From unity to atonement

Some religious correlates of Hans Loewald's developmental theory

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Loewald's understanding of ego development offers a way to conceptualise, from a psychoanalytic perspective, those aspects of religious experience that can reflect or contribute to the enrichment of the ego, in contradistinction to the defensive and regressive elements of religious experience that have been well detailed in the psychoanalytic literature in the past. In Loewald's view, a dynamic and metabolic interplay between ego and reality characterises the developmental process. With increasing levels of internalisation, differentiation, individuation and integration, ego and reality are restructured into increasingly resilient and durable forms. An ongoing dialectical tension between separation and reunion provides the driving force for development. Loewald's emphasis on the synthetic rather than defensive aspects of ego functioning forms the basis for his characterisation of sublimation as a 'genuine appropriation' rather than a defence, thus opening up one way to understand non-defensive aspects of religious experience from a psychoanalytic perspective. In the course of this exploration of Loewald's view of ego development and its implications for an understanding of religious experience, the author offers perspectives on Freud's views of religion, on some extreme forms of religious fundamentalism, and on the dynamics of 'mature' faith as illuminated by Loewald's developmental theory.

Thousands of blossoms, red, brown, white, yellow, black, scattered on ground made tender by their falling.

This human body, more fragile than the dew drops on the countless tips of morning grass.

My wailing voice is the September wind, and in the dark night, silence speaks:

I will die only when love dies, and you will not let love die.

(from a sermon by Bonnie Myotai Treace, Sensai, Fire Lotus Temple, Zen Mountain Monastery, Brooklyn, NY, 14 September 2001).

Introduction

Psychoanalysis has contributed much to an understanding of the neurotic and regressive aspects of religious experience. Until recently, however, psychoanalysis has shed little light on the ways in which religious experience can contribute to and/or reflect psychic development. There has been a tendency to equate the neurotic and regressive manifestations of religious experience with the whole, without a clear understanding of the many functions religion can serve

in psychic life and the many levels on which it can function. In this paper I attempt two things: to highlight some of the ways religion can be an agent and/ or product of psychic development rather than an instrument of defence and to offer a developmental model for the religious life of an individual when it is proceeding in a healthy and generative fashion. The developmental understanding of religion that I offer is based on Hans Loewald's theories regarding ego development: in particular, the dynamic interplay between ego and reality and the dialectical tension between separation and reunion that, in his view, characterise the developmental process.

Below, I shall outline Loewald's developmental theory, juxtaposed with a JudeoChristian view of human development. By means of this juxtaposition, I intend to highlight how certain basic human concerns are conceptualised in a psychoanalytic framework and in a mythical-religious one, and to suggest how they are worked through in the course of human development (including via psychotherapy) and in the context of religious experience and practice. I choose the Judeo-Christian tradition because it is the one to which Loewald makes explicit reference and because it is the one I know best.

Both Loewald's developmental theory and Judeo-Christian tradition postulate that our beginnings consist of an undifferentiated unity from which we literally emerge (come out of a state of merger) as individuals and as humankind. Loewald takes as his starting point the 'primary narcissistic unity' of mother and infant and focuses on the development of the individual; the Judeo-Christian tradition takes as its starting point the one God 'from which all things

were made' and focuses on the development of humankind in relation to God. In both models, development consists of the creation and progressive restructuring of the relationship between the elements of the original unity. Individuation, differentiation, loss, integration and internalisation are central processes in this restructuring. I will argue that, in each model, the fundamental polarity of unity vs separateness (appearing in the course of development as isolation vs merger, separation vs reunion, autonomy vs intimacy, and self-responsibility and atonement) creates a dialectical tension that provides the driving force for both psychological and spiritual development. With increasing levels of differentiation and internalisation, the relationships between ego and reality, self and others, and man and God are restructured into increasingly resilient and durable forms. An original unity is transformed into dyadic relations, then triadic relations. A dynamic interplay between object relations and internal structures characterises the developmental process. I shall argue that in most forms of extreme fundamentalist religion—and also in the rigid, magical-compulsive form of religion that Freud critiqued (1907, pp. 115-27, 1927, pp. 3-56, 1933, pp. 158-82) —this 'dynamic interplay' is to varying degrees defended against and/or precluded.

This paper concludes by offering one form of synthesis of the fundamental unity/ separateness dialectic, based on Loewald's view of sublimation 'as a genuine appropriation' rather than a defence (1978, p. 76). This synthesis provides an extension of concepts of psychological development towards what are commonly understood as religious concepts: atonement and redemption. Hence the final section offers also a synthesis of psychological and religious perspectives.

An original unity: Emergence and return

Loewald posits as the earliest phase of psychological development one in which there is as yet no differentiation between infant and mother, self and other, ego and reality; instead there is an

'all-embracing feeling of intimate connection or ... unity with the environment' ([1951] 1980, p. 5).[1]

In Loewald's view, it is out of this original unity that our experiences not only of ourselves but also of the external world develop. We become, in time, more or less autonomous individuals, responsible for ourselves, capable of seeing the external world and other people more or less objectively. This process of emergence and individuation is not a simple or unidirectional one. In Loewald's view, over the course of individual development, elements of the original unity are modified and reclaimed as parts of oneself. Rather than conceptualising psychological development in a linear fashion, as progress away from the original unity towards an ultimately autonomous state, Loewald sees development as it were in spiral form ([1962] 1980, p. 272), whereby the separation and reconnection of elements of an original unity occur cyclically, on increasingly complex levels of psychological organisation. In this way, both the internal structures of the psyche and the relationships between ego and reality, self and others, become increasingly rich, resonant and complex. In Loewald's view, the fullest development of the ego involves ongoing access to and reintegration of early, pre-differentiated strata of human experience.

Most religions, too, posit an original unity out of which the created world takes form. And most religions are centrally concerned not only with our beginnings, our emergence from a formless unity, with our passage from non-life to present life, but also with our endings: what happens to us when we die. In most religions, there is the assumption of a return, in some form, to a state of union with the Divine. There are thus intrinsic both to a Judeo-Christian view of human spiritual development and to Loewald's view of human psychological development processes not only of emergence from, but also of return to, an original unity.

What form do these recapitulative journeys take?

From unity to dyadic relations

The psychological emergence of the infant from the mother is never absolute or complete. It is characterised by a profound ambivalence, one that is played out in later life in other relationships as well (Loewald, [1962] 1980, pp. 263-4).

Separation, while offering the possibility of freedom, the broadening of one's horizons, at the same time threatens us with loneliness and isolation; the prospect of union, while offering security and fulfilment, threatens us with the loss of our individual selves via merger.

In the earliest, most primitive stages of dyadic relatedness the dialectic of separation and unity exists in its starkest and most polarised form: as the twin threats of isolation and merger; true intimacy is difficult to obtain. We see people alternately clinging to and fleeing from significant others as if in response to a mortal threat. We see this in the stages of 'separation/individuation' and 'rapprochement' (Mahler, 1968; Mahler et al., 1975): a toddler defiantly running off to where he's been told not to go, glancing back over his shoulder to be sure his defiance has registered (and to make sure his mother is still there), and a moment later, frightened by something, or realising she has turned away, running back and hanging on to her

[1]*'Loewald here paraphrases a view of 'primary narcissism' as Freud conceptualised it in Civilization and its discontents (1930, p. 68). Loewald's view differs from Freud's, however, in that Loewald's primal unity is explicitly a pre-objective and pre-subjective state, an 'infant–mother psychic matrix' ([1978] 1980, p. 208), or 'that primal state where id-ego and external world are not yet differentiated' (1988, p. 17), rather than an attribute of the baby, a kind of pure subjectivity, an early ego-feeling from which the world of objects detaches. This distinction has important ramifications for Loewald's revisions of instinct theory ([1978] 1980, 1988, p. 17), as well as for the later development of his ideas on sublimation and on religious experience.*

for dear life. We see it in the alternation of idealisation and devaluation characteristic of borderline states. We see it clinically in patients who experience our interventions alternately as too intrusive and as devastating evidence of our distance from and lack of understanding of them; for whom our words are experienced alternately as instruments of coercion or direct physical assault and as so much empty, ineffectual noise.

A similar dilemma presents itself in religious life in the individual's relationship to orthodoxy (or to God)—whether in the interpretation of texts or religious doctrine, dietary laws or social norms. Most in our profession can easily see the dangers of blind devotion, the failures and stuntings of individual development brought about by rote adherence to religious dictates. But we also can easily understand the instinct that pulls people towards some source of comfort, stability, power or transcendence at times of communal crisis and at major transitions in individual lives: birth, coming-of-age, marriage and death. People have a natural tendency to gather together at such times, and to create rituals.

For example, at the disaster site in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York, impromptu shrines were set up to individuals who had been lost, centred around photographs, descriptions, notes from friends and family. Over the rubble, a cross-beam of metal supports that had remained intact was hoisted up and left standing. Whether or not such rituals (and symbols) are overtly religious, they satisfy a deep need for community, continuity, stability and connectedness without which even the most successful and satisfying of individual lives can, at such times, feel fragmented and meaningless.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the dialectic of union (with God) and separateness, autonomy and freedom is a central concern, and its elaboration is an ever-present theme in the stories of the Bible. The religious Jew or Christian longs, on the one hand, to be close to God and aligned with His will and, on the other, for a transcendent God, one who stands outside and/or can overcome the miseries and limitations of human life. Yet there are dangers to both these views: to be secure in always acting according to God's will is, arguably, to be deprived of one's autonomy; to conceive of God as untouched by human suffering is to render him all-powerful but aloof.

The Hebrew scriptures portray these polarities: a God who is close to us, intimate with us, like us (we being 'made in His image') and one who is transcendent, inscrutable and utterly Other. The tension between these two aspects of the Jewish and Christian God is played out repeatedly in stories in the Bible, from the God who interacted directly with Moses on Mount Sinai to the remote and inscrutable God of the Book of Job; from the God who says of Jesus, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased' to the God who seemed to abandon him on the cross.

The tension between God as close to us and God as remote and all-powerful is related to a corresponding tension between union and separateness, obedience and self-directedness: we stand to lose either our free will and our identity (as distinct from God) or our sense of connectedness to a source of love and power greater than ourselves. We don't want to lose either.

The role of differentiation and integration

What enables us to be close without losing ourselves; separate without losing one another?

In some sense, we remain always dependent upon and in dynamic equilibrium with the external world, both physically and psychologically, much as the child once depended, both physically and psychologically, on the mother. In Loewald's view, development is not a unidirectional process of separation, but rather one of ongoing differentiation and integration

that links us, in increasingly complex ways, to others as much as it helps us to establish separateness and individuality. Loewald observes, 'As the mother becomes outside, and hand-in-hand with this, the child an inside, there arises a tension system between the two—and an urge toward re-establishing the original unity' ([1951] 1980, p. 6). The 'tension' between individuation and union takes many forms in the course of a lifetime, encompassing, through the organising and integrating work of the ego, an increasing diversity of human relationships and modes of relating. In this way it becomes a creative force no less than a source of yearning and angst.

We never lose that intimate relatedness to and dependence on the external world that we once experienced, as children, with our mothers. Instead we experience and recreate that primal unity in increasingly complex and differentiated ways. What was once supplied by one thing, the mother, must come to be supplied by a diversity (of things): food, air, the warmth of sun and fire, shelter, community, financial security, religion, love, a moral code, one single relationship or a diversity of relationships with other people.

By contrast, it is implicit in much of Freud's work that development moves us away from an original narcissistic unity more or less unidirectionally towards increasing independence and autonomy. Religious life, in Freud's view, reflects a wish to return to a state of dependency that is more appropriately left behind, and/or to retain the illusion of a protective and all-powerful father (1930, pp. 22-4, 72). In *Civilization and its discontents*, he alludes to, but is disinclined to accept, a hypothesis that religious feeling has an earlier basis, in the 'limitless narcissism' of the beginnings of mental life (p. 72). Whereas Freud—as he was the first to admit—found the most primitive strata of human experience—those related to an 'oceanic feeling', the emotional residua of primary narcissism—to be alien to him personally and opaque to his understanding (pp. 65, 68, 72-3; Loewald, [1951] 1980, p. 9, [1971] 1980, p. 135), Loewald saw access to them as potentially enriching. This difference leads to a corresponding difference in attitude towards religious experience.

In Loewald's view, psychological development is not about reaching an autonomous state that makes full separation possible or even about finding the right place on a continuum between isolation and merger, separation and closeness, or accepting a compromise. Rather it is about holding these poles in dialectical relation to one another, neither clinging to the Other nor fleeing, and through this tension finding something new—a third possibility, a 'synthesis' of sorts—that is neither the original closeness nor an ultimate separateness but something that is at the same time both and neither. Echoing Loewald, the goal of psychological development is not to be cut off from mother/reality despite the necessity to differentiate and become emancipated from her/it, but rather to enter into an increasingly diversified, articulated and organised relationship to her/it such that the paradoxical co-occurrence of separateness and connectedness becomes possible. (One could substitute 'spiritual' for 'psychological' and 'God' for 'mother/reality' in the sentence above.) In spiritual development, as in psychological development, the polarities of union and separation are reflected in increasingly mutually compatible forms as the processes of internalisation and differentiation occur.

Loewald understands the 'tension' between separation and closeness as a potentially creative one that is never resolved, but rather motivates us to find novel modes of synthesis that can bring richness and vitality to human experience. He links depth and vibrancy of inner life with access to primitive forms of relatedness.

> *If we look closely at people we can see … that people shift considerably from day to day, at different periods in their lives, in different moods and situations, from one level to other … levels. In fact, it would seem that the more alive people are (though not necessarily*

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> *more stable) the broader their range of ego-reality levels is. Perhaps*
> *the so-called fully developed, mature ego is not one that has become fixated at the presumably highest or latest stage of development, having left the others behind it, but is an ego that integrates its reality in such a way that the earlier and deeper levels of ego-reality integration remain alive as dynamic sources of higher organization([1951] 1980, p. 20).*

In similar fashion, those individuals whose religious faith is most vibrant are in continual engagement with the complexities of human experience and all that flies in the face of belief. Without such engagement with the world, with contradictions, with doubts and fears, religious belief becomes defensive and narrow, and can survive only by excluding those individuals, ideas and emotions that pose a threat to its authenticity. Furthermore, the depth of religious experience is related to access to basic human emotions—terror and angst as well as joy and wonder—and to the integration of such basic human passions into one's religious experience and understanding. Holiness, especially in Judaism, is both great and terrible, inspiring both love and dread.

Awareness of the third as a motive force for psychological development

A fundamental change takes place in psychological life with the awareness of a third person: the move from dyadic to triadic relations in the oedipal phase. This awareness involves the realisation that others close to oneself can form a relationship with one another that excludes oneself. With it (analogously to the recognition of the third dimension in space or art) comes the potential for both objectivity and perspective. Associated with this developmental phase is the development of symbolisation (Klein, [1951] 1990; Segal, 1957; Bion, 1962), mentalisation (Fonagy and Target, 1996; Target and Fonagy, 1996) and a greater mastery of language (Loewald, [1960] 1980, p. 243). With it come new possibilities for relatedness to the external world as well as an enrichment of both the content and organisation of inner life.

At first, however, this awareness tends to be experienced as a loss. The primary maternal–infant bond can no longer be felt to encompass the whole world; it thereby comes to seem diminished. There are now, furthermore, external forces that are perceived to threaten it; it thereby comes to seem more fragile. According to classical psychoanalytic theory, the superego—and with it the tripartite structure of the mind—comes into being partly in response to these threats, in the evolving resolution of the Oedipus complex. Thus the awareness of triadic external relations sets the stage for the development of a triadic internal structure of the mind.

Loewald notes that the father serves a vital function for the developing ego in modulating the closeness of the maternal-infant bond, providing an opportunity for identification, promoting internalisation, and thereby fostering the movement of 'ego' and 'reality' to a new level of relatedness. While the

'castration threat' imposes a distance between mother and infant, in Loewald's view it could equally be said that the paternal presence protects both the relationship between mother and child and the developing child himself in that it keeps mother and child from slipping back into a pre-differentiated, prerelational state (see Loewald, [1951] 1980, pp. 16-7).

Loewald also identifies a linkage between mourning and internalisation and, more specifically, between mourning the loss of the exclusivity of the maternal–infant bond and the processes of internalisation that lead to the development of the superego and, in turn, to the progressive enrichment of the ego. He observes that 'the work of mourning is not confined to a gradual relinquishing of the lost object, but also encompasses processes of internalising elements of the relationship with the object to be relinquished' ([1962] 1980, p. 274). Through

the work of mourning, introjections and imitations of the one we have loved and lost give way to internalisations of our relationship to the one we mourn which in turn become integral parts of ourselves.

Loewald posits a kind of progression—from external authority to superego to ego ideal to ego proper—that occurs with progressive internalisation and modification of elements from the external world. He emphasises that, with progressive levels of internalisation, the individual attains both a greater level of self-sufficiency and a greater capacity for intimacy and for deepened and expanded involvement with others.

For Loewald, the structuralisation of reality and the structuralisation of inner life, of the ego, set in motion by 'dread of the womb' and facilitated by identification with the father (and other significant objects external to the mother–infant dyad), are complementary processes. They are what constitutes the development in psychic life away from the polarities of isolation and merger, towards self-responsibility and atonement. As the ego, through interaction with the environment, expands in scope and complexity, it becomes capable of engaging the external world in ever deeper, more complex and more broadly encompassing ways. This expanded reality, in turn, further promotes the development of the ego. In Loewald's view, there is a dynamism implicit in external reality that both creates and is created by the dynamism of the psyche ([1951] 1980, pp. 3-20, 1988, pp. 79-80).

Failures in the development of triadic relatedness: Fundamentalism and the paranoid-schizoid position

This developmental step, the mourning of the exclusiveness and completeness of the maternal–infant bond and the movement towards triadic relations, is the point where, I will suggest, some extreme forms of fundamentalist religion get stuck. By this, I do not mean to imply that all individuals who ascribe to such views are primitively organised as individuals, or in all areas of their lives, but rather that—especially in those fundamentalisms that are associated with violence and/or terrorism—the religious group seems to function as it were from the paranoid-schizoid position with respect to the world external to it; the external world is felt to be hostile and threatening, and evil is projected on to it.

Primitive defences such as idealisation, splitting, projective identification and denial (Klein, [1946] 1952; Segal, 1964, 1967) help to maintain a black-and-white view, with all goodness residing in the fundamentalist group and all evil in the world outside. As in Steiner's view of the paranoid-schizoid position, 'thinking is concrete ... the leading anxiety is paranoid, and the pre-occupation is with survival of the self (1997, p. 198)—or the fundamentalist group.

A cautionary note is perhaps indicated here. This discussion is intended to highlight a set of dynamics that are common, but by no means universal in (or unique to) extreme forms of fundamentalist religion. It is included in order to provide a contrast to the development of faith offered here as mature, lifeenhancing and consistent with Loewald's views of the developing ego. It does not purport to do justice to the many forms fundamentalism can take, the different ways it may be experienced by different individuals—including as mature and life-enhancing—and the ways in which it may counter genuine anarchy and thus preserve, rather than impede, the development of culture. (For a more complex view of one form of Islamic fundamentalism, for example, see Marsden, 1998.)

According to Armstrong, fundamentalist theologies and ideologies are:

> *... rooted in fear. The desire to define doctrines, erect barriers, establish borders, and segregate the faithful in a sacred enclave where the law is stringently observed springs*

> *705 from that terror of extinction which has made all fundamentalists, at one time or another, believe that the secularists are out to wipe them out (2000, p. 368).*

Marty and Appleby characterise fundamentalist religions as 'embattled forms of spirituality', deeply threatened by modernity and individualist values, that share a 'crisis mentality' and a sense of 'apocalyptic urgency' (1991, p. 820). Fundamentalists' differences with secular culture and other forms of spirituality tend to be seen in grandiose terms (Armstrong, 2000, p. xiii). One member of a Jewish extremist group (who later left the group) referred to the height of his involvement as an 'ecstasy of rage', fuelled by a conviction that 'the whole world is against us' (Halevi, 1995). The dean of the Christian Identity movement, Richard Butler, described his introduction into it in the following way: 'That was the most marvelous experience of my life', he said. 'The lights started turning on, bang-bang-bang.' The recognition that a 'war had been going on for over six thousand years between the sons of Cain and the sons of God' was an epiphany for him, 'the greatest thrill' of his life, 'opening up who we were, where we came from and why we were there' (quoted in Juergensmeyer, 2000, p. 155). Armstrong writes of earlier American Christian fundamentalists: 'they had organized the world into watertight compartments in which right was utterly and obviously distinct from wrong, and true believers in a totally different category from secularists and liberal Christians' (2000, p. 356). Not only fundamentalists' own role but also their enemies are seen as larger than life, dramatised and mythologised (Marty and Appleby, 1991, pp. 820-1).

The extreme and primitive defensiveness characteristic of some radical forms of religious fundamentalism—the use of splitting and projection—creates a starkly clear, if inaccurate, view of the world—one characterised by exhilaration, rage and terror, with little or no room for compassion, grief, sadness or doubt (Halevi, 1995; Juergensmeyer, 2000). The life of the individual is devalued; conflict is projected outward and enacted. Halevi describes how, in the context of the extremist group in which he once participated, the capacity to see things from multiple perspectives, the capacity for objectivity and the capacity to experience the 'other' as human, sentient and in essential ways more similar (to oneself) than dissimilar, threatened the foundations of the group's cohesion and effectiveness, and were actively suppressed (pp. 114, 186-7). Halevi's own emancipation from the group was ushered in by a sudden and dramatic opening up of his emotional life: an experience of what felt to him like limitless grief and a poignantly experienced recognition of his own mortality, followed by a period of deep mourning. He came to recognise that his terrorist involvement had precluded, and thereby protected him from, feelings of grief, vulnerability and doubt. It had protected him as well from the necessity of taking responsibility for his own life and actions, and from the challenge of

forging an individual life in a pluralistic world that can often seem ambiguous and confusing (pp. 188-91).

The appeal and allure of religiously motivated terrorism, much as it repels us, is nevertheless understandable. The terrorist group can serve an organising function for an otherwise disintegrated self, and can provide a source of motivation and a sense of personal agency for groups of people who otherwise lack hope in their future and in the possibility of having a hand in shaping that future (Juergensmeyer, 2000, p. 242). It can serve as a 'way out' of a hopeless situation and a jumping-off point for a more mature form of empowerment (see, for example, Haley and X, 1964). The belief in a pure, absolute and concrete source of guidance and truth can be 'exhilarating and transformative' (Sullivan, 2001, p. 46). The feeling of omnipotence— and the freedom from internal conflict—provided by acts of terror and the planning thereof are, for some individuals, worth more than life itself. The kind of finely nuanced, complexly structured inner and outer worlds and the intricate interplays between them that Loewald

describes as the culminations of human development are creations requiring hard work—and, perhaps, a benevolent-enough external reality—to achieve. The satisfactions they bring are deep but subtle: they do not bring the giddy euphoria of absolute certainty. Unlike radical fundamentalist religion, they provide no 'quick fix', and no universal, simple or absolute answers. The world of the radical religious fundamentalist appears to remain, in important respects, stuck in the paranoid/schizoid position and at a dyadic level of relatedness, lacking or evading the depth, complexity and emotional awareness characteristic of triadic relatedness and of the depressive position. The motivation supplied by the respectful awareness of an alternate perspective— the ongoing re-examination and restructuring of inner and outer worlds brought about by the advent of triadic relatedness—is compromised or absent.

Internalisation

While Loewald's emphasis on the synthetic functions of the ego lends itself readily to a discussion of religious faith as potentially a source of growth rather than exclusively as a neurotic (or psychotic) defence, his emphasis on internalisation and his insights into the dynamics of internalisation lend

themselves to an understanding of the processes involved in the development of faith.

Central to Loewald's view of internalisation is that, unlike other related processes—introjection, incorporation, imitation—it is always accompanied by some degree of modification of what is internalised and a corresponding structuralisation of inner life. He suggests that various 'degrees of internalization' correspond with 'degrees of modification of what is internalized' ([1962] 1980, pp. 270-1). Loewald's view of internalisation includes both libidinal and aggressive aspects—because the process of modification 'destroys' the status quo of the existing external relationship or object even as it is taken in and thereby bound more closely to oneself (see 'The waning of the Oedipus complex', [1979] 1980). Internalisation per Loewald is a metabolic process, involving both catabolic and anabolic processes ([1973] 1980, p. 78). It is a creative entwinement of aggression and love, of self-differentiation and reunion.

Much of the Bible can be read as a series of cyclical progressions through idol worship towards increasing levels of internalisation of the deity. As the story goes, each time the people of Israel experienced a genuine encounter with God, they felt the very human need to concretise it, to find a way to hold on to it, to represent it, from the Golden Calf to the Ten Commandments, from idol worship to adherence to scripture and the Law. Rabbinic tradition extends this progression towards increasing levels of internalisation of the deity (and/or of divine wisdom) by means of Mishna, 'oral Torah', through which the words of the (written) Torah are interpreted and integrated into daily life. According to Christian tradition, Jesus's teaching that 'the Kingdom of God is within you', his emphasis on the 'spirit' rather than the 'letter' of the law and God's gift of the Holy Spirit as an internal guide to his disciples following Jesus's death are further extensions of a progression away from the concrete and towards internality.

The process of maturation in religious faith, of integrating a religious tradition into an individual life, typically involves rejecting aspects of it, doubting it and modifying one's understanding of it. (Note that an opposite process is advocated by some radical fundamentalist groups, that is, the narrowing of the culture so the individual will not be tempted to stray, rather than the individual modifying his/her internal landscape so as to reflect and accommodate the complexities of the encountered world.) Even for one who retains the religion of one's childhood, maturation (in the sense I'm outlining here) involves a

process of modification of one's childhood image of God and changes in one's relationship to Him.

Loewald emphasises, furthermore, that what is internalised is not, strictly speaking, an 'object', but rather an 'interaction process' ([1962] 1980, p. 251). He identifies as the structure-building elements in the course of psychoanalysis— and of early development—internalisations of 'integrative experiences' ([1960] 1980, pp. 240-1) between patient and analyst, infant and mother. He goes on to say that creative processes, too, consist of internal versions of such integrative experiences. Although he does not specify such an extension, it follows easily from this line of thinking that elements of religious practice can serve, for some individuals and at some moments, as 'integrative experiences' between an individual and a community or transcendent being, and that the internalisation of such experiences can contribute to the building of psychic structure and the expansion and enrichment of the ego.

Spiritual development and the dynamics of faith

Developments in ego-psychology, object-relations theory and the understanding of pre-oedipal stages of development have contributed to a broadening and deepening of the psychoanalytic understanding of religion. Erikson's concept of 'basic trust' (1959, 1968), Kohut's of the 'self-object' (1971) and Mahler's of the 'symbiotic phase' (Mahler and Furer, 1968; Mahler et al., 1975) can serve to link religious experience to 'bedrock psychic strengths' for which religion provides ideological support (Wallwork and Wallwork, 1990, p. 162) and out of which religious faith develops (see also Rizzuto, 1979; Leavy, 1995, p. 360). Several authors (Pruyser, 1968; McDargh, 1983; Jones, 1991; Black, 1993) have provided views of religious experience based explicitly on an objectrelations perspective. Ana-Maria Rizzuto (1979) and Vergote and Tamayo (1980) have studied the ways in which the 'God-image' is created and elaborated over a lifetime and across cultures, beginning with an individual's experience of early object relations. Winnicott's theories regarding transitional objects and experience (1953, 1971) have provided a template for the understanding of religious experience that Meissner (1990, 1992) and Pruyser (1974, 1983), in particular, have extensively elaborated and that is close to, but not identical with, the view of religion presented here. Fuller (1994) and Wallwork and Wallwork (1990), among others, have provided reviews of recent psychoanalytic developments relevant to the understanding of religion. Conversely, developments in theology have contributed to a kind of 'depth

psychology' of religious experience that has further opened up the possibility of a rapprochement (see Wallace, 1990, in this regard).

My focus here, however, is on the trajectory of the development of faith within an individual—specifically the dynamics of separation/reunion between man and God or between a person and his/her ultimate concern—and the ways in which this trajectory parallels Loewald's views of the development of the ego. Accordingly, the discussion that follows will emphasise the work of those theologians and psychoanalysts who have brought a developmental perspective to the understanding of religious faith, and for whom something akin to Loewald's dialectic of separation and reunion provides a vital underpinning.

Late twentieth-century theologians (Tillich, 1957; Niebuhr, 1960, 1972; Fowler, 1974, 1981) and psychoanalysts (Rizzuto, 1979; Meissner, 1987; Jones, 1991) have defined faith in terms of a synthetic activity born out of an interaction process between man and God, the individual and a (more or less explicitly formulated) 'ultimate concern'. 'Faith', then, consists in the evolution of a relationship. For Tillich, this evolution involves a tension between 'participation', whether in organised religion or as mystical union, and 'individualization' (1952). For Meissner, it involves the 'tension and dialectical interaction between individual belief and dogma' (1990, p. 112). Faith as an interaction process strives to develop the connection between a person and his or her God, his or her 'ultimate concern' (Tillich, 1957; Fowler, 1981). Through a progressive

restructuring of this connection, both the individual and his or her experience of the ultimate grow in complexity and depth.

The term 'ultimate concern' aims to expand the concept of faith to encompass aspects of human experience that are not explicitly religious. By 'ultimate concern', I mean that amalgam of values, human relationships, hopes and dreams towards which our passions and our efforts are most centrally drawn— from the visions of self and other implicit in a late adolescent love relationship to a vision of humanity that an ageing artist/writer/teacher/philosopher hopes that his collected *oeuvre* might serve to foster; from patriotism to devotion to a work ethic, to one's family or to an aesthetic ideal.

Faith, according to this view, whether or not it is overtly religious or even consciously elaborated, entails 'the search for an overarching integrating and

grounding trust in a center of value and power sufficiently worthy to give our lives meaning'; it grows 'through our experience of trust and fidelity—and of mistrust and betrayal—with those closest to us' (Niebuhr, quoted in Fowler, 1981, p. 5).

Fowler (1981) has done empirical studies of the development of faith, based on which he conceptualises the development of faith in terms of 'stages', analogous to Erikson's stages of the life cycle and to Piaget's stages of cognitive development. The stages progress from 'pre-conventional' to 'conventional' to 'post-conventional'; from something akin to primary narcissism through various forms of relatedness to the external world, through various states of disintegration and re integration, of differentiation and internalisation, towards an experience of oneness with others and with an ultimate concern. The movement from the 'pre-conventional' stages to the 'conventional' ones (which occurs, typically, in adolescence) involves the capacity to take another person's perspective: to see oneself through the eyes of another, to imagine the other's view of him/herself and to imagine how one's relationship with another fits in among one's own and the other's relationships outside the dyad. Thus, this movement is related to a deepening awareness of and coming to terms with triadic relations, and parallels the reworking of oedipal conflicts in adolescence. The movement from the 'conventional' stages to the 'post-conventional' (which occurs, if at all, in adulthood) involves the capacity to balance dynamic tensions without collapsing them, to engage paradox and to seek a reconciliation that is not dependent on splitting off or disavowing discordant aspects of reality.

According to Fowler, Rizzuto and Meissner (among others), the development of faith, at least in the early stages, parallels ego development. The earliest, preconventional stage is coincident with primary narcissism. At this stage, there is no differentiation between self and other, ego and object-world, man and God, self and concerns outside of self. As 'primary narcissism' gives way to 'ego' and 'reality' (Loewald, [1951] 1980), as the baby separates from the mother and as one's inner life becomes distinguishable from an outer, objective world, connectedness between the elements of the original unity must take place in increasingly complex ways. Similarly, as experience sheds doubt on early conceptualisations of the Ultimate and as, for many people, their childhood image of God comes to seem false and/or alien to 'real-life' experience, the faith of the individual must be reformulated. The ego thus conceived is primarily a synthetic rather than a defensive agent, and faith, too, aims, optimally, to synthesise and embrace, not defend and exclude.

Religion as neurosis and non-dynamic or conventional faith

Loewald makes a correlation between an understanding of the ego as primarily defensive in relation to a hostile external reality and a view of religion as seen through the lens of neurosis. Implicit in this correlation is the converse: a view of the ego as primarily synthetic, of external

reality as potentially nutritive and nurturing, and of religion as non-defensive and potentially constructive. He writes:

> *Psychoanalysis has taken for granted the neurotically distorted experience of reality ... Stimulus, external world, and culture, all three, on different levels of scientific approach, representative of what we call reality, have been understood unquestioningly as they are thought, felt, experienced within the framework of a hostile-defensive (that is regressive-reactive) ego-reality integration. It is a concept of reality as it is most typically encountered in the obsessive character neurosis, a neurosis so common in our culture that it has been called the normal neurosis ([1952] 1980, p. 30).*

The practice of religion within such a context is reduced to a kind of elaborate, magical, obsessive-compulsive defence. Loewald goes on to say: 'Freud, living in a culture in which, for the majority of people, the meaning of religion is narrowed down to these magical-compulsive aspects, took this to be what religion "objectively" is' (p. 30). Elsewhere, he wrote, 'Freud failed to recognize— or refused to recognize—that religious experience is capable of evolving into more mature forms, no less than human love, for example' (1978, pp. 71-2).

Vergote has offered clinical examples of religion as a manifestation of an obsessional neurosis. In Vergote's view, 'cure' for the 'religious obsessional neurotic' does not always result in the abandonment of faith—as Freud, presumably, would suggest—but alternatively can involve a radical (and often profoundly disquieting) reformulation of religious belief allowing for an ongoing, but healthier, religious involvement (1988, pp. 48-71, 1990, pp. 87-90).

It is notable that Freud views religion, and religious faith, as static; he contrasts religion with science, which grows and changes in response to new evidence (1933, pp. 170-1). It would seem to be in large part this presumed rigidity, its association with obsessional neurosis (1907, pp. 115-27), as well as its links to

pre-oedipal (1927, p. 24) or psychotic (1930, pp. 43, 81) levels of experience, that lead Freud to reject religion and to expect that religion will, or should, eventually be supplanted by the more mature views that science and human reason can offer (1933, pp. 168, 171). For Freud, the pre-oedipal roots of religious experience, rather than existing as sources of enrichment to the maturing ego—as complements to reason, operating as it were side by side with it—are seen predominantly as dangers to the development of the ego and of civilisation, leading to fixed regressions and/or neurotic residues (1927, pp. 42, 44).

Faith, in Freud's view, rather than engaging all the contradictions of the encountered world, and rather than undergoing revision in the course of maturation, is non-dynamic. In its rigidity, it is analogous to an obsessional neurosis; in its lack of engagement with or modification based on the encountered world ('reality'), it is at best an illusion and at worst a kind of psychosis, of 'blissful hallucinatory confusion' (1927, p. 43).

The dynamics of mature faith

Meissner describes faith in a way that has much in common with Loewald's conceptualisation of the optimal functioning of the mature ego:

> *Faith is a dynamic process that involves and expresses man's total existence. It reaches back to the basic wishes and needs that characterize man's primary experiences and are subsumed into and unconsciously operative in his development. This reaching-backis both regressive and recapitulative, but it returns to infantile sources only to reorganize and revitalize them into a new psychic alignment. It finds power and creativity in the instinctual forces of fundamental narcissism and the dynamic cycle of loss and restitution (1987, p. 147).*

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Like psychic development, spiritual development occurs in the context of a relationship in which the individual is dynamically involved. Implicit in this involvement are cycles of clarity and confusion, belief and doubt, closeness and alienation. For example, a monk who later became famous for his spiritual writings said that he doubted, every day, the existence of God. He cried out to the God whose existence he doubted, poured out his rage, his disappointment and his unbelief. In the biblical story, Job does not disengage from God; rather

he rages at Him, challenges Him and demands that He show His face. God's 'answer' comes not in the form of an explanation, but as poetry. He grants Job's request for engagement, for a direct encounter, but not for justification. In his 'answer', God is powerfully present to Job, and yet remains inscrutable, paradoxical and utterly 'other'. St Augustine wrote that sin lies, not in having done this or that wrong thing, but in the absence of a turning of the will towards God—the absence of active engagement in an interaction process. It is in the context of such an interaction process—whether through prayer, or involvement in a religious community, or through an active orientation towards a non-religious 'ultimate concern'—that the faith of the individual develops.

In order not to function as a mere idol, our ultimate concern must challenge and change us so that neither we nor it are static. As we change, so, too, inevitably, will our understanding of God (or of our ultimate concern), our intrapsychic representation of God (or our ultimate concern) and our manner of relating to Him (or it). God may not change (and what we think of as our ultimate concern may in some sense be immutable), but our internal image(s) of God (or Science or Art or Music or Love or Humanity or our conception of other minds) does and should as we grow and develop, much as in Loewald's view the reality that we engage expands in scope and depth with the development of our own psychic structure and ego.

Freud's characterisation of religion as an 'illusion' is, perhaps ironically, not inconsistent with the view of faith as put forth here; but whereas this characterisation was part of the basis of Freud's rejection of religion, I would argue that the characterisation of religion as an 'illusion'—even according to Freud's own use of the term (1927, pp. 30-1)—more appropriately provides the basis for neither a theistic nor an atheistic view, but rather an agnostic one— one that neither posits nor denies the 'truth-value' of a religious perspective, but remains, in this regard, neutral. In a chapter on 'illusion', Loewald suggests that a more appropriate term would be 'imagining', in order more clearly to reflect neutrality with respect to the 'illusion's' correspondence—or lack thereof —with an aspect of external reality and more clearly to distinguish it from 'delusion' (1988, pp. 66-75). To say that religious experience involves an act of the imagination on the part of the believer—an impulse to connect with a transcendent reality, based on a wish for solace, certainty or inspiration—is not to make any judgement as to whether or not that reality exists or even, if it does exist, to what extent the believer's 'imagining' accurately reflects it. Nor does it nullify the possibility of that reality as a dynamic force, as the creator or co-creator of the religious 'imaginings' of an individual or a people. I would

propose that all religion is, to a greater or lesser extent, an 'illusion' in that, while it may reflect an ultimate or transcendent reality, it can never do so with full accuracy or completeness. By virtue of the dynamic nature of faith, this illusion is continually being modified and revised. According to Judeo-Christian tradition, we may approach an understanding of ultimate things, but there remains always a core opacity, an irreducible mystery (St Paul writes: 'we see … as through a glass, darkly'; according to Jewish tradition, even in the inner sanctuary of the temple, there is a 'veil' before the Holy of Holies, which cannot safely be viewed directly, except by the high priest, on Yom Kippur).

The capacity for faith involves, in part, the capacity to imagine (or perceive) a loving object and then, in turn, to grow through interaction with that imagined (or perceived) loving object.

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The capacity for faith—whether or not it is consciously formulated or articulated—is similar, then, to the capacity to internalise a benevolent relationship with an analyst or therapist and grow through it. For some people, prayer, engagement with matters of faith and/or involvement with a religious community can, like therapy, provide a 'second chance', a context in which to rework aspects of psychological development and of interpersonal relatedness that had gone awry at the outset and/or to further deepen and build on early strengths.

Redemption and atonement

Both are religious terms. The derivation of the word 'redemption' is 'to set free'; the word 'atonement' comes from 'at one'. These two words, like 'isolation' and 'merger', represent a form of the separateness/unity dialectic; but in redemption and atonement this dialectic is raised up, transformed and approaches a synthesis. While 'atonement' carries a negative connotation—as it relates to 'sin' and punishment—its derivation suggests a positive one: the restoration of unity. Similarly, 'redemption' connotes not only the payment of a ransom but also the restoration of freedom or the fulfilment of a promise.

According to Jewish tradition, the highest holy day of the year is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which is the occasion for reconciliation within individual souls, for the Jewish people among one another and for humankind with God. The ten days leading up to Yom Kippur are the occasion for *teshuvah*, generally translated as 'repentance', but meaning, more literally, 'returning', as in the

restoration of a lost unity or state of peaceful harmony. One who has successfully performed this act is designated as *ba'al teshuvah*, generally translated as 'repentant sinner' but meaning, more literally, 'master of returning' (Frankel, 1994). In this way, the life of the religious Jew is marked by yearly cycles of alienation and atonement that recapitulate the history and essence of the relationship between God and humankind.

According to Christian tradition, the redemption of humankind and the state of atonement with God are brought about through Christ. Whereas Adam's exercising of his free will—his act of rebellion in eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge—resulted in his banishment from the Garden of Eden and isolation from God, Christian tradition—at its best—offers a paradox. Following redemption through Christ—through his birth, death and resurrection and, most expressly, through God's gift of the Spirit—humankind is understood to have been set free—to make choices, to seek knowledge, to be in some sense autonomous, distinct from God and responsible for ourselves—and yet to still remain in a state of atonement with and intimate, gracious relatedness to God.

Speaking in psychological terms, Loewald relates atonement to sublimation, characterising it as the creation and recreation of an original unity on progressively higher levels of organisation. He refers to sublimation as 'an internal recreative return toward [primary narcissism]' (1988, p. 22), 'a kind of reconciliation of the subject-object dichotomy—an atonement for that polarization—and a narrowing of the gulf between object world and self (p. 20). Loewald views the 'waning' of the Oedipus complex in the course of human development as leading to (or tending, if all goes well, towards) 'atonement' and 'self-responsibility' ([1979] 1980, pp. 392-3). While in the early separation/ individuation phase one moves from merger vs isolation to dependence vs autonomy, and later to intimacy and emancipation, atonement and selfresponsibility remain as lifelong goals, to be created, disrupted and recreated variously and continually throughout a lifetime.

In both ego development and the development of faith, with increasing levels of internalisation, differentiation, sublimation and integration, the polarities of isolation and merger may be transformed into redemption (or selfresponsibility) and atonement (reconciliation,

the restoration of unity). Internalisation adds, as it were, a third dimension that lifts us out of the quicksand of merger, saves us from the emptiness of isolation

and enables the paradoxical co-occurrence of closeness and separateness. In contrast with the primitive polarity of isolation/merger, redemption and atonement represent these archaic poles in mutually compatible and positive aspects: separation leading to emancipation, unity leading to reconciliation and peace. They go together as aspects of human fulfilment, in contrast to isolation and merger that go together as aspects of human desolation and destruction.

Loewald is well aware of the potential use of sublimation—or something like it —as a defence, and of instances of religious belief and practice that serve a primarily defensive function. But he also presents a carefully explicated and compellingly described conceptualisation of sublimation as a 'genuine appropriation' (1978, p. 76), which opens the way for an understanding of religious experience that is fully consonant with, expressive of and conducive to the development of the ego. According to his conceptualisation, sublimation more accurately belongs 'in the area of ego development and of internalization rather than defense' (1988, p. 33). Sublimation as he defines it is fundamentally integrative and creative, encompassing rather than avoiding or defending against the passions that motivate it. Sublimation weaves together elements of self and other, inside and outside, passions and ideals (id and superego). And religion, to the extent that it functions as a true sublimation, does the same. According to this view, rather than overpowering or denying aspects of self or of reality, sublimation encompasses both and forges something new.

A new unity

Poets and psychoanalysts alike have postulated that our beginnings involve an experience of fundamental unity, timelessness or transcendence quite different from our habitual experience later on. Ironically in a critique of religious belief, Freud quotes the poet Romain Rolland's allusion to an 'oceanic feeling', linking it to early life and primary process mentation (1930, pp. 64, 68). Wordsworth writes of our beginnings: 'trailing clouds of glory do we come/From God who is our home' and of an accompanying depth of attunement that (for him) fades with the passage of childhood. Loewald, too, links moments of timelessness to primary process mentation and suggests a cumulative effect of such moments over a lifetime:

> *Philosophers and theologians have spoken of the nunc stans, the abiding now, the instant that knows no temporal articulation, where distinctions between now, earlier, and later have fallen away or have not arisen. All of us know, I believe, poignant moments that have this timeless quality: unique and matchless, complete in themselves and*

somehow containing all there is in experience. As experience augments and grows in an individual's life course, these instants, in time but not of time, contain more and more meaning which is poured into the nunc stans in such a way that temporal and other articulating differences are dissolved or become condensed into oneness. What was lived through earlier and later, and the mental categories of secondary process mentation—all fall away, collapsing into an instant, into that one experience which stands for all experience, although only 'for one instant'(1978, p. 65).

Loewald suggests that 'intimations of eternity' (1978, p. 69), reflective of the ongoing presence of primary process thought and of the expanded 'ego-feeling' (Freud, 1930, p. 68) characteristic of primary narcissism, are as vital to human development as are the conscious, executive functions of the ego and secondary process thought. While the latter are emphasised in contemporary culture (and even more so in Freud's time) as arguably the highest achievements of civilisation and of the mature ego (cf. Freud, 1933, p. 171), Loewald suggests that overemphasis of either one aspect of experience or the other can be dangerous and/or

impoverishing. He suggests that the characteristics of the 'fully mature' ego include, not a dominance of ego over id or rationality over instinct or religious feeling, but rather an ongoing dialectical tension between and synthesis of the two modes. He suggests that the expanded 'ego-feeling' characteristic of primary narcissism is regained, in part, through the internalisation of interaction processes with the environment of an increasingly broadly encompassing and deeply integrated nature. In this way, ego development leads towards an experience of 'atonement' with the external world, towards a 'differentiated unity' (1988, p. 24), not structureless and conflict-free, as in primary narcissism, but rather complexly structured, reflective of the manifold tensions within and between self and other, ego and reality, man and God, and thereby characterised by an internal dynamism.

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