

“The War of the Gods in Addiction”

David E. Schoen

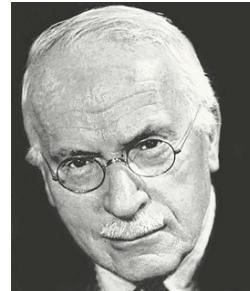
Letters were exchanged between Bill W, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous and the renowned psychiatrist Carl G. Jung in 1961.

The first letter was in January 23rd 1961 and concerned Roland H, a friend of Bill W. but “long since passed away”. Roland had made the journey from the U.S. to Zurich in 1931 to be treated by Jung. However, Roland suffered a relapse after treatment and returned for further treatment.

Surprisingly, Jung told him that further medical or psychiatric treatment was really hopeless for his case.

When asked was there any other hope, Jung replied that a genuine religious or spiritual conversion might be a possibility but was rare.

His best chance of this happening was for Roland to place himself in a religious atmosphere.



Carl G. Jung

The Oxford Group put an emphasis on self-survey, confession, restitution, the giving of oneself in service to others and meditation and prayer. So, Roland H. became involved through Edwin T, himself a former alcoholic. Both Roland H. and Bill W. did eventually experience spiritual conversions and release from their disastrous dependence on alcohol.

After his conversion, a further influence on Bill W. was a book by William James called “Varieties of Religious Experience”. This book brought home to him, “the realization that most conversion experiences, whatever their variety, do have a common denominator of ego collapse at depth.” (First letter of Bill W. to Jung) Jung had intimated to Roland H. that the ego as the centre of consciousness must be replaced by a transcendent spiritual principle for conversion to occur.

In Jung’s reply to Bill W’s first letter he writes: “His (Roland H’s) craving for alcohol was the equivalent, on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God.”



Bill W’s house in Vermont