

A Neglected Object in Psychology: the Relationship to the Divinity

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Abstract

God is a significant object for many people. Some individuals give credence to God as an existing transcendent reality; other people oscillate between belief and unbelief at different moments of their lives while some atheists adamantly deny God's existence. Regardless of their stance, all three groups must have a certain mental conception or representation of the divinity to be able to believe in it, wrestle with it, or deny it. Such representation has significant antecedents in both parental representations (Freud, 1910; Rizzuto, 1979) and other affectively significant early objects and obtains from them prevailing emotional characteristics, which inevitably contribute to the dynamic organization of the relational or rejecting experiences the subject has with his/her personally conceived divinity.

In this paper I offer a clinical example from a completed analysis to illustrate the patient's libidinal and defensive and, at times, organizing use of the divinity during the course of his treatment.

Key words: Divine object, parental representation, God representation, self representation, psychodynamic processes, personal God, wish fulfillment, defensive use of God

Zusammenfassung

Ein vernachlässigter Gegenstand in der Psychologie: Das Verhältnis zur Göttlichkeit

Gott ist für viele Menschen ein wichtiger Bestandteil ihres Lebens. Manche Menschen sehen in Gott eine existierende transzendente Realität, andere Menschen bewegen sich zwischen Glauben und Unglauben zu unterschiedlichen Zeitpunkten innerhalb ihres Lebens, während wieder andere die Existenz Gottes völlig verneinen. Unabhängig davon scheinen alle drei Gruppen ein bestimmtes mentales Konzept vom Göttlichen zu haben, um in der Lage zu sein, an es zu glauben, damit zu ringen, oder es völlig abzulehnen. Solche Konzepte sind stark beeinflusst durch die Repräsentation der Vaterfigur (Freud, 1910; Rizzuto 1979) und anderen signifikanten Objekten in der frühen Kindheit und übernehmen von diesen spezifische emotionale Charakteristika, die zur dynamischen Organisation der relationalen oder ablehnenden Erfahrung von Göttlichkeit im Erwachsenenalter beitragen.

Im Folgenden zeige ich anhand eines klinischen Beispiels, wie ein Patient seinen Glauben während der Therapie in libidinöser, defensiver und teilweise organisierender Form einsetzt.

Schlagwörter: göttliches Objekt, Repräsentation der Eltern, Repräsentation Gottes, Selbstbild, psychodynamische Prozesse, persönlicher Gott, Wunscherfüllung, der verteidigende Gebrauch Gottes

In my book *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychodynamic Study* (Rizzuto, 1979) I have presented the developmental and dynamic processes that eventuate in the formation of the representation of a divine being in an individual's mind under the influence of family dynamics and in the context of the prevailing culture and of his/her religious education. I have shown that each stage of development and the configuration of the relationship with the parents during that period contribute to the idiosyncratic components of the representation of a divinity whose more dogmatic and secondary process characteristics are provided by the culture and the official religions. As a result, the psychic representation of the individuals' divinity is not a compact unity of well defined characteristics. It is

formed by a complexly layered amalgam of components of different levels of development with their characteristic patterns of libidinal and hostile components in relation to the parental figures that provided the experiences used to build it up. When the patient firmly believes that such divinity not only exists but is actively present as part of his/her psychic life, the analyst or therapist has no choice but to deal with such God as an object that enters the analytic field in its own right. It must be admitted that God is no ordinary object in many senses: it is not visible, his 'actions' can only be seen as a result of the patient's reporting his/her experience to the analyst who, in turn, has to infer the psychic configuration and function the patient's God is serving at that particular analytic moment.

A recent article in *The Boston Globe* (March 28, 2008) reported the dramatic experience of Canadian journalist Scott Taylor, when he was at the point of death in the hands of his Muslim extremists kidnappers. The *Globe* reports;

Taylor, editor of *Esprit de Corps* military magazine, says that even though he was not particularly religious at the time of his captivity, the only thing he wanted to do when told he was about to be beheaded was recite the Lord's Prayer as they were doing it. Certain that his captors were going to videotape the killing, he wanted the prayer to send a message to his parents, who are devout Christians (page D4).

The report graphically illustrates how Scott Taylor, when being confronted with his imminent violent death, linked God the Father, his father and mother, and his relationship to them in a prayer they had taught him. It is not hard to assume that under such terrifying circumstances he needed to revive the protective presence of his parents and the God they had provided him during his development. A similar phenomenon occurs during analysis when a patient brings a living or forgotten God into the analytic situation to modulate the dynamic complexities of their revived parental experiences in the context of the convolutions of the transference moment.

Case illustration

Louis, a man in his early 30s, requested analysis because he was suffering from an obsessive symptom, a compelling need to search for 'something' before leaving his house for work. He was troubled by his own assessment of his work performance and was concerned about his relationships with women. He wanted to marry but his many relationships ended in nothing and left him sad and feeling that he was not a real man. He and his parents were firm believers and attended religious services with some regularity.

During the evaluation to accept him for analysis, it became clear that he had not only obsessive symptoms but a histrionic disposition, presenting his predicaments with big and dramatic words aimed at obtaining something from the listener. His metaphors revealed a vivid imagination and also intensely active libidinal and hostile wishes that dominated every moment of his waking life. Louis was deeply attached to his parents, individually and as a parental couple, and related to them as a latency child who showed himself to be good and obedient, while he was secretly engaged in sexual thoughts and victorious vengeful fantasies that involved his parents. He cried during one of the initial interviews, insisting that nobody should take God and his religion away from him. There was no indication at that point that either the analyst or anybody else in his life had any intention of separating him from his God. The tears only revealed the depth of his conflict with the divinity. During the same hour, he wept again out of fear that his father could die soon, even though the father was in excellent health. An analyst needed no further evidence to conclude that Louis was thoroughly entangled in a human drama with his father, mother, and God. Obviously, he needed analysis to help him with his *internal conflicts* because, in spite of his complaints, his actual life was in order. His parents were interested in him and they remained in contact with him. He was established financially and doing well in his work objectively, even when he continuously felt like an incompetent child assigned to do a man's job. He had plenty of women willing to be with him, but he could not move from a casual relationship to a committed one without being overcome by terror.

In this paper, I will not report on the whole course of the analysis but focus on moments-- and there were many-- in which the divinity appeared as a significant presence precisely in the middle of the narratives about his parents, his predicaments with himself, and his transference predicaments with me. Such a focus will permit me to attend both to the particular components that contributed to the God representation unconsciously selected for that moment and also to the function it served in the dynamic formation of his experience.

The earliest dramatic religious episode occurred at the time of my first vacation.¹ Louis described the separation as very difficult and presented himself as frantic, clinging, and terrified of his feelings, which were voiced in gruesome, fairy-tale metaphors. They seemed to hint at some unconscious guilt. He reported a dream in which he was being castrated by his mother. He insinuated that if nobody loved him he would have to kill himself. During my absence, he resorted to the help of his pastor and repeated to him the sad announcement of his need to kill himself. The pastor affirmed, the Scriptures in hand, that God loved him, and that God's love would always remain. Louis informed the pastor that he had a woman analyst and asked him to call her. He felt much consoled by the pastor's words to him and by the Scriptural readings. He considered their encounter a proof of God's love for him.

The pastor did call me upon my return. Under the constraint of confidentiality, I listened to his detailed report and thanked him for his concern about Louis' wellbeing.

When Louis returned to analysis he described the crisis and reported that he was much improved. He asked if the pastor had called. His question was a formality because he knew that the pastor would keep his promise. A good mood came over him and, without transition, he had a *conscious* fantasy of being naked next to his mother and ready and eager to have sex with her. He was surprised that he was describing the fantasy. He felt no guilt and acted as though God had given him permission to have sex with his mother. From that moment on Louis' clingy complaints diminished, his mood lifted, and he became able, once more, to collaborate in the analytic exploration. Probably it helped him that the analyst accepted without challenge the first and very explicit emergence of his sexual wishes for his mother. He made no mention of his sexual desires for the analyst. He had expected a devastating punishment for having such wishes and for his successful manipulation of his pastor and of the analyst. The meeting with the pastor replicated many of his childhood manipulations of his parents to confirm with one parent or the other that he was loved in spite of his secret sexual and hostile wishes directed at them. At this early moment of treatment I did not interpret his wishes (as something to be done later) but helped him to make himself comfortable in the treatment, thereby, facilitating his ability to say all he needed to say. Louis remained at this moment of his analysis unaware of his sexual wishes towards the analyst and of the interconnections between God, pastor, mother, father, and analyst.

The cleverness of Louis' unconscious processes is shown in their economy of means. In the enactment with the pastor, Louis unconsciously orchestrated a magnificent demonstration of how to keep yourself loved by God, your mother, your analyst, and your pastor/father, while fulfilling in fantasy the triple satisfaction of sex with mother, narcissistic triumph as a loved object, and nonchalance about my absence without any conscious guilt. All this he could achieve because he made God, the Scriptures, and his pastor the unsuspecting accomplices (as his mother had been) of his satisfaction. Louis had a very interesting superego, I should say, a corrupt superego. It was very harsh when *he* thought that he had failed as a man and shown himself to be nothing more than a fumbling child. On the other hand, it was always ready to permit him full satisfaction of forbidden wishes, if he went through a dramatic enactment of his miserable condition until he found an adult, frequently his mother, and, at times, his father, who would give in to his pleading to satisfy his disguised wishes. These parental concessions did reveal faulty parental superegos and a mode of relating to people in which both parties accepted a corrupt solution, but did not inform themselves about it. In his enactment at the time of my vacation, Louis re-experienced his clinging need for a maternal object that he could not force to stay with him. As he had done many times in childhood, he sought a paternal ally, his pastor, to tell him that he was distressed and on the brink of suicide

because he was not loved. The pastor dutifully resorted to Scriptures that proved God loved him. What the pastor could not have known was that, in his conscious and unconscious manipulative style, Louis heard the words "God loves you" in the key of his libidinal and transferential wishes: his mother/god loved him and God/ father/pastor approved of his loving his mother, even to the point of having sex with her in his mind. Thereupon he could give me in the analysis a clear demonstration of what he was entitled to, because G/god/mother loved him. God was his accomplice.

Later analysis permitted Louis to trace some aspects of his despair at the analyst's vacation to his deep and highly ambivalent involvement with his mother. It became clear that he had been physically very close to her as a small child and that she had overstimulated him with her physical games. It was that mother who supplied the representational elements for the God representation that had condoned their sexual involvement in his analytic fantasy upon my returning from vacation. At that point, the paternal components of the God representation were not present. The paternal figure was, however, acted out in the person of the pastor who, unknown to him, insisted that God/mother did love him and that it was very good. Louis heard this as permission to have sex with his mother.

God became a regular feature of our analytic work, serving many dynamic functions of displacement, substitution, and as an object that could absorb and tolerate what Louis could not. During the following month, he talked much about his father, describing him as an inefficient, incompetent man who talked like a sissy and who had married a second-class woman because he was not man enough to have a real woman as a wife. Louis' competition with his father was ever-present in his life and in his analysis. Yet, Louis was terrified of the consequences of his rivalry with his father, which included the conviction that his being better than him would kill his father, as he had insinuated during the initial interviews. This situation was illustrated in an analytic moment a year after his visit to the pastor. Louis' everyday life was improving but he could not accept responsibility for his changes for the better. He had bought a house and received much praise for his work. He also was sexually involved with a married woman, a fact he kept secret in the analysis up to a few days before this hour. He did not inform himself about the infantile and transferential meaning of the involvement with the married woman as his victory over another man, the woman's husband. He started the analytic hour with his usual complaints: nobody respected him, he was not a man but only a child who could not do anything right. Soon his associations led him to remember that he had received great compliments for his performance at work. He had implemented measures so effective that his boss and coworkers said the changes he brought about seemed like a miracle, and they had congratulated him effusively for achieving such wonders. He immediately responded that it was not his doing but that, in fact, God had performed the miracle. I called his attention to his refusal to accept responsibility for having done something and done it very well, particularly when he was complaining all the time that nobody appreciated and respected him. He responded by saying that he was ashamed and guilty about his great success. It was better to have God be responsible for what had happened. The God of this episode appears on the surface to be the real existing God that had now intervened in Louis' life to help him perform a 'miracle' in the eyes of his fellow workers. Dynamically, however, the associations led to another aspect of the father, not the incompetent man of Louis' descriptions, but the effective executive he had always respected and in whose footsteps he had selected his own line of work. At this moment, when Louis' performance at work had placed him on an equal footing or higher than his father, his guilt about being better than his father and the shame of having exposed his desire to be superior interfered. He could not accept the praise he had always craved. In his usual defensive style he called upon God, as a more neutral object of displacement, to be the agent that performed the miracle his coworkers claimed he had brought about. It would take a very long time in analysis before Louis could begin to accept some responsibility for the satisfaction of his wishes. Transferentially, the report of his great success had another angle. During this period he repeated with exaggerated words how much he had come to trust me and to respect my judgment, while consistently avoiding any feelings or desires toward me. At the same time he complained that I did not treat him the way he wanted to be treated by me. He wanted me to be more responsive to his wishes and more direct with him and protested that talking to me was like talking to a tree. I believe that his calling upon God as the

author of the 'miracle' also contributed to the modulation of his frustration with me. If God had performed it, there was no point in being disappointed with me for not celebrating his great success.

Louis continued to regress to analytic experiences closely related to his childhood predicaments. His enactments diminished to a certain extent and he became able to give voice to the intensity of the sexual wishes for his mother while vehemently denying any sexual wishes towards me. Yet frequently during the hour he experienced sensations in his bladder and penis and felt compelled to leave the office to go to the bathroom to urinate, even though he had urinated before entering. The more he talked about his sexual wishes the more frightened and frenetic he became. Louis was certain he was about to be terribly punished or that he would do something irreparable that would force him to end his life. He would be fired from his job, would lose his reputation and have to leave the city, or, finally, kill himself. During the exploration of how so many terrible things would befall him, Louis insisted that it was God's punishment because God was angry with him. In his despair in confronting the punishment he deemed unavoidable, Louis began to plead with God during the hour, saying: "God, help me, help me. Later that day, he went to church to appease God and obtain some help from Him.

Persistent analytic inquiry and careful interpretative work led Louis to recognize and describe one of his most persistent activities in childhood. Through his lamentations and demands, Louis frequently managed to forcefully place himself between his parents and play one against the other while feeling mistreated and abused by both. These manipulations brought him many concessions from both parents and frequent libidinal and narcissistic hidden satisfactions.

Louis seemed to experience in the analytic situation contradictory aspects of his personal God: one that would punish him severely and another that had to be placated to help him, something that in Louis' experience meant getting his own way. It was not hard to see that in the divine representation Louis had conflated different aspects of the maternal and paternal representation as well as the type of interaction he had with his parents. If Louis, feeling like a victim, pleaded to and cried enough in the presence of his God, he could win some concessions and feel that he had again become a good person in God's eyes. The enmeshment with the parental couple had found a replica in his dealings with the different facets of his God.

Several months later we traced some of the dynamic components of God's purported punishment of Louis. These dynamic components emerged shortly after my return from another vacation. He was very excited about my being back, but could not accept his own feelings. Instead he worried with gruesome imagery about an upcoming meeting with his boss. He feared he would be killed, castrated, have his 'balls' cut off. The boss would impose impossible demands upon him. He was completely blind to the connections between his fears and his sexual excitement with me. Finally, the dreaded meeting took place. The boss said explicitly that he was very satisfied with Louis' work, praised his ideas and his handling of his responsibilities. The following day he was 15 minutes late, something very unusual for him. Louis was also in a true frenzy. He sat on the couch, got up, walked around, screamed, complained, and cried that the cause of his suffering was that God had cursed him, to punish him. I gently helped him explore as much as I could in the middle of such storm. Finally, I said that I had the feeling that he was 'confessing' something to me without saying what it was. Suddenly he stopped crying, recovered his full voice and proceeded to confess a childhood sexual event: between the ages of six or seven, he and a girl of his same age had exposed their genitals to each other. He was reluctant to describe what he had seen and after much insistence on my part described "the little slit girls have. He began to giggle with pleasure and recall how around the age of five he and his older sister had played with each other's genitals in a pleasurable way. He walked out of the hour bouncing on his soles and with an air of satisfaction.

Louis did not inform himself that he was inviting me to engage in sexual play with him. The following day he was again 15 minutes late and extremely upset. After the previous hour he had gone to a professional meeting and felt "like a little boy sitting among men. He heard in his head that God was punishing him, left the meeting, went home and lay on his bed crying for over an hour. After

listening carefully to his saga, I invited him to explore the motives God might have had for punishing him. After much back and forth another 'confession' came up. God was punishing Louis because he was manipulative; he had always manipulated everybody, and he had even manipulated the married woman to have sex with him. He had to accept that God sees everything, and God could see that he was manipulative. A few sentences later Louis complained bitterly that his mother had persistently accused him of being manipulative, and without any further transition he began pleading with me: I had to do something to stop his suffering. I said that his suffering was internal to himself and that all I could do was to help him make sense of himself. He screamed that he was about to die and that I did not understand how imminent his death was. I said that there was nothing I could do but that I could not see how his death would come about. Louis insisted that I had to do something, at once. I said firmly that nobody could do anything about it because his *feeling* that he was dying had to do with him alone and not with any happening in real life. His only option was to figure himself out with my help. He replied with great anger that it was all *his mother's* fault because she had repeatedly said that God was going to punish him for being so manipulative. Louis insisted, once more, that I had to do something immediately. I told him that I could clearly see that the same manipulations he described in relation to his mother and parents were taking place with me now because he was asking me to do something he knew I couldn't do. In response to my interpretation, he giggled with pleasure and remembered a situation in which, when he was nine years old, one of his teachers caressed his hair, a caress that evoked pleasure in his genitals. I said that Louis wanted me to behave like his teacher, and that he presented himself as a person who was suffering great pain in order to obtain sexual caressing from women. Louis giggled again, declaring that what I had said was not exactly true, but that he had to acknowledge that he was trying to manipulate me. This conscious recognition on Louis' part opened up an analytic space for me to try to help him see that most of his suffering resulted from his convoluted way of trying to obtain sexual satisfaction from people who should not give it to him. Much to my surprise he did not argue the point.

These hours illustrate how Louis used a God linked to his maternal admonitions. Louis felt simultaneously threatened by God's impending punishments but also resorted to God for help, a help that involved manipulation of God in order to obtain the satisfaction of his transference sexual wishes. Yet the analytic process was helping Louis to make some significant advances. For the first time in analysis, Louis accepted some responsibility for his participation in the manipulation of people and recognized his manipulation of me.

Louis and I were entering into a new phase of his analysis. He said explicitly that he was feeling more comfortable with me, that he knew I meant well and that I intended to help him. Such assertions did not stop him from getting furious with me if he feared I could humiliate him or push him too hard. He became afraid that if he fully entered his moods and feelings he would fall into a big well and go into a terrible chaos. He would not be able to figure his way out of it. I could not help him either. After a short time, he returned to his lamentations about his many misfortunes, and how nobody cared about him, nobody respected him, he had no help, no mentor and that his parents had always told him that he was an impossible and demanding child. I said in a calm and descriptive voice that it seemed to me that he was always working very hard to control the chaos inside him but that regardless of his efforts some derivatives of it came up and brought him despair and a great fear that others would see it. He listened quietly, agreed with what I had said, but insisted that he was very, very afraid of going into that area of his mind. I said again in a reflective way that it was necessary to go there because his chaos kept interfering with his life. He cried and said that in that chaos he was totally, completely alone. Even God refused to attend to it. God had abandoned him to his chaos because God did not want to deal with it. I asked him to help me understand why God did not want to deal with his chaos. He started sobbing very hard and continued crying to the end of the hour. The following hour we returned to the topic. Louis was extremely upset and insisted that God was going to kill him or let him die if he attended to his chaos. Slowly we figured out that his chaos was a composite of intense sexual wishes and erotic desires, deep anger, revengeful wishes, and a tremendous desire for experiences that would make him feel important, significant, someone who deserves the attention and care of others. He wanted to be a person others would look up to and respect. I tried to help him talk about God's refusal to help him

with his chaos, to abandon him on account of it. After much analytic work, full of back-and-forth moves, and much crying and despair, he concluded that his parents had not been able to soothe him and that he was not able to soothe himself. Instead, the parents criticized him, blamed him, accused him but did not console him. They told him how difficult he was without attending to his wishes. We were able to see that in the family style of relating to him, Louis was not able to experience that his parents wanted to deal with the despondent child who had frequent temper tantrums. They either conceded to him what they should not have conceded or asked him to change. It was very interesting to observe that when Louis had an analytic enactment of his despondency or tantrums, he would immediately calm down if I gave him a direct and clear interpretation of his wishes while indicating that they could not be fulfilled in analysis. In fact, much of the analytic progress we were making came out of such moments because after my interpretation he became able to look at himself. It seemed clear that the God who did not want to deal with his chaos had at least a partial origin in the parental couple's inability to place limits on him or to want to know what he really wanted. It became obvious to me that my task, unlike Louis' God's purported behavior, consisted in not being deterred by his loud protests and guiding him respectfully and firmly to visit his 'chaos' until he made some sense of it. We were getting close to the core of his neurosis.

Louis was now making significant progress in his emotional and working life. He had found a woman he felt he truly loved and was considering marrying her. He was promoted and praised for his accomplishments at work. Yet, during the hours, he continued to lament about his endless misfortunes and insisted that he was only a child. I said to him that it was very interesting to notice that while he felt so puny he was obtaining all he had wanted: a woman for himself, the job he had desired, praise in the work place, and yet he was complaining as though he was not having any of his wishes fulfilled. He responded that he could not recognize himself in my description. That man was not Louis. It was another man, not him. He said that he was not able to complete his tasks and listed his many shortcomings. God, Louis insisted, was responsible for the way he was. I asked him what God had done for him to be the way he was. Louis insisted that God created him to be only a child, not a man. I asked what good reason God had to make him to be just a child. He said with great emphasis that it was to protect his father. It would kill his father if he were to succeed. He did not want to have Brutus' experience when he killed Julius Caesar and Caesar said before dying: "You too, my son. The Oedipal issues were absolutely obvious. In his ambivalent wish to have everything he wanted in real life while not informing himself about it, he resorted defensively to God to deny his own defense of appearing to himself as a child. Once more, God was used as Louis' accomplice in the satisfaction of his wishes. The only difference at this point in his analysis was that his manipulations and defensive maneuvers had been exposed regardless of his many efforts to avoid seeing himself as the man he was.

The announcement by his woman friend that she was going to visit her family in another state for two weeks brought Louis to extreme despair. He claimed he was going to die. He sat on the couch and prayed: "God, help me, God, help me. When he calmed down a bit, I invited him to make sense of his feelings. What emerged was that he was furious because he was not the most important person for his woman friend, or for his mother or his family. Louis acknowledged that maybe it had something to do with his sexual wishes, with wanting his mother all for himself. I said that he wished his mother should have no one but him. Louis reflected on this and agreed that it was true. He wanted his woman friend to have no one, absolutely no one, but him. She should stay with him all the time, adore him, and be totally involved with him, and then he would be all right, he would not die. I said that it seemed to me that he wanted to be adored as the only god. Louis immediately responded by saying that that was exactly what he wanted and that not getting it made him so furious that he wanted to kill his girlfriend in the same manner he had wanted to kill his mother. I commented that now it was their time to die, not for him to die. His dying and his killing them belonged together. He accepted the connection. In this hour, the God he prayed to appeared in counterpoint to the god Louis himself wanted to be: a being adored and worshiped by those who should love him. The family and his woman friend's failure to adore him the way he wished to be adored brought Louis to experience murderous narcissistic rage. In my opinion, this moment of Louis' analysis points to the narcissistic component of Louis' G/god representation, in which the

adored and the adoring are intermingled in mutual narcissistic involvement. I reflected privately that the God Louis prayed during this period of his analysis could be linked to an early mother who might have adored her first boy child.

In the middle of these storms, Lent was progressing toward Easter. Louis felt a need to examine his behavior as a religious person. He was attending religious services and trying to figure out where he stood before God. He lamented that not even God liked him. I asked him what motivated God not to like him. He confessed that he was not what he was supposed to be as a believer. Furthermore, God wanted him to worship Him alone, as the first commandment clearly states. Louis was aware that he had created other gods and idols for himself. He wanted success for himself, to be the first everywhere. God was angry with him for his not worshiping God alone but the mundane idols of success. I pointed out to Louis that his description of God sounded to me quite similar to his frequent description of his mother as wanting all the attention focused on herself. Louis responded that there were some similarities and some differences. The similarity was that both, God and his mother, wanted him to attend to them. The difference was that his mother wanted to take him over, deprive him of his freedom, but God was different. God wanted Louis' own good, had Louis himself in mind, and desired that he should behave well. God could be angry with him because he was so ambitious and worshipped the idol of success and the world in which he could achieve it. This was the first time in the analysis in which Louis referred to anybody, in this case God, as capable of seeing him as himself and desiring his own good. The appearance of this new aspect of God seemed to have some connection with his religious education and beliefs and the religious components of his superego. I pondered silently if this newly described aspect of his God, might also be linked to his perception of me as someone who could not be deterred from the efforts to help him to know himself.

During this period we worked very hard together to make sense of his problems and desires. It was remarkable to me that direct interpretation of Louis' intense sexual and erotic wishes calmed him down and elicited 'confessions' from him that moved the process along. One day, Louis 'confessed' that for as long as he could recall he had had a "tremendous wish to be stroked lovingly and to be recognized by "women that look very delicious wherever he found them, be it in school, in an elevator, or in any other place. The confession followed one of my many direct interpretations about his sexual and erotic desires for his mother.

Six months later, Louis announced his plan to marry his woman friend and informed me that he had been invited to give a significant presentation at a national meeting of his company. A few minutes later he was back complaining that there was something terribly wrong with him. I helped Louis to articulate what it was. He said: "I have never separated from my parents. I need to be part of the threesome. It is as though I have an elastic band around my chest and I can only walk a short distance away from them; I have to bounce back to protect my father and take care of my mother. I won't make it. God has cursed me and destined me to be a nobody, unmarried, and living at home with my parents. In a brief period of time, Louis' mood changed and he talked with pleasure and surprise: "It is amazing how I found my future wife. God hand-picked her and miraculously delivered her to my door. She was in her big city and through a series of coincidences she appeared in my neighborhood and we met. God selected her to be my companion. I said to Louis that his God was very confusing to me: on the one hand God had cursed him, on the other hand, God had hand-picked and miraculously delivered his future wife to him. On hearing my words Louis became very upset and reflectively said that he had to figure out the contradiction. Soon we were talking about his dual role in the family as the fumbling child and as his mother's 'little husband.' He replied that he was like two persons. I reminded him about an episode of conscious duplicity in his early teens in which he intentionally tricked his mother into staying with him while making himself appear as completely innocent. He acknowledged his duplicity and his ability to trick people into doing what he wanted without informing himself. Once more his belief that God had hand-picked his wife served a defensive purpose, a denial of his Oedipal victory, of his capacity to get himself a real woman through his own merits. Yet this God representation suggested a new elaboration from earlier representations. This God did not appear to be enmeshed in the threesome but had cast a

broad net across the USA to find a wife for Louis. Furthermore, this God had selected a person suitable for him and wanted him to leave his parents behind and marry her. Once more, I wondered in my own mind if such evolution of the God representation might have included our work together and my efforts to help him to have a life of his own and to be a man in his own right.

The following Easter Louis reflected about his situation with God. He reflected that it was sinful not to be who you are and how he lived his life for the eyes of others. Such an attitude was almost a religion for him. I commented that he felt guilty because he was betraying God's purpose a phrase he had used earlier-- for his life. He responded emphatically: "It is very, very true. I get very upset. I should do my work well. It is sinful to enter the rat race, to be so competitive . . . I am ashamed about it . . . I am frightened to be myself, just myself. I am afraid to be a failure. For that I apologize to God. I commented: "If you are faithful to God and allow yourself be just yourself, you are afraid that people will not be interested in you. This exchange illustrates how far Louis had moved from his terror of the unapproachable chaos within him to his awareness that his only choice was to let himself be himself, free of his manipulations, his endless seductiveness, and his compensatory competitiveness. The newly presented God representation seemed to have evolved together with his awareness of his need to be himself. Now, he felt that God wanted him to be himself and that it was his religious duty to be himself. This God stood for the opposite of his corrupt superego. God aligned with the superego demands of honesty, integrity, and attention to the best aspects of Louis' own self. This God and his more mature superego seemed to belong together.

The analysis was coming to an end. We had the predictable dramatic storms about each of the issues confronting him: separating from me, getting married soon after the end of analysis, and the impact of his becoming a married man like his father.

I have described as accurately as I am able to some of the significant moments in which Louis brought up God and God's actions toward him as explanations of the predicaments he was exploring in analysis. God appeared in these hours as another person deeply enmeshed in Louis' family relations as well as in his transferential wishes.

The report of a patient's analysis frequently does not do justice to the more mature and integrated aspects of the patient's life. The hours I have described above present Louis in his most regressed moments. They permitted Louis and me to discover the genetic, dynamic, conflictual, and defensive sources of his many predicaments as well as the convolutions of his *unconscious* and conscious God representation(s) and its variegated psychic functions. Yet he was more of a moral and religious person than these analytic hours revealed. He was a committed religious believer who responsibly honored his professional, moral, and religious obligations. The hours I have presented reveal the unconscious derivatives that become verbalized during moments of analytic regression. Such moments are indispensable to allow the patient and the analyst to trace the genetic, dynamic, conflictual, and defensive functions of the patient's communications to the analyst. In this paper I have selected those regressed moments that brought out significant aspects of his *unconscious* God representation to illustrate the dynamic function Louis' *personal God* served, not only during the analytic process but also in other moments of his psychic life.

The case aims at illustrating that the analyst must keep every component of his/her analytic stance and technique when the patient brings to the hour his dealings with the divinity. It is the analyst's task to remain completely committed to understanding the dynamic and transferential motives for God's appearance at a particular analytic moment. The persistent examination of the component elements of the God representation are indispensable for the working through of the fixation to parental figures as well as beliefs and convictions about God that were formed during childhood at the service of psychic compensation or defense. To carry out this task the analyst must follow unswervingly the patient's associations to facilitate the full articulation in conscious words of the analysand's idiosyncratic and, at times, bizarre beliefs about God's actions and feelings. These may include God's rage, love, neglect, sexuality, favoritism, curses, sadism, or any other feeling and intention attributed to God. All of them must be taken with utmost seriousness. It is only in this

complete analytic freedom that the analysand can fully feel the complexities of his relation with his personal God and come to understand the *psychic* function that a particular representation of God serves in the context of the analysand's conflicts and his/her analytic efforts to find a resolution of dynamically motivated dilemmas. The comprehensive analytic examination of an analysand's God representation may bring about an unintended effect. The patient may come to see how his/her relationship with a God the patient believes exists has been burdened by his/her use of it for the fulfillment of wishes or as a defense against them. In the end, the analysand may discover a way of believing in his/her own personal God, whose representation has been purified of some of its old psychological burdens.

Technically, the analyst can only fully analyze the patient's formation and uses of his/her God representation if s/he abstains from making any pronouncement of his/her own about God or religion. Such pronouncements are a completely unnecessary self-disclosure and invariably disrupt the working through of the patient's personal representation of God and personal belief, and dynamic conflicts. An inevitable consequence of any pronouncement about God on the analyst's part is that it conveys to the patient that the analyst knows God better than the patient and expects that the analysand will submit to the authority of the analyst on such a matter. Such disclosure goes against the aim of the analytic treatment, which is to help the patient find maximal autonomy and internal freedom in his/her own right. It is not the responsibility of the analyst to help the patient find the "true" God and religion. His responsibility is to help the patient with his personal conflicts and, as a spontaneous result of the analytic process, discover his/her *personal God* as s/he has conceived of it in the context of his/her past life history and present circumstances.

Conclusion

All patients are potentially religious. A psychoanalytic therapist must remain attentive to the moments when God and religion appear in treatment, as a natural manifestation of significant developmental and dynamic issues and also as defensive moves against forbidden wishes or at the service of fulfillment of desire. When religion and God emerge during an analytic hour they are never uncomplicated issues. In its representational components the God that appears in the hour brings many aspects of the patient's genetic developmental history together with a regressive potential to capture earlier moments of his/her psychic formation and the concomitant conflicts and defenses against them. God can be used as a defense against difficult transference issues. The origin of the God representation in affective interactions with the parents bestows on God the possibility of being used as an object for displacement and externalization. Besides, in patients who are believers, God is an object who has a long *conscious* history in the life of the individual; consequently, it is readily available to be used defensively, as Louis' case illustrates, in regressed transference moments. God can also be *unconsciously* called upon to enforce the patient's superego stance that is contrary to free association, claiming that certain things are not to be said, not even in analysis, thus making God responsible for avoiding painful associations.

The analytic exploration of the God representation and its entanglement with the sense of self, may bring about--as happened with Louis--the possibility for the patient of accepting his/her own self, including the conflicts, desires, and frustrations that contributed to the patient's personality formation. At the end of his treatment, Louis could for the first time in his life establish a *conscious* positive connection between being himself and being with his God.

Psychoanalysts must also remember that our technique can only examine the sources and motives of God's appearance in analysis. The religious life of the patient in actual life is broader than our explorations and reaches beyond what we are able to examine with our analytic method.

In concluding, I want to make it explicitly clear that the analyst must exercise profound respect and tact in exploring religious feelings and convictions. It is humiliating for a believer to have to admit to himself that s/he has a sexualized relationship with God, as was the case with Louis. The main task of the therapist is to facilitate the patient's progressive acceptance of his/her psychic life as the

necessary, even if difficult and painful, process of accepting the person the analysand is and the God s/he believes in or has chosen to reject.

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Note

¹ This episode has been published earlier (Rizzuto, 1996). It appears here with some modifications to suit the present article.

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