

Chapter 1 Introduction and Overview

Personal Mythology and the Search for the Sacred

In the introduction to *Symbols of Transformation*, C. G. Jung asked the simple yet profound question, “What is the myth you are living?” (CW 5: xxiv). That fundamental question is one which, in their related yet different ways, both religion and depth psychology seek to address. In a larger sense, this question of finding symbols and stories through which one may discover the meaning of one’s life seems to be a perennial one as old as human consciousness itself. What makes the asking and answering of Jung’s question particularly significant and urgent today is that, unlike previous generations, many contemporary men and women find themselves living in a time when the collective culture offers little alternative to wrestling personally with this question and deriving answers from the core of one’s individual experience.

For the majority of people living in the modern, secular world, however, a more basic issue must be addressed before dealing with Jung’s question, namely “Why bother with myths at all?” For most people reared in a culture without obvious or clear mythological underpinnings, it would appear that they are living well enough without a mythological context and that, as a species, perhaps human beings have outgrown the need for mythic consciousness. What remains invisible to these men and women is the inevitability of living out unconscious and ill-fitting mythologies if a conscious psychic process has not imaginally and reflectively disclosed more meaningful ones to take their place.

Since collective mythologies no longer generate a sense of existential meaning for many people, one alternative has been to turn mythic consciousness inward and attempt

to find the mythic dimension of each person's life story. But just what is meant by this idea of a "personal mythology?" While much of the second chapter of this dissertation will focus on variations in the way contemporary scholars and practitioners define what is meant by this idea, Stanley Krippner offers an effective, basic sense of the value of this concept. "Personal mythologies," he writes, "give meaning to the past, understanding to the present, and direction to the future" (139). He goes on to observe that personal mythologies "perform the functions of explaining, confirming, guiding, and sacralizing experience for the individual in a manner analogous to the way cultural myths once served those functions for an entire society." Another basic definition of personal myth, one that directly addresses the religious dimension of this concept, is that proposed by Robert Atkinson. "The personal myth," he writes, "is the personally sacred story of one's beliefs and experiences that order, shape, and direct one's life, which is also linked to the story we all share" (207).

Joseph Campbell observes that myths serve four fundamental functions. In delineating these functions, he characterizes the first as being metaphysical and religious in nature, serving to express our relationship to divinity, "that ultimate mystery, transcending names and forms" (*Masks of God* 609). The second function of myth, according to Campbell, is a cosmological one, serving to help one comprehend the natural order of the cosmos. The third mythic function, notes Campbell, is sociological in nature and intended to express the proper relationship between the individual and the collective. The fourth and final function of myth, in Campbell's view, is psychologically oriented and seeks to "foster the centering and unfolding of the individual," thereby

enabling men and women to find the meaning inherent in the inner workings of their own psyches (6).

Of Campbell's four mythic functions, one might argue that the cosmological one is largely served in the modern world through the evolving and increasingly complex mythology of theoretical science and, as such, is inherently non-personal in nature. By definition, the social function of mythology is collective in nature and, in our world, the one most completely in disarray and confusion. Moreover, while one may speculate on the nature of any myths that might arise to serve this function in our increasingly global culture, a personal approach to mythic meaning can never be more than peripherally concerned with this function of myth. In contrast, the mythic function most inherently connected with the notion of personal mythology is the psychological one, since it is fundamentally concerned with the evolving psyche of each individual person.

Though the psychological function of mythology will necessarily feature prominently in the content of this dissertation, it is with the first of Campbell's functions, the metaphysical and religious one, that I will be most essentially concerned. This mythic function has traditionally been the province of organized religion and, as a result, has tended in the past to be collective in orientation and effect. While there has undoubtedly always been a personally felt aspect of the experience of religious mythologies, both the myths themselves and the rituals embodying them were contained within the collective constraints of tradition and officially sanctioned theologies. It has been increasingly clear throughout much of the last century that, for many Western men and women, this domination of the sacred function of myth by traditional religious authority is no longer tenable. Moreover, while the initial effect of this development has

often been the wholesale rejection of collective religious mythologies and the complete alienation of many people from the religious dimension of life, such an outcome ultimately seems to be as untenable as the previously unquestioning reliance on outside religious authority.

Describing the impact of the alienation that many Western people feel regarding the dominant mythological premises of the monotheistic traditions, D. Stephenson Bond writes:

We are suffering from a failure of religious imagination. The signs lie in the growing number of people who see behind the curtain of their childhood faith and are dismayed to find a patriarchal image of God which they can no longer worship, who discover the dark side of God that goes unspoken, who search for new traditions to meet often indescribable hunger, or live without any religious practice at all. (52)

Moreover, individuals who have come to experience the Western religious traditions as either irrelevant or insufficient for their spiritual needs are unlikely to find abiding sustenance via eastern religions, revivals of occult traditions, or New Age practices without having first evolved a more personal orientation to the religious dimension of life. The principal thesis of this dissertation is that personal mythology can provide a highly viable approach for engaging in the search for such a relationship to the sacred.

Engaging in personal myth-work from a religious or spiritual perspective means reflecting deeply and imaginally on the relationship of the sacred—however that concept might be defined—to one's own life experience, dreams, and fantasies. It equally means exploring one's emotional and intellectual response to both existing myths and symbols and those mythic images that arise spontaneously within the psyche of the individual. Regardless of whether such an archetypal engagement with the sacred dimension of one's personal mythology leads to the adoption of a purely personal orientation to the religious

aspect of life, or to a return to the religion of one's childhood blessed with a more personal relationship to that tradition, or to the embracing of another tradition more in keeping with one's innate religious sensibility, there is the real possibility of a more personally engaged and meaningful approach to religious life.

Relevant Developments in Contemporary Religious Experience

The potential religious implications of engaging in personal myth-work are particularly significant, since there is considerable evidence that many people are actively searching for new, more personally meaningful ways of relating to the sacred. For example, a major Gallup poll on religious issues conducted in 1998 asked "How much have you thought about the basic meaning and value of your life during the past two years—a lot, a fair amount, or only a little?" In response to this question, nearly seven out of ten Americans indicated that they had thought about such issues "a lot," while less than one in ten responded "only a little" (Gallup 42). In a similar vein, when respondents to that same survey were asked, "Do you feel the need to experience spiritual growth?" more than eight out of ten said "yes" (79). As Wade Clark Roof observes of this trend, "discourse on spiritual 'journeys' and 'growth' is now a province not just of theologians and journalists, but of ordinary people in cafes, coffee bars, and bookstores across the country" (*Spiritual Marketplace* 7).

In reviewing prominent recent literature on the subject of major trends in the evolution of religious life in the West, one may observe two important, interrelated themes associated with the contemporary search for the sacred that are directly relevant to the religious or spiritual aspect of working with personal mythology. The first of these general themes concerns a growing emphasis on the experiential dimension of the search

for the sacred, while the second relates to the increasingly pluralistic nature of the contemporary religious landscape in the United States and Europe and the effect of that pluralism on religious orientation.

While the importance of the idea of seeking an experiential basis for religious belief and practice has increased dramatically since the coming to maturity of the Baby Boom generation in the late 1960s and the 1970s, one can trace the roots of this development back to the start of the twentieth century and the work of William James. In the now-famous distinction between “firsthand” and “secondhand” religion described in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, James laid the theoretical seeds of the contemporary search for an experiential approach to religious life. For James, firsthand religion is always based on direct, personal experience of the divine in one’s life. That form of religious expression, James writes, encompasses “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (36). In contrast, secondhand religion, according to James, is based on a collective and traditional adherence to a canon of dogmatic precepts about the nature of the divine.

For James, as for many people today, the firsthand variety of religion is the primary and essential form of religious experience. For one thing, firsthand religion is ultimately the source of all religion, which only becomes secondhand when the initial revelatory experience of the initiator of a religious tradition bequeaths that revelation to his or her followers. From this point of view, as that initial revelation becomes more and more institutionalized and theologized, as it is transformed into a canonical and orthodox

form of religious teaching, it also tends to become more and more distant from a flesh-and-blood experience of the sacred.

Regarding the danger inherent in this tendency, particularly as it relates to the Western (and largely monotheistic) religious experience, Roof observes:

When the institutional forms of religion become fixed, objective entities—that is abstracted as a belief system somehow set apart from the everyday world, as has happened in the Western tradition—there is a real danger that they will get cut off from the inner meanings and feelings that gave them life to begin with. (*Generation of Seekers* 78)

The desire to experience the sacred directly, “to have an encounter with God or the divine, or simply nature and other people, without the intervention of inherited beliefs, ideas, and concepts,” observes Roof, “is understandable, not simply because secondhand religion can be empty of meaning, but because only personal experience is in some sense authentic and empowering” (67). While this perspective on the primacy of religious experience in many ways runs counter to the traditional view within the monotheistic traditions regarding the fundamental impossibility of direct human experience of the divine, it nevertheless remains an important concern for many contemporary religious seekers.

While one typically does not hear people outside of the academic study of religion refer to the distinction between “firsthand” and “secondhand” religion, one can easily see the enormous importance of this distinction for the general public in the very different connotations ascribed in common parlance to the terms “religion” and “spirituality.” Roof, who has extensively explored the role of religion in the lives of the Baby Boom generation, observes that almost all of the people interviewed by his team of researchers “had an opinion about the differences between being ‘religious’ and being ‘spiritual.’ ”

Even more interesting, Roof observes, while these interviewees did not always agree as to what the difference was, “they were sure there was one” (*Generation of Seekers* 76). Robert Wuthnow, who has also researched religious trends in America since the 1950s, concurs with Roof. With regard to his research, Wuthnow observes, “Many of the people we talked to had thus come to find special meaning in the contrast between spirituality and religion,” adding that “for them, spirituality was a broader term that signified the value of drawing insights from many sources, whereas religion was simply the particular institutional manifestation of different traditions” (74).

By definition, a key distinction between firsthand and secondhand religion relates to the relative importance within each orientation of personal experience of divinity or the sacred. For those seeking a firsthand connection to religion, of course, such personal experience is essential and foundational. In contrast, for adherents of secondhand religion, personal religious experience is viewed as essentially unimportant or, worse still, deeply suspect. As Harvey Cox observes, “professional theologians and ecclesiastical leaders will usually be skeptical of ‘experience,’ while lay people will tend to trust their experiences more than they trust theology” (316).

A particularly important aspect of this experiential approach to religion is the degree to which it encourages a conscious borrowing of symbols, beliefs, and practices from a wide range of sacred traditions, a trend that been greatly facilitated by the existence of an increasingly pluralistic religious environment in the United States and Europe today. Among the questions Roof asked in his research on Baby Boomer religiosity, was “Is it good to explore many different religious faiths and learn from them, or should one stick to a particular faith?” He found that 60 percent of his respondents

expressed a preference for exploring a range of sacred traditions, while only 28 percent chose the option of sticking to a single religious faith. Writing about the incredible breadth of this development within contemporary religious life, Roof observes:

A global world offers an expanded religious menu: images, rituals, symbols, meditation techniques, healing practices, all of which may be borrowed eclectically, from a variety of sources such as Eastern spirituality, Theosophy and New Age, Witchcraft, Paganism, the ecology movement, nature religions, the occult traditions, psychotherapy, feminism, the human potential movement, science, and, of course, all of the world's great religious traditions. (*Spiritual Marketplace* 73)

One result of this development is the increasing commonness of individuals simultaneously practicing differing forms of faith drawn from a global storehouse of religious traditions. “While there is nothing strange about there being many religions around for people to practice,” writes John H. Berthrong, “it is still considered shocking in some circles that it is less and less strange to find a Zen Catholic or a Confucian Methodist than it would have been twenty years ago (xv). One can see evidence of this growing trend toward mixing sacred traditions in the large numbers of Jews and Christians drawn to Buddhist theology and practice, of Christian women engaged in Goddess worship, of African-American Christians practicing Yoruba and other indigenous African traditions, and of Irish Catholics pondering ancient Celtic and contemporary Wiccan beliefs and practices. When one bears in mind the fact that such two-way religious mergings say nothing of the increasing tendency to mix elements from multiple sacred traditions, one can see that the range of possible inter-religious combinations is endless.

One obvious impact of this intense inter-religious exploration and borrowing has been a radical shift in the way many individuals have come to view the myths, symbols,

and rituals of the world's many distinctive religious traditions. As Daniele Hervieu-Leger writes, religious traditions have largely become “symbolic ‘toolboxes’ on which the men and women of today draw freely, without this necessarily meaning that they identify themselves with the comprehensive view of the world [. . .] that historically was part of the language of the traditions concerned” (141). Of course, leaders within the various religious traditions have tended to decry this development as leading to “religion a la carte” and predict that such mixing and matching of elements from widely different traditions are doomed to failure as sustainable religious orientations. Nevertheless, given its increasingly widespread popularity and acceptance in the Western world, this adoption of a “toolbox” approach to religion may well indicate a fundamental shift in religious consciousness in the West.

Harvey Cox suggests that the trend toward religious “bricolage” —quoting Hervieu-Leger’s term for this development—ultimately implies a shift toward to the notion of personal religion. Attempting to define this emergent concept, Cox describes personal religion as:

a radically personal style of piety in which, as it were, each person is constantly compiling his or her own collage of symbols and practices in the light of what coheres with their own changing experiences in the tortuous passage through life in a world where the old, allegedly comprehensive charts no longer command confidence. (305)

In his research on the religious life of Baby Boomers, Roof also sees considerable evidence of this movement towards personal religion. Describing this trend as “reflexive spirituality,” he observes this approach requires that individuals accept the responsibility “to cobble together a religious world from available images, symbols, moral codes, and

doctrines, thereby exercising considerable agency in defining and shaping what is considered to be religiously meaningful (*Spiritual Marketplace* 75).

These two interrelated religious developments—the one towards a more and more experiential orientation to religious life and other towards a more pluralistic approach to the evolution of one’s religious orientation—have great relevance to the idea of adopting personal myth-work as pathway to the sacred. With the regard to the former development, deeply working with the mythic and archetypal dimensions of one’s life story inherently asks one to reflect on the times in one’s life when he or she has personally confronted the sacred dimension of human existence. Moreover, such mythic reflection also leads one to contemplate the degree to which the sacred regularly intersects with one’s daily experience of being alive. Finally, working with personal mythology can help one become a more effective bricoleur of sacred symbols and stories, thereby providing individual religious and spiritual seekers with a more effective form of religious “glue” with which to construct more meaningful personal religious orientations.

Neither Secularism nor Fundamentalism

One of the most difficult problems faced by post-modernism has been the dilemma of how to approach the possibility of religious renewal given the consequences of three hundred years of enlightenment thought. Given the powerful emphasis within post-Enlightenment Western civilization on rationality, empiricism, and materialism, traditional approaches to religious life and belief have tended to become less and less tenable for most educated people. According to Peter Berger, the confrontation between this modern frame of reference and the largely literal approach to the understanding of mythology inherent within pre-enlightenment Western religion has left contemporary

individuals faced with three alternative—and equally untenable—ways of relating to the religious aspect of life.

The first alternative consists of a wholesale denial of the relevance of any possible religious dimension to life and the adoption to a completely secular orientation. The second requires the return to a strict and uncompromising fundamentalism that, in effect, denies the validity of all modern thought, as well as most social, scientific, and cultural developments since the seventeenth century. In addition to these two options, Berger observes, a third approach attempts to eliminate altogether the dilemma of having to choose between the reductionism of the secular approach and the dogmatism of fundamentalism. This third alternative seeks to steer a course between these two completely opposing frames of reference by stripping religious belief and practice of all those mythic or mystical elements potentially at odds with modernity. Many people, unable to adapt to the tremendously restrictive mindset of the fundamentalist alternative, have either adopted an entirely secular approach to life or have chosen adherence to a demythologized and demystified kind of secularized religion.

Developments during the past half-century in scientific disciplines as diverse as theoretical physics, environmental science, depth psychology, and mind-body medicine, however, have begun to impel a reconsideration of the validity and viability of any purely rational, empirical, and materialist vision of reality. These developments—along with new streams of thought in areas ranging from philosophy and sociology to linguistics and literary criticism—have resulted in the evolution of a post-modern frame of reference that has once again reopened the question of the possibility of a meaningful religious orientation to life which is open to both the mythic and the mystical.

Berger has characterized this post-modern option, opposed both to secularism and fundamentalism, as “the heretical alternative.” In this context, Berger observes that the English word “heresy” comes from the Greek verb *hairein*, meaning “to choose” (27). In essence, heresy implies choosing anything other than that which is considered orthodox by religious authority. As Berger further observes, in pre-modern times collective religious certainty in the orthodox vision would have been the norm and heresy the exception. Since the rise of the Enlightenment, however, such religious certainty has been harder and harder for most people to adhere to, making a heretical approach to religious matters more normative for us.

In Berger’s frame of reference, the fundamentalist approach to dealing with questions of religious orientation is called “the deductive option” (61). Berger writes that this option simply “reasserts the authority of religious tradition in the face of modern secularity.” As a result, he continues, tradition is “restored to the status of a datum, or something given a priori,” making it “possible to deduce religious affirmations from it more or less as was the norm in pre-modern times.” Berger calls the effort to reinterpret religious tradition in terms of modern secularity, which he sees as the only existing religious alternative to fundamentalism, “the reductive option.” This option, Berger writes, is “taken to be a compelling necessity” if one is to participate in both religious life and modern consciousness. In applying the reductive option, he continues, “modern consciousness and its alleged categories become the only criteria of validity for religious reflection” (62).

Against both the deductive and reductive options, Berger proposes what he calls “the inductive option,” the approach that forms the basis of the heretical imperative. In

describing this third alternative, Berger writes that the inductive option means relying on “experience as the ground of all religious affirmations—one’s own experience, to whatever extent this is possible, and to the experience embodied in a particular range of traditions.” Far from denying the validity of empiricism, Berger notes, this option implies “a deliberately empirical attitude, a weighing and accessing frame of mind” which is “unwilling to impose closure on the quest for religious truth by invoking any authority whatsoever—not the authority of this or that traditional *Deus dixit*, but also not the authority of modern thought or consciousness” (63). In opposition to fundamentalism, Berger observes, the adoption of the heretical imperative “means a reassertion of the human as the only possible starting point for theological reflection and a rejection of any external authority (be it scriptural, ecclesiastical, or traditional) that would impose itself on such reflection.” In opposition to the forces of reductionism, he continues, the inductive option “means a reassertion of the supernatural and sacred character of religious experience, and the rejection of the particularly oppressive authority of modern secular consciousness” (154).

Berger’s cogent reflections on the dilemma of having to choose between the soulless qualities of the purely secular frame of reference and the unrelenting dogmatism of fundamentalism have particular relevance to the notion of developing a personal sense of mythic consciousness as pathway to the sacred. Both Berger’s heretical imperative and personal myth-work are inherently reflective and experiential in their orientation to the experience of the sacred. Both eschew adherence to any form of traditional religious or spiritual orthodoxy in favor of individual inquiry. Indeed, personal myth-work

potentially offers a most effective means for adopting Berger's "heretical imperative" in the evolution of one's orientation to religious and spiritual life.

Another scholar who has written about the contemporary dilemma of finding a third alternative to both fundamentalism and secularism is Robert A. Segal. Segal describes this dilemma as one concerning "the relationship between modernity and religion" ("Is Analytical Psychology a Religion?" 547). Modernity is defined by Segal as the worldview that is "co-extensive with science, both natural and social." Religion, in contrast, is the older worldview supported by pre-modern mythological systems. Segal sees the relationship between modernity and religion as taking one of three forms, forms that he respectively characterizes as "fundamentalist," "rational," or "romantic" in nature (548).

The first of these three orientations, Segal observes, "pits religion against modernity and opts for religion," adding that fundamentalism either ignores or denies the "inescapability" of modernity (547). The second of these orientations, he continues, "is like the fundamentalist view in one key respect," since "it, too, pits modernity against religion." For both fundamentalists and rationalists, Segal writes, "there can be no modern religion," adding that for both groups, "the term 'modern religion' is a contradiction." But as opposed to fundamentalism," he continues. "rationalism opts for modernity over religion." In this regard, he writes, for rationalists "religion is not merely unnecessary for moderns but outright impossible." This is because, ironically like the fundamentalists, rationalists literalize the myths underlying religion and pit them against science as an explanation for the functioning of the physical world. Whereas fundamentalists cling to the explanatory functions of religious myths—as in the case of

endorsing the Biblical creation myth over the theory of evolution—for the rationalists, religion “can work only when its explanation is accepted, and science precludes the acceptance of that explanation.”

The third view, which Segal describes as the romantic approach, “breaks with both fundamentalism and rationalism in its refusal to oppose religion to modernity.” Rather than insisting on choosing between these two opposing views, the romantic view attempts to reconcile them. Like fundamentalists, Segal observes, “romantics prize religion as an eternal and invaluable possession” (548). However, in contrast to fundamentalists, he continues, “romantics do not prize religion as an explanation.” Indeed, for them, religion “serves to do almost anything but explain: to express, to advocate, to comfort, to harmonize, to give meaning.” Religion continues to serve these functions, Segal argues, by addressing the core existential questions of human life in symbolic, metaphorical, and imaginal terms.

In this way, Segal argues, for romantics “religion while an explanation until superseded by science, can still exist, and more, thrive even when no longer an explanation.” Moreover, he adds, according to the romantic view, the conflict between religion and science gives the former “an opportunity to rid itself of its explanatory baggage and to make explicit for the first time its non-explanatory core.” As a result, far from posing a threat to religion,” Segal writes, “science abets religion by obliging it to show that it has always been other than an explanation, even if its non-explanatory core is recognized only now” (549).

By adopting a symbolic and imaginal approach to religious life, the romantic orientation allows for a reconciliation between modernity and religion. Moreover, given

the inherently symbolic and metaphorical nature of mythic consciousness, such an approach is fully compatible with the idea of seeking the sacred through the vehicle of personal mythology. It is not surprising that Segal, who has written extensively on both C. G. Jung and Joseph Campbell, the two most influential figures in the evolution of both personal myth and a mythic orientation to contemporary religious life, describes both men as typifying the romantic approach (Joseph Campbell 264-71; “Is Analytical Psychology a Religion?” 549-550).

Both Berger’s heretical imperative and Segal’s romantic orientation to the relationship between modernity and religion are deeply relevant to the concept of approaching the religious dimension of life through the vehicle of personal mythology. Commenting on the significance of applying personal mythic consciousness to questions of religious meaning, Robert Ellwood observes that such an approach affords a middle path between the twin perils of fundamentalism and secularism. “In a semisecularized and rampantly pluralistic world in which the hold of objective religious truth is increasingly problematic, but in which religious questions and yearnings are certainly real,” he writes, “mythology is a viable and not ignoble alternative to a stark choice between dogmatic religion and sheer secularism (177).

Organization of the Study

This study is interdisciplinary in nature and draws on content from the realms of comparative mythology, religious studies, and depth psychology. Hermeneutical in approach, the study will explore and synthesize this varied content in order to explicate the concept of personal mythology as a religious endeavor. In particular, this study takes

as its interpretive jumping-off point Joseph Campbell's observations that "Myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life" (*Power of Myth* 5). Bearing in mind that such mythic clues are always symbolic and metaphorical in nature, they require interpretation to become meaningful. Moreover, given the ambiguous and often paradoxical nature of the meanings of symbols and metaphors, this study takes as an assumption the recognition that ambiguity and paradox are, therefore, inherent to the nature of personal mythology. In addition, the interpretive frame of this study recognizes that, like collective myths in the life of a culture, personal myths—even conflicting or contradictory ones—are always "true" within the life of an individual and yet remain fundamentally subjective creations of the psyche open to constant reinterpretation.

During the course of its development, this study will explore five general areas of concern regarding personal mythology. The first of these concerns focuses on understanding the overall conceptual nature of personal mythology. The second of these areas of concern explores contemporary ways of thinking about the nature of the sacred that make sense in relationship to the idea of personal mythology. The third area of concern explores the ways in which personal mythology effectively synthesizes insights from both psychology and religion, thereby helping to bridge the gap between these two frames of reference. The fourth of these concerns focuses on the work of two individuals, Joseph Campbell and C. G. Jung, both of whom have played key roles in the evolution of personal mythology as an approach to the religious or spiritual domain of life. The fifth and final area of concern focuses on the concept of "faith in the journey" as a metaphor for the religious implications of personal mythology.

In the context of these five focuses, the next six chapters of this work will explore various aspects of the general theme of employing personal mythology as pathway to the sacred. The first of these subsequent chapters lays basic groundwork for this study by considering the general nature of personal mythology as a concept and a practice. Chapter Two begins with an overview of the history and evolution of personal mythology as a concept. After reviewing some of the ways in which personal mythology has been defined as an endeavor by its practitioners, this chapter then continues with a discussion of the idea of “personal mythwork” as an ongoing process of inner exploration and reflection focused on the evolving nature of one’s personal mythology. This chapter’s overall conceptual review of the field of personal mythology also explores the inter-relationship of the universal/collective and the particular/personal dimensions of personal myth, as well as the difference between “inductive” and “deductive” approaches to engaging in personal mythwork.

The third chapter sets a context for reflecting on the idea of “the sacred” as it relates to the religious or spiritual dimension of working with personal mythology. This discussion begins with a brief exploration of the larger religious function which mythology has always served. Following these introductory observations is a discussion of the dictionary definitions and etymology of the word “sacred” and the sense in which this term is used today. This chapter then considers the increasingly important role of the symbolic and metaphorical within contemporary theological discourse relating to the nature of divinity and the sacred. Next, this chapter considers the traditional opposition and separation of the immanent and transcendent aspects of the sacred and the paradoxical problem this opposition poses for contemporary religious experience. In a

similar vein, this chapter also explores the relationship between the idea of the sacred and that of the “profane.” In the context of these dichotomies, this chapter also considers how one’s personal mythology might provide a container in which these opposing dimensions of the sacred might dialog with each other, resulting in an “ordinary” or “everyday” sense of the holy. This chapter also explores the concept of “narrative theology” and its implications for personal mythology as a tool for connecting with the sacred. Finally, this chapter contemplates the relationship between a mythically based experience of the sacred and the search for an existential sense of personal meaning.

The fourth chapter explores specific frames of reference for understanding both the specific qualities of the sacred, as well as the ways in which the sacred might be encountered. In particular, this chapter considers five distinct conceptual approaches to comprehending and apprehending the sacred, all of which are compatible with the idea of personal mythology as pathway to the sacred. Beginning with Rudolf Otto’s concept of the numinous, this discussion also considers Mircea Eliade’s idea of heirophany, Paul Tillich’s notion of “ultimate concern,” Martin Buber’s concept of “I and Thou,” and Maurice Friedman’s idea of “touchstones of reality.”

The fifth chapter focuses on the work of the comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell as it has shaped and inspired the creative application of personal mythological consciousness. Based on Campbell’s ideas that myths must remain “transparent to transcendence” in order to function effectively as the “masks of god,” this chapter begins with an exploration of the universalist and symbolic orientation of Campbell’s work. Next, this chapter explores the profound relationship between Campbell’s approach to myth and the particular mystical orientation known as the “perennial philosophy.” This

chapter then explores the critical, yet paradoxical, significance of Campbell's emphasis on the idea of the "symbol without meaning" when combined with his emphasis on the fundamentally experiential nature of mythology. Finally, Campbell's concept of the "Hero's Journey," is explored as a metaphor for the evolution of the sacred dimension of an individual's personal mythology.

The sixth chapter explores the strong connection between the idea of personal mythology as pathway to the sacred and the work of the depth psychologist C. G. Jung. It begins with an exploration of the general relationship between depth psychology and both mythology and religion. In that context, this chapter briefly compares of the orientation of Jung regarding these matters with that of Sigmund Freud, the founder of depth psychology. This chapter then proceeds to an evaluation of the specific roles played by mythology and religion within Jungian psychology. Next, this chapter explores a variety of Jungian concepts and considers how these ideas relate to the theme of personal mythology as a religious endeavor. Concepts discussed in this chapter include the collective unconscious and archetypes, as well as the nature and role of symbolic and mythic consciousness within Jungian psychology. This chapter also explores how archetypal dreams, the Jungian technique of active imagination, and the occurrence of those meaningful coincidences called "synchronicities" can all provide insight into the religious aspect of one's personal mythology. This chapter concludes with an exploration of the concept of individuation and its relationship to the idea of personal mythology as pathway to the sacred.

The seventh and final chapter of this dissertation proposes the idea of "faith in the journey" as an overarching metaphor for the search for the sacred through the vehicle of

personal mythology. In doing so, this chapter first explores a variety of ways of considering the phenomenon of faith that are potentially relevant to the concept of personal myth. This chapter then examines the general nature of the archetype of the journey, followed by a discussion of three key forms of this larger archetype, namely the quest, the initiation, and the pilgrimage. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the concept of *amor fati*, or “the love of one’s fate,” as a framework for engaging a sense of faith in one’s life journey. Such a faith, this chapter argues, will be less concerned with embracing abstract concepts of the sacred and of divinity than with experientially engaging the mysterious, paradoxical, and mythic nature of the unfolding of one’s story throughout course of a lifetime.