Sir, - So many letters I have received have emphasized my statement about 'knowing' (of God) [in ‘Face to Face’, THE LISTENER, October 29]. My opinion about 'knowledge of God' is an unconventional way of thinking, and I quite understand if it should be suggested that I am no Christian. Yet I think of myself as a Christian since I am entirely based upon Christian concepts. I only try to escape their internal contradictions by introducing a more modest attitude, which takes into consideration the immense darkness of the human mind. The Christian idea proves its vitality by a continuous evolution, just like Buddhism. Our time certainly demands some new thought in this respect, as we cannot continue to think in an antique or medieval way, when we enter the sphere of religious experience.

I did not say in the broadcast, ‘There is a God’, I said ‘I do not need to believe in God; I know’. Which does not mean: I do know a certain God (Zeus, Jahwe, Allah, the Trinitarian God, etc.) but rather: I do know that I am obviously confronted with a factor unknown in itself, which I call 'God' in consensu omnium ('quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus creditur'). I remember Him, I evoke Him, whenever I use His name overcome by anger or by fear, whenever I involuntarily say: ‘Oh God’.

That happens when I meet somebody or something stronger than myself. It is an apt name given to all overpowering emotions in my own psychical system subduing my conscious will and usurping control over myself. This is the name by which I designate all things which cross my willful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans, and intentions and change the course of my life for better or worse. In accordance with tradition I call the power of fate in this positive as well as negative aspect, and inasmuch as its origin is beyond my control, 'god', a 'personal god', since my fate means very much myself, particularly when it approaches me in the form of conscience as a vox Dei, with which I can even converse and argue. (We do and, at the same time, we know that we do. One is subject as well as object.)

Yet I should consider it an intellectual immorality to indulge in the belief that my view of a god is the universal, metaphysical Being of the confessions or 'philosophies'. I do neither commit the impertinence of a hypostasis, nor of an arrogant qualification such as: 'God can only be good'. Only my experience can be good or evil, but I know that the superior will is based upon a foundation which transcends human imagination. Since I know of my collision with a superior will in my own psychical system, I know of God, and if I should venture the illegitimate hypostasis of my image, I would say, *of a God beyond good and evil*, just as much dwelling in
myself as everywhere else: *Deus est circulus cuius centrum est ubique, cuius circumferentia vero nusquam.*

Yours, etc.,

Zürich

CARL GUSTAV JUNG

Notes

**Paragraph 1:** A transcript of the exchange described by Jung appear in the next section below, along with another question and answer that may help with understanding.

The article in the October 29, 1959 issue of *The Listener* mentioned in the editorial note was “Dr. Jung on Life and Death” by Frieda Fordham, pages 722-725. Two paragraphs from that article appear in another section below.

**Paragraph 2:** (in) *consensu omnium* (‘quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus creditur’), with everyone’s agreement (‘what has been believed always, everywhere, and by all’). The parenthetical formula is what St Vincent of Lerins, in *The Commonitory*, proposed as a supplement to Scripture as a criterion to distinguish true doctrines from heresy.

**Paragraph 3:** *vox Dei*, voice of God

**Paragraph 4:** *Deus est circulus cuius centrum est ubique, cuius circumferentia vero nusquam*, God is a circle whose center is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere, a paraphrase of Saint Bonaventure’s statement in his *The Mind’s Way to God*.

**From the 1959 BBC interview**

The program aired on October 22, 1959. It is available at

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=biu4ds63lqc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=biu4ds63lqc)

The discussion where Jung remarks on believing in God begins about 7:50 into the program.

John Freeman (interviewer): What sort of religious upbringing did your father give you?

Jung: Oh, we were Swiss Reformed.

Freeman: And did he make you attend church regularly?

Jung: Oh, well, that was quite natural. Everybody went to church on Sunday.

Freeman: And did you believe in God?
Jung: Oh, yes.

Freeman: Do you now believe in God?

Jung: Now? (Pause) Difficult to answer. I know. I needn’t, I don't need to believe. I know.

There is a later section of the interview, at about 33:35 into the program, which may help clarify the way in which Jung distinguished “belief” from “knowledge.”

Freeman: Do you yourself believe that death is probably the end? Or do you believe…

Jung: Well, I can't say. You see, the word belief is a difficult thing for me. I don't believe. I must have a reason for a certain hypothesis. Either I know a thing, and then I know it. I don't need to believe it. If I, I don't allow myself, for instance, to believe a thing just for the sake of believing it. I can't believe it. But when there are sufficient reasons to form a certain hypothesis, I shall accept these reasons naturally, and I should say: "We have to reckon with the possibility of so and so," you know.

Excerpts from the Fordham article

Fordham reported the exchange about belief in God as follows (bottom, left column, p. 724)

Jung’s statement, in the interview, that he knew, he did not have to believe in God was the fruit of his long study of the collective unconscious and his conviction of the reality of psychic experience. To try to study God scientifically may seem to some to be bordering on blasphemy, but Jung’s approach is not destructive, he seeks rather to reconcile what is of value in the historic view with the scientific spirit of our time.

In her closing paragraph, Fordham makes a comment which apparently applies to the entire interview (Jung recalled youthful anger and violence soon after describing knowledge of God).

To understand what Jung means requires hard work and the patient observance of all the phenomena he classes under the heading of ‘the collective unconscious’. There is no easy promise of a good celestial father, and nothing escapist in his view of religion, in fact, it implies coming to some sort of terms with the dark side of our nature, as Jung did with his own violence. In this way, each of us can make a contribution to one of the greatest problems of our time.
Quote from the February 14, 1955 *Time* cover story

Jung himself has not been to church for years, but when asked if he believes in God, he says: "I could not say I believe. I know! I have had the experience of being gripped by something that is stronger than myself, something that people call God."

Quotes from an April 1955 *Daily Mail* interview article


Without knowing it man is always concerned with God. What some people call instinct or intuition is nothing other than God. God is that voice inside us which tells us what to do and what not to do. In other words, our conscience.

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The fact is that what happens to a person is characteristic of him. He represents a pattern and all the pieces fit. One by one, as his life proceeds, they fall into place according to some predestined design.

All that I have learned has led me step by step to an unshakable conviction of the existence of God. I only believe in what I know. And that eliminates believing. Therefore I do not take His existence on belief - I know that He exists.

The posthumous December 1961 *Good Housekeeping* article

A headbar to Frederick Sands’ “Why I Believe in God,” (pages 64, 138-141) refers to a June 2, 1961 meeting between Sands and Jung. Jung died on June 6th. Sands writes in the article,

Jung told me, in his last interview:

To this day, God is the name by which I designate all things which cross my willful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans and intentions and change the course of my life for better or worse.

The bolded material appears verbatim in the third paragraph of Jung’s letter to *The Listener*, written about a year and a half before the “last interview.” Quite a bit of the letter appears in the article, as do many quotes that ran in the 1955 *Daily Mail* piece.

Trouble with Women” bore the subhead “In his final interview, psychologist Carl Jung spoke his mind about them as never before..” The text explains “It was the last interview the erect, agile six-footer would ever give – and in many respects his most remarkable. Shortly thereafter, on June 6, 1961, he died at 85.” In the next paragraph, Sands wrote, “We talked for hours over a period of four days…”

The trouble with “The Trouble” is that it, too, is heavy with quotes from April 1955 Daily Mail articles. Jung had spoken his mind before. Apparently, “the last interview” combined into one “interview” Sands’ sessions with Jung in 1955 with a farewell meeting in June 1961. Even so, it is unclear how so much of Jung’s letter to The Listener ended up being “told” to Sands.

Here are quotes from the Good Housekeeping article that bear directly on Jung’s conception of God, and are not found in the other sources mentioned here.

I cannot tell you what His qualities are, or what he looks likes. I have only a human conception of how He appears to me.

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It (whatever man may say about God) will always remain a human view, for we cannot prove that that it is God himself who speaks. It is the human being telling, or trying to tell, about his experience of what he assumes is God.

Even revelations or illuminations such as are told in the sacred books are mere formulations of man. They are no more than translations of inner images and experiences told within the limitations of the human tongue. Whatever the experience, it was that of a human being, and as such remains within the boundaries of human perception.

We can do no more than to tell about our own images, ideas, concepts, thoughts and experiences, all of which are products of the soul.

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I know some foremost scientists, as well as simple people, even children, who understand what God is. They have no trouble knowing.

The problem begins with people with intellectual and overrational minds, They have lost that knowledge and come to ask for rational, philosophical theological or psychological proof.

They have forgotten to be simple, open-minded and humble enough to know God and to feel him. They are too much concerned with everyday events, and their personal affairs.

When the primitive man sees the sun or the moon, when he becomes ill and recovers, when he is faced with a birth or death, he thinks immediately of God. But the rational mind of intellectual people cannot perceive and cannot understand. These people have lost their religious attitude toward life and are looking for explanations like mathematical proof. They cannot realize that to know God is not a matter of explaining, but a deep emotional experience which neither needs, nor can be put into, words.