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Donning Masks and Joining the Dance: Religious Ritual and Contemporary Psychoanalysis

In *The Interpretation of Cultures* Clifford Geertz calls for a widening of Freud's psychoanalytic treatment of rituals. He cites Freud's theory as an inevitable starting-point for any useful anthropological theory of religion, but one which must be placed "in a much broader context of contemporary thought."¹

Freud's approach to religion seeks to uncover its unconscious motivations. His psychological understanding of religious ritual can be characterized by the image of tearing away a ritual mask. Freud was convinced that psychoanalysis finally and convincingly reveals the true and patent face of religious observance; it lays bare the naked sexual and aggressive wishes and drives hidden beneath symbol and sacrament. Subsequent orthodox psychoanalysts continue to apply their craft in the sanctuaries of religious ritual, be it tribal dance, passover seder, or eucharistic assembly, in order that they might remove more celebratory masks, further demythologize sacred narratives, and finally desacralize ritual symbols.²

Psychoanalytic unmaskings of religious rite and cult have led to valuable understandings of the complicated motivations which

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¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books 1973) 88.

² Freud treats ritual experience in "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices" (Volume 7 in the Standard Edition of Freud's works: London: Hogarth Press 1907), *Totem and Taboo* (Vol. 13 in SE 1913), *The Future of an Illusion* (Vol. 21 in SE 1927), *Civilizations and Its Discontents* (Vol. 21 in SE 1930), and in *Moses and Monotheism* (Vol. 23 in SE 1939). For a review of classical psychoanalyses of ritual see Daniel Merkur, "The Discharge of Guilt: Psychoanalytic Theories of Ritual," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 5:2 (1991) 15-32. Mary Ellen Ross provides a creative psychoanalytic rethinking of ritual in *Object Relations Theory and the Psychoanalytic Theory of Ritual* (1983 doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago) and in Ross and Ross, "Mothers, Infants, and the Psychoanalytic Study of Ritual," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9 (1983) 26-39.

draw people to religious ritual.³ There is benefit in the methodology of not taking any behavior, including religious behavior, at face value. It is possible, however, to retain a hermeneutics of suspicion and at the same time to develop psychoanalytic understandings of religious ritual different from Freud's.⁴ A particular development within contemporary psychoanalysis which offers radically new opportunities to revisit, review and reframe depth psychological analysis of religious ritual experience is found in the work of the Chicago psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut. Kohut's ideas and their elaboration by other psychoanalysts and psychologists have become known as psychoanalytic self psychology, or simply self psychology.⁵

There are two distinct contributions which self psychology makes and which can be applied to the psychoanalytic investigation of religious ritual. One is the sustained attention self psychologists give to the nature of psychoanalytic method; the second is the retrieval of the psychoanalytic construct of the self. These two factors provide ways to reopen and rethink how one applies psychoanalysis to ritual and at the same time provide the "much broader context of contemporary thought" desired by Geertz.

METHOD IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

Introspection and empathy as ways of listening. Clinical psychoanalysis is constituted by a well defined art of listening. The psychoanalyst attends to the words and stories, the references and omissions, the images, dreams and hopes of the client. Kohut suggests two words to capture the essence of the disciplined listening which is

³See William Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1984) and *Life and Faith: Psychological Perspectives on Religious Experience* (Washington: Georgetown University Press 1987), and Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1970).

⁴Freud himself makes this assertion in *The Future of An Illusion*, 48-49, 53.

⁵See Kohut's major texts, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* (Madison, Connecticut: International Universities Press 1971), *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press 1977), and *How Does Analysis Cure?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1984); also the multi-volume series edited by Paul Ornstein, *The Search for the Self* (Madison, Connecticut: International Universities Press).

constitutive of the psychoanalytic method. They are “introspection” and “empathy.”⁶

When we focus attention on our own inner world, namely on our “thoughts, wishes, feelings and fantasies,” we are engaging in introspection. Psychoanalysts practice and refine the universal human capacity for introspection in the belief that sustained observation of the inner life can gradually reveal and illumine the unconscious aspects of human interaction, and sometimes heal the deeper, hidden parts of the soul.⁷ When introspection is exercised on behalf of the inner life of another person, one is engaged in the exercise of empathy or “vicarious introspection.” Empathy is the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person. Kohut understands empathy, like introspection, to be a natural capacity of all human beings, a virtue which itself can grow and develop throughout a person’s life. The exercise of empathy by the psychoanalyst in the clinical setting is a disciplined and focused listening to and observation of the inner life of the client, exercised on behalf of and for the benefit of the client.⁸

Listening for the unspoken: transference. In the work of introspection into his own soul, as well as in his empathic work with clients, Freud observed that the inner life is complex and multi-layered. He noted that what he observed by empathic listening, the client was often not able to observe by introspection. The client was not conscious of certain dimensions of his or her inner life. Freud also theorized that previous and especially early life experience exerted powerful influence on a person’s later life, even though in unconscious ways. Transference was Freud’s word for this observation that feelings and states of mind from previous life experience, especially from early developmental years, are

⁶Kohut, “Introspection, Empathy and Psychoanalysis: An Examination of the Relationship Between the Mode of Observation and Theory,” *The Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 7 (1959) 459–83.

⁷Kohut understands introspection to have characterized the essence of the method in Freud’s own self-analysis in his seminal work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Vol. 4 and 5 in SE, 1900).

⁸To identify empathic listening with self psychology is not to say that such listening does not happen or is not valued in other clinical approaches. Self psychology, however, is explicitly and continuously attentive to the value and method of empathy.

“reproduced,” “projected” and “relived” in and through the relationship with the psychoanalyst as well as in daily life. These transferences of earlier feelings and states of mind are by nature unconscious, that is, reproduced and relived unawares, though their influence on present behavior and motivation is often extensive and powerful.⁹

Introspection and empathy, as psychoanalytic tools, need to be used with great respect for the intricate and delicate complexity of the soul. Empathic listening is not naive. It is attentive to what may not be immediately or even remotely audible or apparent, to what always lies beyond the conscious awareness of a client, as well as beyond the awareness of the therapist, to the unconscious bonds that tie a person’s past to the present. Kohut, as a psychoanalyst, takes the reality of transference seriously. However, he modifies and expands Freud’s understanding of transference. His self psychology, as we shall see, explores unconscious needs of the self, which are rooted in infancy and childhood, and which are pervasive and powerful dimensions of our relationships with each other and with our environment.

Listening and theorizing. Introspection and empathy are not exercised without reference to theory. A clinician’s sustained exercise and careful application of introspection and empathy are always modified by conceptual presuppositions brought to the task of listening, or by ideas engendered during the process of listening. As the therapist engages the psychoanalytic method of empathic listening, she or he employs or seeks categories and concepts by which to reflect on and explain one’s understanding of what the client is expressing, revealing or repressing. One engages existing concepts or constructs new theories, in order to sustain the initial understandings gained by introspection and empathy, and to organize those understandings in ways that allow one to communicate them to another. When one returns at a later time to the exercise of introspection and empathy with the same client, or begins work with a new client, one brings the theories which have

⁹Freud treats transference in *Studies on Hysteria* (Vol. 2 in SE 1895), *Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (Vol. 7 in SE 1905), *The Dynamics of Transference* (Vol. 12 in SE 1912), *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (Vol. 14 in SE 1915), and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Vol. 18 in SE 1920).

been generated or used in previous interpretation or explanation. These familiar theories work to filter and select the data gathered in subsequent empathic clinical encounters.

In the further exercise of introspection and empathy, a clinician must work to keep previously generated theory from ossifying in ways that prevent fresh observations. In claiming that introspection and empathy constitute the essence of psychoanalysis, Kohut advises that all previous psychoanalytic theories need to be constantly tested against the ongoing testimony of the client. Psychoanalysis is not simply the *a priori* application of psychoanalytic theory to what one hears from the client. It is not a pre-packaged set of instructions and factory parts for assembling diagnoses and prognoses. Psychoanalysis is the careful probing with the refined tools of introspection and empathy in the ongoing and fallible attempts by the therapist to understand the experience being described by the client, while assuming there are unconscious dimensions to the present experience of both therapist and client.

There is then a delicate balance between active, open, searching, enterprising introspection and empathy on the one hand, and the formative influence of psychological concepts and the therapist's previous experience on the other. Theorizing, therefore, is always tentative, probing, provisional and should even contain an element of playfulness. Self psychologists emphasize that the observer-interpreter is always a participant-observer whose presuppositions and theories both promote and limit the exercise of introspection and empathy.

Method in applied psychoanalysis. Using psychoanalytic concepts to investigate the wider vistas of civilization and broader horizons of history is called applied psychoanalysis. Like Freud, Heinz Kohut believed that psychoanalysis, beyond its clinical exercise on behalf of patients, has many applications to the wider society and culture. Kohut, however, makes a distinctive contribution to applied psychoanalysis. It is his insistence that care and attention to the way one listens and observes is as crucial in applied psychoanalysis as it is in clinical psychoanalysis. Applied psychoanalysis, like clinical psychoanalysis, is not just the *a priori* application of psychoanalytic theory to some aspect of civilization or culture. According to Kohut, applied psychoanalysis involves

careful, empathic attention to subjects in the field and a cautious reluctance, as in the clinical hour, to impose any pre-established psychoanalytic categories. When applying the concepts of self psychology to a cultural phenomenon such as ritual, Kohut advises the same methodology he uses in individual psychotherapy: introspection and empathy.

The self psychologist listens carefully to how ritual participants describe their own experiences of the ritual and of the ritual's place in their lives. In the application of the psychoanalytic method to ritual, those who regularly practice religious ritual deserve the careful attention and empathy of the psychoanalyst who wishes to understand and explain unconscious dimensions of their ritual experience. It requires the attempt or series of sustained attempts to put oneself in the place of the ritual participant, to begin to feel the experience as if it were one's own. The psychoanalytic observer needs to reach into his or her own past experiences to find what may be similar inner experiences or feelings which may serve as empathic guides in the psychological study of religious ritual. Psychoanalytic concepts and theories need to be shared with ritual participants and tested for adequacy in helping to interpret and understand their ritual experience.¹⁰

The self psychologist does not dismiss the psychoanalytic hermeneutic of suspicion and the investigation of possible transferences in ritual experience. However, through introspection and empathy the self psychologist remains open to depth psychological dimensions of religious ritual experience which emerge with the help of interpretive categories affirmed by and in the shared search for understanding by the ritual participant and the self psychologist. To return to the image invoked at the beginning, the self psychologist is less likely to tear away ritual masks and more apt to don a mask and join the ritual dance. The empathic approach of self psychology would emphasize the value of exploring

¹⁰The various Freudian critiques of religion and of religious experience illustrate the *a priori* application of his psychoanalytic theories, especially his Oedipal theory, to the phenomena. The works of the Freudian anthropologist Weston LaBarre, *They Shall Take Up Serpents: Psychology of the Southern Snake-Handling Cult* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1962) and *The Ghost Dance: The Origins of Religion* (New York: Delta 1972), are notable illustrations of a strict application of Freudian theory to ritual experience.

how a celebration is experienced by its devotees and the advantage of engaging in the ceremony to the extent possible as ways to deeper understanding of the ritual.¹¹

THE PSYCHOANALYTIC CONCEPT OF THE SELF

In addition to care for and attention to method, there is a second way in which self psychology responds to Geertz's call for a broader contemporary psychoanalytic context for the study of religious practices such as ritual. It is the retrieval of the psychoanalytic concept of the self. As a seminal psychoanalytic idea retrieved and invigorated by Kohut, the concept of the self provides new ways to consider and understand some depth psychological aspects of religious ritual experience when it is employed and applied to such experience with the careful methodology described above.

Narcissism and the self: Freud. Self is anything but a univocal term. The vast variety of philosophical schools, religious traditions and cultural systems reveal a great many ways of understanding and defining self as an aspect of human experience. Even among psychologists there is no universally accepted definition of self.¹²

The psychoanalytic concept of self first appears in Freud's works in his attempts to discuss and define narcissism. Narcissism represents a significant area of Freud's work and the term bears a variety of related meanings in his writings.¹³ A major use

¹¹ Ronald Grimes, *Beginning Ritual Studies* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America 1982), argues compellingly for a different "style" in the study of ritual, a celebrative style of study which is more adequate to the ritual experience being studied. Kohut's psychoanalytic method of interpretation and empathy enriches the field of ritual studies by providing a method to complement Grimes' idea of "style."

¹² See Paul Florsheim, "Cross-cultural views of self in the treatment of mental illness," *Psychiatry* 53:3 (1990); Paul Ricoeur, "The self in psychoanalysis and in phenomenological philosophy," *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 6:3 (1986); Stephen Toulmin, "Self-knowledge and knowledge of the self," *Psychological and Philosophical Issues* (Oxford, England: B. Blackwell 1977, Theodore Mishel, ed.); Saul Tuttmann, "Psychoanalytic concepts of 'the self,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 1:2 (1988); and J.W. Redfearn, "Ego and self: terminology," *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 28:2 (1983).

¹³ See *On Narcissism* (Vol. 14 in SE 1914); also Sidney Pulver, "Narcissism: the term and the concept," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 18

of the term narcissism by Freud is its reference to an infant's original self-centered indulgence, or in psychoanalytic terms, an infant's natural tendency to invest its libido in itself. Other persons, such as the mother, are experienced not as separate realities in their own right, but only as parts or extensions of the infant and only for the satisfaction of its instinctual wishes and drives. Freud understood an infant's sense of self, then, originally to overlap and intersect with other persons and with its general environment. He specified this as primary narcissism.¹⁴

Slowly, Freud theorized, as the child grows, it begins to experience others as distinct and separate from itself, that is, as "objects" which, though separate, can provide relief from and satisfaction for the child's drives. Maturation or psychological development is constituted by the abandonment of primary narcissism, and the gradual establishment of separate identity over and against others and one's environment. From an infantile experience of the world as part of one's inchoate sense of self, a child slowly learns that she or he exists separate and apart from a world of others and of objects which may or may not respond to his or her wishes and desires.

Narcissism, for Freud, is an infantile psychological dynamic to which we may at times return, especially when under stress, but beyond which we are meant to grow. Narcissism, in the adult, is a break in the well-defined borders between one's subjective self and the objective world outside oneself. We return to narcissistic states when our individual sense of self regresses to an unconscious and infantile appropriation of another as "part of" one's self and totally dedicated to one's own needs and desires.¹⁵ Persons with the diagnosis of narcissistic personality or narcissistic character disorder are understood to have been fixated somehow in infantile narcissism.

(1970) 319-41, and Burness Moore, "Toward a Clarification of the Concept of Narcissism," *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 30 (1975) 243-76.

¹⁴For a different approach and analysis of the early infant's sense of self, see Daniel Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (New York: Basic Books 1985).

¹⁵Freud draws a distinction between primary (infantile) and secondary narcissism. The latter represents regressive returns to infantile narcissism which, however, are temporary and which contribute to the growth and development of the ego.

Narcissism and the self: Kohut. Kohut's clinical work led him to develop, modify and elaborate Freud's earlier concepts of narcissism and the self. He suggests that although a child begins to experience others as separate and distinct "objects," as Freud had written, she or he also continues to experience other persons as parts or extensions of oneself. In other words, long after infancy and childhood and on into adulthood, our relationships *continue* to sustain narcissistic dimensions that are not regressive, but are part of and essential to psychological development. Mature and healthy relationships involve an experience (usually unconscious) of the other not as apart from and distinct from oneself, with a separate history and identity, but as part of, contributing to, and even constitutive of one's own sense of self. This narcissistic dimension of relating with others contributes to the well-being, cohesiveness and strength of one's own self. "Selfobject" is Kohut's term for the self-sustaining, self-affirming dimensions of one's relationships with other persons or things which in infancy help build up the very structure of the self and which in adulthood continue to maintain the self's cohesiveness. Our sense of self, then, does not stop at our skin. Our self extends across our companions and social groups, well into our physical and cultural environments which provide selfobjects for our psychological survival and growth.

Kohut's self psychology investigates the nature of narcissistic needs met by selfobjects and how the self, as a psychological structure, continues to grow and develop throughout life. He argues that empathic analysis and careful, receptive listening reveal that in all relationships with others there are self-sustaining and self-affirming concerns and needs which imperceptibly intertwine us with each other.

Selfobject transferences. As a psychoanalyst Kohut took account of the transferences which patients developed in their clinical relationships with him. He gradually realized that patients not only transferred unmet, unconscious instinctual wishes onto him as analyst, as classical psychoanalysis taught. Patients also had pressing, unmet narcissistic needs of the self which Kohut, as therapist, experienced in a "transference like" way.¹⁶ Just as a per-

¹⁶See Schlauch, "The Intersecting-Overlapping Self: Contemporary Psychoanalysis Reconsiders Religion — Again," *Pastoral Psychology* 42:1 (1993) 28–33,

son with highly active, instinctual wishes will transfer them, unconscious of their true origin, onto the present relationship with the therapist, so too a person with highly charged narcissistic needs of the self will bring them into the present relationship with the therapist. It was his experience of becoming an important selfobject for his patients which led Kohut to the gradual development of his theories about narcissism and narcissistic needs.

Guided by introspection and empathy in his clinical work, Kohut noticed two basic forms of selfobject transferences which characterized his clients' narcissistic needs: a need for mirroring by another and a need to idealize another. Drawing from Freud's studies on narcissism, Kohut theorized that these two basic needs originated in infancy. The infant has a need for the parent to mirror back its worth and goodness. "I am perfect; look at me." The child experiences the mother or father, or other regular caretaker, as mirroring back a sense of importance, of value, of worth and goodness. In Kohut's terms the parenting one functions as a mirroring selfobject, experienced by the child as an integral and intrinsic part of its own sense of self worth and loveableness. This narcissistic need for mirroring selfobjects continues throughout life, though it is experienced differently as one grows and develops. Selfobjects which mirror the self respond to and confirm a person's innate sense of vigor, worth and goodness.

As the infant grows it begins to experience a second basic narcissistic need: the need to idealize another, to invest the other with perfection. "You are perfect; I am part of you." The mother or father or regular caretaker also plays this selfobject role for a child. This selfobject or narcissistic need, like the need for mirroring, continues throughout life. Adults also experience the need to idealize another, and to identify with that other in such a way that the other functions as a part of one's own sense of self. Selfobjects which mirror the idealizing self provide an experience of merger with the idealized other which leads to calmness, cohesion, harmony and strength.¹⁷

for an overview of Kohut's thoughts on the transference-like dynamics of narcissistic needs.

¹⁷Kohut thought that there were other narcissistic needs which selfobject relationships met. In later writings he speaks of alter ego needs. Ernst Wolf has written on the importance of listening empathically to discern their particular

Transmuting internalization. In analyzing the dynamics of self-object transference, Kohut observed a phenomenon which he called "transmuting internalization." To understand how transmuting internalization works we can return to the two basic kinds of narcissistic needs of which Kohut took note and use them to follow his description of narcissistic development.

An infant naturally enjoys or seeks a relationship with a parent or significant caretaker to whom it looks for a reflection of its self. The parent, however, cannot be a perfect mirror for the child. She or he will fail on occasion to attend to, to express approval of, and to affirm the presence of the child. These occasions frustrate the child's narcissistic needs. According to Kohut they constitute "optimal frustrations" because they present opportunities for the child to begin to do for itself what the parent presently fails to do. Gradually the child learns to attend to itself, express approval of itself and affirm its own presence and activity. The narcissistic functions formerly provided for the child by the selfobject parent are transmuted or "changed in the form" in which they are provided. Something shifts in the selfobject or narcissistic relation between parent and child. The parent will soon once again provide mirroring for her child, but the child's capacity for initiating or receiving mirroring, for responding to and resonating with the experience of being mirrored, has been modified or transmuted. There is now a greater capacity for, adequacy to and enjoyment of mirroring in the selfobject relationship between parent and child.

This transmuting internalization of narcissistic need results in a "transformation of narcissism," or new forms of narcissism in which the self continues to enjoy and expand its capacity for mirroring, for affirmation and approval. This is, of course, a long process for the child who must depend upon the parent to have its narcissistic needs for mirroring met again and again. Psychic structure within the self is built up only gradually over a series of optimally frustrating parental lapses which result in transmuting internalizations of narcissistic functions. By such minute transmuting internalizations of narcissistic functions, the child continues to grow in its capacity for, adequacy to and resonance with

narcissistic needs; see his *Treating the Self: Elements of Clinical Self Psychology* (New York: The Guilford Press 1988).

the mirroring dimensions of other relationships as well. The need for relationships in which one's self is mirrored, however, perdures throughout life.

The second major narcissistic need is to have someone to idealize, to consider perfect and with whom one then identifies. All bliss and power reside in the idealized parenting one, and the child feels that happiness and strength when it is in relationship with the person who has become the idealized selfobject. When that person is gone or fails to respond to the child's narcissistic needs for that happiness and power, the child feels depleted and powerless. Transmuting internalization functions here as well. If the absence or psychological neglect of the idealized caretaker is experienced in small doses, the child will begin to exercise those psychological functions for itself. It will little by little begin to feel able to activate a sense of joy and strength, to relate and respond to idealized others in ways that increase strength and multiply joy. The idealization of another persists as a narcissistic need throughout life, but it changes and develops in its nature over a lifetime.

As these two kinds of narcissistic needs, the need for mirroring and the need to idealize, are slowly met through the child's transmuted narcissistic functions, the child's "nuclear self" begins to grow. This is Kohut's term for "the basis for our sense of being an independent center of initiative and perception," enjoying both continuity and identity in our experience of body and mind.¹⁸ Kohut realized that when he noticed or felt strong narcissistic demands from a client for mirroring, or when he felt that he was being unrealistically idealized by a client, he was serving as a self-object. His timely interpretation and explanation of such self-object transferences would serve to encourage transmuting interpretation and thus encourage narcissistic development.¹⁹

¹⁸ Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self*, 177. Kohut never provides an elaborate definition of the self. He infers, if you will, the existence of the self from narcissistic needs and behavior.

¹⁹ If a child experiences traumatic, chronic failures in parental empathy, she or he could grow into adulthood with powerful, unmet needs for mirroring by and idealization of others. If such narcissistic needs are severe and disruptive aspects of the person's relationships with others, she or he may suffer from some level of narcissistic personality disorder. While all persons may show narcissistic needs during analysis, those suffering from narcissistic personality disorders

Lifelong needs for selfobjects and selfobject transference. As Kohut's thought developed, he began to see more clearly that we have lifelong needs for selfobjects. A person "can no more survive psychologically in a psychological milieu that does not respond empathically to him, than he can survive physically in an atmosphere that contains no oxygen."²⁰ We experience lifelong forms and transformations of narcissistic needs. Persons, places, things, events, sounds and all dimensions of our experience throughout life function as selfobjects to meet those narcissistic needs of the self for mirroring, approval, acceptance, idealization, sameness, success and so forth. Self psychology studies the nature of those ongoing narcissistic needs and how we experience others as selfobjects, that is, as dimensions of our own sense of self, meeting the needs of the self. When our life is rich with persons and things that meet these lifelong narcissistic needs, we feel a sense of cohesion and strength in our sense of self. Even in later adult life selfobjects, experienced as vibrant dimensions of the self, echo, re-echo and support the narcissistic functions which may have long ago been transmuted and transformed. In moments of stress and self doubt, selfobjects are there to provide the reassuring narcissistic functions to meet our narcissistic needs.

Kohut emphasizes that the acquisition of self structure, the internalization of functions from empathic selfobject relationships, does not make the self independent of selfobjects. "Instead it increases the self's ability to use selfobjects for its own sustenance, including an increased freedom in choosing selfobjects."²¹ Internal resources are never enough. Just as our bodies need oxygen to survive, our psychological survival depends on our ability to seek out and find mirroring selfobjects which nourish us and idealizable selfobjects which enliven us with the enthusiasm we feel for them. The selfobject dimensions of our relationships are vital for our psychological survival, growth and development.

will exhibit especially powerful and persistent selfobject transferences which Kohut called "archaic narcissistic needs" because of their roots in a deprived infancy or early childhood.

²⁰ Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self*, 253.

²¹ Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 77.

A radical shift in psychoanalytic paradigms. In his later writings Kohut eventually comes to understand the Freudian subject-object model to be encompassed and replaced by his selfobject model. He develops a new psychoanalytic anthropology, one which sees persons as overlapping, intersecting selves. This fully developed selfobject theory in the late Kohut represents a radical shift in psychoanalytic thought, a shift from the Freudian perspective which understands persons as distinct and separate selves, relating to one another as subject to object, to the self-object model which understands a person's sense of self to extend beyond the body and into the multiple selfobjects in the surround. In Kohut's selfobject model a person's experience of self crosses interpersonal borders to include other persons; in other words selves intersect and overlap, especially at unconscious levels.²² Self psychology is an invitation to move beyond a subject-object dichotomy in understanding how persons relate and interact, to a subject-subject model.

This paradigm shift in psychoanalysis from a Cartesian lens of subject-object perception to Kohut's subject-subject model provides a psychoanalytic model and method with which to re-approach the study of religious ritual. Self psychology allows for a radically different psychoanalytic approach to ritual, one which understands the selves of the ritual participants to intersect and overlap, to function as selfobjects for each other.

APPLYING SELF PSYCHOLOGY TO RELIGIOUS RITUAL EXPERIENCE

So often in their descriptions of their ritual experience and of its importance in their lives, people talk about how the ritual expression or practice of their religious faith provides them with strength, joy and support in the community of those with whom they celebrate. Kohut's self psychological theories provide a receptive context and responsive categories within which to explore empathically the depth psychological dimensions of the strength,

²² Arnold Goldberg, *A Fresh Look At Psychoanalysis* (Hillsdale, N.J.: The Analytic Press 1988), and *The Prisonhouse of Psychoanalysis* (Hillsdale, N.J.: The Analytic Press 1990) comments on the importance of this paradigm shift which characterizes Kohut's psychoanalytic understanding of selfobject.

joy and support ritual practitioners so often describe. Kohut's understanding of persons as intersecting or overlapping provides psychoanalytic categories for exploring and examining depth psychological dimensions of the communion and companionship experienced during religious ritual.

Ritual can be understood as an experience in which the various narcissistic needs of the self are met or frustrated. Casting ritual experience in self psychological terms allows one to consider how ritual participants might supply each other's narcissistic needs for mirroring or idealization through the selfobject transferences which are unconscious dimensions of the relationships among the ritual participants. It is to suspect that the spontaneous needs of the self will emerge in the ritual assembly in ways that find selfobjects which nourish and enliven the participants. In listening to participants discuss and describe their ritual experience, the self psychologist is alert to how mirroring, idealizing or other narcissistic needs of the self might be met through various aspects of the ritual structure as experienced by participants. A self psychoanalytic approach theorizes that religious ritual involves selfobject transferences among participants in the rite, and that these transferences help constitute the deeper psychological dimensions of a ritual's intensity, interaction, motivation and meaning for the participants.

These selfobject transferences may occur between two participants in the ritual, or between a participant and the ritual assembly as a whole, or they may even involve ritual symbols which meet narcissistic needs for a member or many members of the group. Insofar as they function as selfobjects, all the elements of a ritual are experienced as a part of, contributing to, and even constitutive of a worshiper's own sense of self. Ritual is thus understood as a fertile field for multiple selfobject relationships which affect the narcissistic needs of the participants.

A pastoral case study. We all enter a ritual with our own narcissistic needs, needs which depend both on our narcissistic development to date, as well as on the stresses and strains which our current-life circumstances may be putting on our sense of self. If one comes to a ritual celebration with a depleted sense of self, the mirroring experienced in the ritual can help restore strength and

vitality to the self. If one comes, for example, into the ritual from a life circumstance of significant loss or failure, discouragement or disappointment, the mirroring provided by other participants and by the ritual group as a whole can begin to meet the narcissistic need for approval and attention so that the self can heal and strengthen. The ritual selfobjects can help the participant begin to reappropriate the capacity to approve and affirm her or his self and to recover ambition and capacity for success. The ritual experience provides an opportunity for transmuting internalization and the strengthening of narcissistic functions in the self. The following case of Joan illustrates in limited fashion how a person might experience, at unconscious level, narcissistic mirroring during a ritual celebration.

Joan is the young mother of three children, ages six, eight and eleven. She has been separated from her husband of fifteen years for the past five months. This has been a very difficult experience for her. She believes marriage to be a lifetime commitment and is experiencing a good deal of guilt and shame over her "failure" as a wife. She and her husband had been having significant difficulties communicating for the past several years and financial worries seemed to drive them further and further apart. He moved out, but this time of separation has not yet made any noticeable improvement in the struggle to improve their relationship.

One Sunday, just before leaving the house with her children for Mass, she had an argument over the phone with her husband. She entered the church with the harsh words of the telephone conversation still echoing in her ears like static which prevented her from hearing either her chattering children or the welcoming words of the pastor at the church door. The children, especially the two younger ones, are unusually active and quarrelsome, sensing the distress and upset of their mother.

However, just being in the congregation begins to soothe her. There is a certain comfort and reassurance that grows as the Mass continues and the volume of the difficult conversation with her husband begins to tone down in her mind and imagination. Her simple presence in the liturgical assembly begins to provide significant comfort and confidence that whatever problems she and her husband have, they will reach some kind of workable solu-

tion. As the Mass goes on the children also calm down somewhat, sensing the change in their mother. The pastor who had seen her so upset coming into church took note of the difference in her state when chatting with her after Mass.

The ritual of the Mass provided Joan, on this occasion and on many others during her marital separation, she says, with the strength and courage to carry on as mother and as breadwinner. A Freudian approach might interpret Joan's testimony about strength and courage in light of Oedipal issues symbolically stirred by her marital separation, by the role of the fatherly pastor, and by the patriarchal symbols and themes of the liturgy. Good clinical suspicion would not dismiss any such possibilities.

A broader exercise of empathy might lead one to ask about other aspects of her experience of the Mass which provide her with this strength and courage. One could frame the question in light of Kohut's understanding of the self and explore how the ritual experience might supply strength and reassurance to Joan's self. A tentative self psychological explanation is that the ritual assembly provides a selfobject or a set of selfobjects which satisfies Joan's unconscious need for narcissistic mirroring. She feels stronger after the ritual because the structure of the ritual provides her self with multiple opportunities to experience a wider set of resources and reassurances upon which Joan draws and with which she identifies. It is possible that the ritual provides Joan with unconscious experiences of "I am perfect (even though I feel very broken); look at me."

Joan's experience of the liturgical assembly as a selfobject. When Joan enters the liturgical assembly she joins a familiar group. A Catholic upbringing would mean that the Mass has been known to her for many years. The liturgical assembly has perdured as a well established group throughout the vicissitudes of her life and has witnessed those changes which constitute her personal and familial history. She knows instinctively that attending Mass now is crucial to maintaining her balance and "keeping myself together" during this marital separation. She is not aware, however, of how the congregation itself, and her participation as a member of the liturgical assembly, is key to the effectiveness of the Mass in helping her cope.

Listening to Joan one gets the sense that the assembled community has been an important part of her life because, among other things, it has provided her with a mirror for so many of the important events of her life. Her church youth group as a teenager, her wedding, the baptisms of her children, the funerals of members of her family: all involved participation in groups assembled for the various Masses and rituals celebrated for these events and occasions. The ritual group or assembly has repeatedly reflected back to Joan the importance and meaning of so much of her life since childhood. In self psychological terms it functioned as a constant mirroring selfobject. The liturgical assembly overlapped and intersected with Joan's sense of self, reflecting and refracting who she was, how she was changing and where she was going at so many points in her life.

When Joan enters the ritual assembly of the Mass, she experiences a sense of being at home, "in a place where I belong." The congregation as a whole, as a group, carries much meaning for her. Many times when entering the congregation she is flooded with memories of her immediate family as well as of extended family. She "feels the presence" of those who meant the most to her growing up. Liturgical colors, the smell of incense, even the simple acts of shared postures in close proximity affect her deeply at times and "bring her back to safe, warm and familiar times." She says she does not know exactly why, but going to Mass has become crucial for her during this time of marital difficulty. "I don't know if it's just nostalgia, and I feel so dependent on it, but I can't get through this without it [the Mass]."

Without her being explicitly aware of it, participation in the ritual provides Joan with subtle but powerful reaffirmations of who she is. When the pressing pain of a failing marriage stirs the unconscious to cry "I am perfect [whole], look at me," the Mass experience, through the many aspects of the ritual assembly, provides Joan with a "Yes, you are." The ritual group mirrors back to Joan her sense of self. In doing so it provides her with a certain cohesion, enough to "keep herself together for the sake of the kids." Joan experiences the ritual group as a mirroring selfobject, that is, as a reflection, retrieval and reassurance of much of who she is. The ritual group functions as a crucial part of her self because it mirrors who she is, even though Joan does not see the

congregation in these terms. She attributes the help which the Mass seems to give her to God's grace and the "peace and quiet" it gives her.²³

The needs of the self persist throughout our lifetime. Even as adults we need to live and move in environments that respond empathically to us. We experience lifelong forms and transformations of narcissism as persons, places, things, and events continue to function as selfobjects to meet our narcissistic needs for mirroring, approval, acceptance, idealization, success, meaning and so forth. Because of her personal history and psychological make-up, Joan's primary narcissistic need is for mirroring. The stresses and strains of single parenting, the felt rejection and betrayal by her husband, have all stirred her narcissistic need for mirroring. She needs in her contemporary surround selfobjects which support her own capacity for self-mirroring, which become dimensions of her own self, which reflect, echo and empathically strengthen her narcissistic functions of acceptance and approval. In this sense the liturgical assembly as a group selfobject, as part of Joan's own sense of self, is restorative and recreative in the ongoing narcissistic development of the young mother.²⁴

To approach ritual with the method of introspection and empathy opens the way to new insights about the psychological power of rituals. To reflect heuristically on how various aspects of the ritual process and assembly are experienced as a part of a worshiper's very self is to see ritual against a new psychoanalytic horizon, indeed, from the perspective of a new psychological anthropology. Self psychology offers pastoral liturgists new ways of empowering and enriching those who care for and those who lead rituals by deepening their appreciation of the psychological complexity of ritual experience. Presiders, preachers, readers,

²³ A self psychological analysis will not dismiss or explain away the divine presence or action in ritual. In fact, one might entertain the vicissitudes of the self as psychological paths or ways of grace and of the efficacy of the divine in ritual experience.

²⁴ Irene Harwood, "The Application of Self Psychology Concepts to Group Psychotherapy," *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* 33:4 (1983) 484, notes that a person's history in a group and sense of acceptance by and belonging to the group are important factors in the group's functioning as a selfobject for the individual.

ministers of communion, musicians, and greeters can benefit from learning about how their liturgical roles serve as avenues and ways for divine grace to penetrate into the depths of the soul. Translating self psychological theories about ritual experience into accessible language, designed for those who wish to enrich their liturgical and spiritual life with psychological insight, is the next step.

Self psychology retrieves psychoanalysis for fruitful and challenging insights into religious ritual experience. For the dialogue between psychoanalysts and ritualists to continue, self psychologists must be willing to don ritual masks in many religious rites in order to see and hear the world empathically as the worshipers in different traditions do. The self psychologist must be willing to join the ritual dance, knowing that one's partners in the dance become at deep levels extensions of one's self, even the self of the psychologist, as the dance unfolds in celebratory story.

Martin F. Connell

Heresy and Heortology in the Early Church: Arianism and the Emergence of the Triduum

The *Triduum*, the three-day liturgy of Easter — from Holy Thursday evening through Easter Sunday — has been so common an experience of the Christian liturgical year that it is difficult to imagine a time when the Triduum was not. But for at least the first three centuries of Christian worship, this annual celebration of Easter was only one rite, a single grand annual assembly of confessors, and soon-to-be confessors, embracing the life of God incarnate in Jesus Christ and in the members of the community. The theology of this unitive rite took in all aspects of the redemption wrought in the human life of the Son of God, from his conception to his death and resurrection. The whole incarnate life of

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