have discussed two symbols that are archetypal in the sense both that they pervade history, geography and religious traditions, and that they emerge in the vernacular, material practices of the Orthodox and Muslim faithful. While the prevalence and historical significance of these symbols may have been researched by others, we have argued that the perspective of the imaginal separates our outline



Figure 10. The domestic 'altar' of Laila, Lahore, Pakistan.

from most accounts in three ways. First, by drawing on post-Jungian archetypal psychology, such as that of James Hillman and Henry Corbin, as well as recent anthropological theories, we have described the prevalence of these symbols as being attributed to humankind's collective unconscious. This means that the symbols, in some sense, pre-exist actors: actors do not imagine them, but rather they can be seen as tapping into these symbols from the imaginal realm. Individuals in everyday life use these imaginal symbols to make sense of the world around them, in the same way that scholars use language to understand the world around them. Just as the physical or social world around us would make no sense without the language we use to describe it, so the spiritual world around us makes no sense without these archetypal images as building blocks. This leads to a somewhat neoplatonic ontology in which the ontic object is an instantiation of an archetypal symbol, and this is a charge Hillman and others have faced. However, archetypes are not mere ideal forms, but rather serve a function in the traveller's life-course.

Second, and consequently, we find that these archetypal symbols are expressed in places, times and traditions where one often doesn't look for them, such as the fish in Orthodox iconography, or both the fish and the chalice in Islamic practices. Equally importantly, these expressions are involved as objects in the vernacular practice of the faithful, whether on the domestic 'altars' of Muslim women in Pakistan or next to the icons alongside of which the Orthodox pray in Finland. If esoteric rituals such as Christian alchemical practices or Sufi Grail rituals are mapped, the presence of these archetypal expressions appears even more central.

Third, as a result of this material engagement in vernacular practice, we posit one utility of this sketch in a dialogue of traditions. While most psychological accounts would seek to uncover the meaning of such expressions in personal development, and theological accounts might seek to 'correct' the practices of the faithful, we are interested here in how this outline can help in a more or less stalled dialogue between religious traditions. What makes this possible is the notion

that artists tap into pre-existent archetypes, rather than fantasizing them into existence from within isolated egos. Such may not always be the case, yet by picking up the more popular archetypal expressions we believe a useful dialogue may be initiated on what these symbols mean in people's lives. This would not replace other forms of conceptual or political dialogue, but could add a useful element to them.

Features of an imaginal dialogue

Our preliminary discussion of the fish and the chalice suggest two outstanding differences between such an 'imaginal dialogue' and more standard dialogues based on conversation. One difference is the remarkable complexity of archetypal symbols. The fish is an excellent example of this complexity that retains a 'family resemblance' of meanings in different traditions, contexts and times, without being reduced to a singular meaning in any one case. Using the archetypal fish symbol as a basis for dialogue is notably different from using abstract concepts of scientific 'reality' or political 'interest'. The latter would

lead naturally to a debate on definitions, on singular meanings that can be mutually agreed upon as a prerequisite to further concept-based discussion. A dialogue on fish can build on its biological definition as a mostly ectothermic, gill-bearing, aquatic craniate, paraphyletic organism (and the concomitant agreement on how biological vocabulary should be used). Or it can be based on needs of various populations served by a single body of fish (and the concomitant agreement on how fish should be used). However, such dialogues have been remarkably poor historically at yielding mutually satisfactory results. The archetypal perspective here suggests that dialogue can *also* be built without reducing the complexity of the symbols to other terms, but rather by exploring what the symbol means in vernacular practices. In other words, we look to an intriguing conception of 'imaginal communities' rather than epistemic communities (based on shared epistemological principles; see e.g. Haas 1992) or political communities (based on shared ethical understandings of interests).

Another difference from typical accounts of dialogue is our emphasis on material practice as opposed to conceptual/epistemological or political/ethical exchanges. A feature of archetypal symbols, as seen especially with the chalice, is that they are materially brought into the vernacular practices of the faithful. The ritualistic usage indicates that imaginal dialogue would not be based on passive contemplation (even of images) but rather on an active use of archetypal expressions to recreate and relive meaningful events, over and over, every time anew. Yet the re-creations are not 'mere' performances; they mean just as much to everyone who participates in them every time, as for instance do regular pilgrimages or ritual ceremonies, today and in the past.

These differences highlight the role of art in dialogue, but not in the passive sense of enjoying a particularly good painting. Rather, new mechanisms of dialogue need to be created that can fully engage material participation in archetypal symbols. Art – and here we include performing arts – offer an excellent first venue. We do not suggest here that this must be the only basis for a dialogue of traditions, but that such channels are at least worth exploring as additions to existing forms of dialogue. Again, we use the word 'tradition' not to indicate past, fossilized, beliefs. The imaginal is no less relevant in modern rationalist times, as is evident in the worldwide spread of contemporary images. It is only, as Hillman noted, that

scientized rationality has forgotten that it is but one archetype in the many-sidedness of human experience. Many more such symbols can be identified and, along with the two outlined here, need to be elaborated in their cross-traditional vernacular practice.

A crucial point arises from the meta-theoretical reflection that our approach to building bridges with symbols has relied extensively on post-Jungian depth psychology – the imaginal realm, archetypes, and the collective unconscious. Of course, it is not feasible to imagine that practitioners and the faithful in these, or other, traditions will rely on such theoretical frameworks before engaging in dialogue. So, is the possibility of such interreligious dialogue drastically limited by the requirement of a foreknowledge of depth psychology? We believe not. The very nature of archetypes and the collective unconscious implies a universality that we have sought to illustrate here by means of two symbols. The configuration of how these symbols manifest and what roles they play in people's lives vary over time and culture. It is important now to appreciate how these symbols come together again in (unconscious) relationships among people, and how those relations can be enhanced further. So interreligious dialogue based on archetypal symbols should be possible, regardless of prior cognitive reflection.

However, in order to develop this point further, we need a much more thorough understanding of how users of these symbols engage with them in their religious practices. Ethnographic studies (e.g. around religious art in homes) can illuminate what meanings people give to symbols such as the chalice or the fish in their lives; how they relate to them in their faith, and whether such meanings and roles in different traditions offer a basis for experiential dialogue. In particular, the lack of such research in Islam typically, means that more attention is required there. Another component of this would be greater appreciation of the personal and spiritual effects of such symbols over time in the private lives of the faithful. We thus believe that long-term, multi-sited and multi-tradition-based ethnographies of how the faithful engage with religious symbols is needed to expand on this basis for interreligious dialogue.³

Operationalizing the utility for such a complementary dialogue of traditions thus needs further empirical and theoretical work. However, we have

3 We are grateful to a reviewer for pointing out this important reflection and need for further research.

tried to show how such an effort is theoretically well grounded and potentially very powerful in overcoming barriers to dialogue. The theory of archetypes and what we refer to as 'deep culture' invokes a shared and continuing heritage that remains to be explored. In this sense we suggest that the future lies in our collective past. ■

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