

Functional Religion as a Social Defence Mechanism

By
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A paper delivered to the Religious Research Group of the Social Research Association on 18th June 1980. It is an attempt at a comprehensive statement of a post-Kleinian, primal understanding of anxiety defences and their functioning in social systems, with particular reference to the work of Bruce Reed and the functioning of religious systems as agencies of social control. The second part of the paper (pages 13 ff.) examines some of the current processes of the breakdown of social defences and looks positively at the choices facing us between holistic integration or increasingly violent oppression and repression.

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Sociology and Social Psychology are uneasy bedfellows. It is therefore one of the strengths and values of the Social Research Association that both its articles of foundation and its current membership cover both disciplines. The gap is, however, still very much in existence and very heavily defended, thus 'Tailgunner Parkinson' in the current issue of *New Society* fires a naively destructive spray of grapeshot across the chasm as he indicts the "falsely fertile fields of infantile development" for providing "the usual job-lot explanation of human hostility". He then parodies the position in a couple of sentences, "The extended infancy of human beings inevitably makes for dependency and the restriction of impulse. Much cruelty is of a 'transference' nature, based on revenge for early imagined or real humiliations". Such high handed writing off of three-quarters of a century of clinical research and theoretical formulation is symptomatic of the defensive reaction against the emergence of innovative perceptions which challenge the traditional world view, whether they originate from a Socrates or a Copernicus, a Darwin or a Freud.

In similar vein I quote a recent letter from a sociologist, "The trouble with psychologists is that they are so busy looking for hidden meanings behind everything that they become more and more inward looking until they end up in a worse state than their clients.' This kind of generalised categorisation of all psychologists as a sub-set of the group 'psychotic' makes serious inter- disciplinary dialogue somewhat difficult.

Clearly the inter-disciplinary boundary carries common collusion suppression of unconscious material. It is as difficult for a sociologist to come to terms with the processes described in social psychology as it is for an individual to become aware of his or her own unconscious. It has been my experience that such defences are nowhere more heavily employed than at the frontiers between the sociology and social psychology of religion. The reasons for this are not difficult to understand, since this particular boundary carries the primary task of the preservation of the social value system from analysis and possible disruption. If the insights of modern psychoanalysis, as applied to social systems, could be effectively brought to bear on religious institutions of our own society, then we face the terror that the lid might indeed come off Pandora's box, or in theological terms, all hell might be let loose.

It is therefore with mixed feelings that I venture into this fraught frontier, recognising the threats posed, and the anxieties raised by the material, both at individual and social levels, yet at the same time acutely aware of the importance of the material in its bearing on human development and the management of change in a period of mounting stress at every level of the world community.

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As a starting point I would like to draw your attention to the two propositions put forward by Isabel Menzies at the conclusion of her study of 'The Functioning of Social Systems as a Defence Against Anxiety' (Tavistock 1970).

Proposition 1

That the success and viability of a social institution are intimately connected with the techniques it uses to contain anxiety.

Proposition 2

That understanding of this aspect of the functioning of a social institution is an important diagnostic and therapeutic tool in facilitating social change.

Isabel Menzies was, of course, writing from the position of a consultant seeking to enable functional change in a given institution. My perspective is somewhat different as I am seeking to understand the process of increasingly dysfunctional behaviour in institutions and society under conditions of increasingly rapid environmental change, (while environment includes technology, culture, resources, population, pollution, energy). With reference to the role of religion in society, these propositions need to be widened in their application and could possibly be re-worded as follows:

Proposition 1

That the health and adaptability of society are intimately connected with the techniques it uses to contain anxiety.

Proposition 2

That an understanding of this aspect of social process is an important diagnostic and therapeutic tool in enhancing social health and increasing the adaptability of society.

I suggest that we are dealing with a set of parallel mechanisms or process mirrors at each level of social aggregation from the intra-personal world of the individual, through the group to the institution, to the local community, to the national entity, right up to global construct. The anxiety experienced within any of these given boundaries arises from two sources. **Firstly**, it may be a response to actual threats from the real environment transmitted across the boundary and requiring some intra-boundary adjustment in order to sustain the equilibrium of the boundary and so to facilitate the survival of the institution or group concerned. **Secondly**, anxiety may arise in response to phantasies projected onto the external world from within the boundary. Such material interferes with the perception of reality, is re-introjected alongside the data from that reality, and provides a phantasy data-base upon which the relationship to environmental reality is based. In so far as there is a mismatch between phantasy and reality just so far is the engagement across the boundary dominated by phantasy social relationship, which may become dysfunctional and, in acute cases, psychotic.

The process of reality-testing has to do with the disentangling of these two sources of perceived environmental data. In so far as the system utilises mechanisms which suppress anxiety as such, just so far is reality orientation itself deadened, and the relationship between the system and its environment filters out those anxiety generating signals which provide the

essential warning mechanisms vital if institutional adaptation to environmental conditions is to be maximised. In periods of rapid change and institutional threat such reality-oriented transactions with the environment must be increasingly sharp, accurate and motivationally effective. Unfortunately, the greater the threats from the perceived environment, the more heavily do human institutions utilise anxiety defences to suppress the reaction and the less functionally adaptive the human institution becomes.

I press on then to make the distinction between reality-orientation and anxiety defence as follows:

Reality orientation treats data as primary and perceives anxiety as an important indicator of the work agenda.

Anxiety defences on the other hand perceive anxiety as the data and operate to suppress the anxiety, irrespective of the relevance to the system of its initial cause.

In other words, anxiety defence mechanisms are unable to differentiate between those anxieties generated by re-introjected projection of phantasy and anxieties generated by primary data emanating from the environmental reality.

An important implication of this is that the achievement of social change, i.e. response to reality-oriented data input, requires the toleration of appropriate anxieties. This in turn demands the temporary lowering of the anxiety defence system, which in turn exposes the institution to the possibility of being overwhelmed by psychotic anxiety during the process of change. It is in this collusion loop that resistance to fundamental change, even at the expense of increasingly dysfunctional levels of behaviour, originates and gains its power. Thus Isabel Menzies notes that,

"Bion (1955) and Jaques (1955) stress the importance of understanding these phenomena and relate difficulties in achieving social change to difficulties in tolerating the anxieties that are released as social defences are restructured. This appears closely connected with the experience of many people, including social scientists, who have tried to initiate or facilitate social change. Recommendations or plans for change that seem highly appropriate from a rational point of view are ignored or do not work in practice. One difficulty seems to be that they do not sufficiently take into account the common anxieties and the social defences in the institution concerned, nor provide for the therapeutic handling of the situation as changes takes place."

Elliott Jaques in his paper on "The Dynamics of Social Structure", suggests that "one of the primary cohesive elements binding individuals into institutionalized human association is that of defence against psychotic anxiety". This implies that changes in such structures of human institutionalisation necessitate restructuring of the anxiety defences of which they are a reification. In that very process the anxiety against which those defences are employed spills over in the absence of effective and secure social controls. So, in the conclusion of the same article, he writes,

"Changes in social relationships and procedures call for a restructuring of relationships at the phantasy level with a consequent demand upon individuals to accept and tolerate changes in their existing pattern of defences against psychotic anxiety. Effective social change is likely to require analysis of the common anxieties and unconscious collusions underlying the social defences which determine the phantasy social relationships."

Under conditions of stable or steady-state equilibrium between the human institution and its environment, the social defences against anxiety are reified and treated as part of the eternal structure of the known world. In other words, they are unconsciously operated. As the rate of change increases, both environmentally and internally, social defences against anxiety play a more and more determinative role in both the selectivity of data and the moulding of social process in response to boundary transaction. The exponential rate of change experienced since the onset of the industrial revolution has generated precisely this set of conditions. In addition we are now entering rapidation of a hyper-exponential nature, effectively triggered by the cybernetic revolution and exacerbated by the population explosion within the limited resources of Mother Earth.

I therefore make the hypothesis that racial survival and the maintenance of social health require the analysis of common human defences against anxiety, the management of psychotic anxiety released during the process of analysis, together with the disentangling of anxiety generated by the phantasy life of humanity from that appropriate anxiety generated by man's engagement with his real environment.

It is in that context that I offer a working **definition of the task of religion** as follows:

Religion is the reification in construct, symbol, ritual and institution, of the social anxiety defence system. The process of religion maintains and strengthens that defence system, its taboo structures inhibit examination of the mechanisms employed and therefore effectively preserve the defence system from modification. However functionally effective religion may therefore be in the suppression of psychotic anxiety, it is effectively dysfunctional in enabling man to relate with the realities of his environment.

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Functioning and Origin of Defences against Anxiety

We all use many ways of controlling anxiety, like day-dreaming, going to sleep, getting the wrong end of the stick, poking fun, scapegoating, getting depressed, talking too much, using long words and technical jargon, writing papers on psychology, etc. One of the best treatments of the underlying mechanisms is that of Melanie Klein, which while formulated in the early 1950s is still formative in the contemporary application of psychoanalysis to social systems. The framework which I now wish to introduce is a development of Klein's description of the anxiety-defence mechanisms together with a major reconstruction of their origin.

Over the last three- quarters of a century psychoanalysis has steadily pressed back the frontiers of our understanding of normal, unconscious processes. The various analytic schools, however, differ considerably in the point which they take as the origin, or starting place, of psychological life. In terms of the development of anxiety defences, therefore, the

point at which the individual is perceived as first experiencing anxiety is taken as the origin of the defensive construct. Thus, for Freud, the Oedipal context of father, mother and infant provides the origin of threat giving rise to castration anxiety, specifically in relation to the father. D.W. Winnicott pressed the frontier further back seeing failure of the 'holding environment' as generating initial anxiety. While in certain extreme cases this might relate to traumatic birth, it was normally experienced in the gradual withdrawal of the nursing relationship between mother and infant.

Melanie Klein herself perceived life as beginning at the breast. This constitutes the 'primal object' in her terminology, in relationship to which the infant develops the primitive or 'paranoid-schizoid' defences against anxiety which then become basic for all subsequent levels of development and underlie, at their deepest point, normal, adult, individual and social anxiety-handling processes. The mechanisms which she identified were those of introjection and projection, idealisation, splitting and denial (of which more anon). In identifying the cause or source of the anxiety against which these defences were first brought into play, however, Melanie Klein drew a blank, falling back to a secondary theme of Freudian analysis, that of the instinctive or innate nature of mutually opposing drives in the human psyche, namely the life instinct and the death instinct. Primal anxiety was seen to have arisen because of the threat to the life instinct engendered by the death instinct, primitive defences against this anxiety were therefore called into play and projected by the neonate onto the primal object in the nursing relationship.

Whether you examine the work of Freud or Jung, Heimann or Klein you find the words 'instinctive', 'innate', 'atavistic', 'archetypal', 'genetic', used to describe those phenomena for which the analyst can give no causal explanation. In every system that which is innate or instinctive is perceived as an unalterable datum of the human psyche, that which the normal processes of analysis and abreaction are unable to modify, since the origin of paranoid-schizoid defences is seen to lie within the instinctive area. Those institutions whose social defences are dominated by the primitive psychic defence mechanisms are experienced as virtually impervious to attempts at social change, just as in individual psychoanalytic therapy the most difficult work is with patients whose defences are mainly of this kind, or in phases of the analysis within which paranoid-schizoid defences predominate. Elliott Jaques also deduces from the existence of such psychotic anxiety defence mechanisms in social systems the reason 'Why social change is so difficult to achieve and why so many social problems are so intractable'.

Fortunately, some have not been satisfied with this fatalistic approach and have pressed the frontiers of understanding of the origin of primal threat and thus of primitive anxiety defences back into the experience of birth itself (thus Otto Rank, Stanislav Grof, Arthur Janov, et al. Currently, frontiers of psychoanalytic understanding are being pressed even further back, deep into the intrauterine phase of life (see the work of Dr. P.M. Ploye at the Cassel Hospital, and current research of Dr. Frank Lake of the Clinical Theology Association). Application of this new material to group, institutional and social levels of behaviour is only just beginning, but the indications are that the understanding of human behaviour in primal terms provides an extremely powerful tool for social process analysis and intervention. It offers the possibility of enabling functional change in complex social systems operating with regressed paranoid-schizoid defences against anxiety, just as primal therapy is beginning to break through the impasse encountered by classical psychoanalysis in the

treatment of psychotic disorders, as well as in enabling developmental and maturational processes in 'normal' people.

Although I am obviously indebted to the work of many others, the following tentative reconstruction of the origin and functioning of anxiety defences within the overall context of a unified field of human behaviour is, I think, original. The developmental stages are not necessarily in chronological order.

I - ORIGIN

Our understanding of the fundamental continuity of matter/energy now indicates that placing the origin of life at any point in the space time continuum is arbitrary. Life does not start at birth, but carries across that boundary a history of formative experience overlaying a genetic configuration, which, as would appear from current studies of identical twins separated from each other soon after birth, has a major and detailed formative impact on the whole of the rest of life. If the origin is taken at some arbitrary point within the period of gestation, there is similarly an open boundary to the organism, and a genetic and experiential trace carried across that boundary. Even if the origin of the individual is taken as at the point of fertilisation of the ovum, where it might be presumed that the information stored in the single cell would be purely genetic, it is now being argued that the history of gamete formation, search and fusion, let alone the struggle for survival represented by implantation in the uterus, may leave massive and significant experiential traces which affect subsequent development and history of the foetus. Our understanding of the way information is stored within the massive complexity of a single human cell is still very hazy, but the programming capacity of such 'carbon modules' makes the sophistication of the most modern silicon chip appear Heath-Robinson in the extreme.

I submit that the point of origin of individual life which makes for a most consistent field of understanding of the process of human development lies precisely at the moment of fertilisation. Up to that point it can be argued the gametes were either part of the parental organisms, or if separated, had no capacity for sustained independent life. From that point on the potential for the development of a new individual is present and the struggle for life is on.

II - INTROJECTION AND PROJECTION

From its origin and conception and throughout its life a human organism exists in 'a state of dynamic dysequilibrium with its environment'. This is generated by the introjection, or taking in, from the environment of substances and effects, a processing of that which is taken in, in such a way that the life of the organism is sustained and developed, followed by an excretion, or projection, back into the environment of unneeded materials and effects. Increased complexification and organisation of the organism is affected by degradation of environmental material.

As the foetus develops this process becomes more sophisticated, with placental management of the symbiotic transaction between foetus and mother. For every foetus which survives, the relationship is viable, though never ideal. The umbilical support system introjects oxygen and food from the mother's blood supply and excretes carbon dioxide and waste product back

across the boundary. It is also susceptible to toxic conditions in the mother (vid. the current research on nicotine levels etc.). It is also exposed to the full hormonal saga which lies beneath the mother's emotional reactions during gestation. If the mother is shocked, the adrenaline pushes the foetus also into shock. If the mother is under stress, the foetus is stressed. If the mother is peaceful and contented, the foetus will mirror the equivalent hormonal balance. Placental dependency therefore may in itself and at any time during pregnancy provide not only the conditions for survival but also threats to that survival. Eden is not perhaps an ideal paradise, for the snake also dwells within.

As gestation progresses and foetal sensory perception begins to develop, the introjection/projection transaction with the environment begins to become experiential in ways that are beyond the merely chemical. The archetypal watery world in which the foetus lives and moves and has its being is penetrated by sound (obviously metaphysical in the sense that it comes from beyond the boundaries of the known world!), heartbeats, digestive rumblings, noises, voices, vibrations, pressures, sensory perceptions, feeling, body-touch all over. There is no sight, so the darkness moves on the face of the waters, but there may be taste associated with the amniotic fluid with its traces of foetal excretion. So the process of introjection and projection is established by which that which is outside the boundary of the organism is taken in, processed and pushed back out again, only to be added to the environment from which the input is derived. These early symbiotic relationships form the basis of environmental transactions of the psycho-biological entity of human being.

III - DIFFERENTIATION

As foetal consciousness slowly rises from the sea of unknowing, the primal relationship is between the inside and the outside, i.e. the skin boundary, across which information is exchanged through the developing sensor nervous system. Boundaries are explored as the motor nerves develop and muscular movement becomes more powerful. The primal relationship between 'me' and 'not me' is not, I submit, as in the Kleinian construct, a relationship to a primal object (the breast) but to a primal environment, namely the inside of the womb. This is the archetypal home or haven from which every human being has emerged in one way or another.

IV - IDEALISATION

The life drive of the foetus is unified. The environment is experienced in ambivalence, as in part supporting that life drive and in part threatening it. In so far as the threatening aspects of the symbiotic relationship are experienced as putting the foetus significantly at risk, just so far is the environment experienced as persecutory, and in reaction to which the foetus experiences anxiety or fear for life. I submit therefore that primal angst emerges not out of the fear of the father's castrating intent, nor from terror of the failure of the holding arms of the mother, nor from the loss and lack of satisfaction experienced in relation to the breast, nor from the conflict between opposing instincts, nor even in the traumatic onset and process of parturition. Fundamental threats to being are initially experienced in the intrauterine phase and it is here that the early experiences of anxiety and the corresponding defence patterns are laid down in trace form, however faintly.

The earliest mechanisms for dealing with threat is that of projection. The offending substance is pushed back out across the boundary of the organism. As the brain and sensory systems develop, systemic threat is experienced informationally, and the reaction of projection is transformed into aggressive impulse by which the inherent life drive of the organism seeks to defend itself. In so far as the initial aggressive impulse fails to deal with the threat, the organism experiences the terror of annihilation with mounting levels of adrenal release, rising pulse rate, spasmodic convulsive movements and other signs of distress. If, at any stage, the stress levels rise beyond that which can be tolerated by the foetal mind, primitive splitting mechanisms are brought into play, by which the mind dissociates from the source of primal pain. Splitting is itself the end of a process of idealisation at which we must now look a little more closely.

In so far as the environment is perceived as life-supportive and benign, all is well, but as that same environment is also experienced as providing life-threat it is perceived as persecutory. Idealisation is the process by which the benign data is separated from the malign and compartmentalised or split off. In so far as stress levels rise, so the differentiation into good and bad of the primal environment proceeds. The primal environment is perceived as idealised good or idealised bad. It oscillates between heaven and hell, with a great gulf fixed between the two experiences and no identification made of the integration across the primal split in terms of a real environment which is both life supportive and persecutory. The more threatened the foetus becomes the stronger the idealisation process, in the attempt to suppress the threatened annihilation, manage the anxiety and perpetuate the experience of good primal environment, if not in fact then in phantasy.

Coincident with the phase of idealisation or splitting of the environment goes the process of idealisation and splitting of the experienced self, mirrored across the transactional boundary with the environment. Just as the real environment is dissociated into idealised good and bad parts, so equally and oppositely the real integrated self is also subjected to splitting into idealised good and bad parts. In this process lies the origin of future guilt, depression and paranoid-schizoid defence. It is in this primal splitting that the innate life instinct and death instinct of the Freudian duality are forged.

V - DENIAL

As has already been hinted, if the persecutory experience exposes the foetus to sufficiently high levels of stress the foetal mind splits off from the bad experience which, if sufficiently intense, is subject to the setting of a 'no recall flag' within the foetal memory bank. The higher the level of impingement and distress experienced, the more intense is the repressed imprint and the more intensely repressed the content becomes. In this is the source of the splitting off of the unconscious from the conscious mind. Persecutory traces are addressed to that area of memory which has suppressed recall patterns, tolerable experiential traces are stored with easier recall. The strength of primal trauma determines the intensity of the primitive mechanisms of splitting and denial, effectively determining later accessibility of unconscious content, and tying up larger or small amounts of mental energy (libido) within the unconscious field.

The process of denial effectively weeds out the bad experience from consciousness, so relieving the anxieties generated by the perceived threat to the survival of the organism. If

environmental stressing increases yet further, higher levels of splitting and denial are brought into play involving the dissociation of psyche and soma, the suppression of body inputs to the mind, a process which underlies the schizoid position of the person who lives in his head and is out of touch with his feelings. Still more intense stress may lead to a disintegration of the psyche itself into disparate parts with more or less closed boundaries between the different personae. In intensely traumatic instances such shattering of the primal psyche lays the foundation of psychosis in later life. It was Jung's genius of enabling psychotics to live with this disintegrated set of internal personae, a reflection of his own struggle to cope with internal disintegration, that made his therapy so sought after by those whose primitive defences were breaking down, revealing psychotic structures in mid-life.

VI - COMPENSATION

Little has been said as yet about the effect of parturition, but it should already be clear that the constriction experienced in the closing weeks of gestation, the process of birth itself, together with the post-parturitional history, provide a more or less intensive impingement or threat to the foetus. This results in the heightening and application of those primitive defences against anxiety which are then encountered as innate at the origin of the Kleinian field, in relationship to the primal object of the mother's breast.

In clinical terms, the birth experience is traumatic only if it exposes the babe to more than usual levels of stress (see my treatment of significance of birth trauma in my critique of D.W. Winnicott). This reflects the clinical psychiatrist's definition of trauma in terms of abnormal stress leading to abnormal behaviour. In distinction my hypothesis is that normal birth is essentially traumatic and is archetypal in laying down the normal defences against anxiety operative in all human beings, and at all levels of social interaction. This common unconscious primal trace lays the foundations of paranoid-schizoid defences against anxiety, fundamental to individual and social behaviour. In so far as such mechanisms are perceived as innate and unalterable and the behaviour patterns therefore inherited rather than learnt, just so far are the dysfunctional social interactions perceived as intractable and normal. This myth represents a common collusion system, preserving the primal mechanisms of denial and repression, and so suppressing the threatening, persecutory, angst-generating experience which those defences contain.

The persecutory impingement of birth trauma effectively splits off the foetal unconscious trace from future recall. However, the material, in common with other such areas of traumatically repressed experience, exercises a dominant influence upon the content and conduct of life. The sensations of falling, crushing, annihilation, disintegration, strangulation, asphyxiation, choking, together with intolerable anxieties of dread, despair and, supremely, of loss, generate the symbol world of art, religion, dreams, architecture, science fiction movies, let alone the everyday experiences of normal living in complex political societies.

However intense or easy birth may have been, it marked the end of a world and a new beginning. In so far as that primal world was idealised it was Paradise Lost. The concomitant hell was denied, repressed, projected, to emerge split off and in some ways antithetical to the ideal. This timeless eternity of bliss held in a supportive environment is the archetype of heaven. Foetal unconscious awareness of a lost world, propels man in a compensatory search for that whose loss cannot be acknowledged without re-entry to the

primal trauma itself. Once the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has been introjected, leading to the splitting of the data field into idealised forms, there can be no re-entry to savour the delights of dependency on the tree of life.

In later life the function of primitive defences against anxiety is precisely that of the maintenance of the repressive system associated with primal trauma. The defences are laid down in order to contain the overwhelming experience of psychotic anxiety generated in response to primal impingement. Existentially, the cosmos convulsed in persecutory aggression and threatened the annihilation of the neonate. In later life all boundary transactions, relationships, changes, learning, and other stimuli have the potential to resonate with this unconscious material., and it is in defence against such primal recall that the primitive anxiety defences exercise such a massively dysfunctional effect on the human organism's transactions with its environment.

Defence Maintenance

The process of individual development is the story of the erection, strengthening and maintenance of the defences against re-emergence of repressed psychotic anxiety. If the defences begin to give way either because they are insufficiently strong in themselves, or because environmental impingement builds to the point at which its resonance with primal angst can no longer be contained by the given level of defences, then 'breakdown' sets in. For any person or institution whose anxiety defence system is already near the limits of its repressive capacity, any experience of serious change evokes acute anxiety and hostility. Describing such a reaction in a teaching hospital, Isabel Menzies writes, "The people concerned felt very threatened, the threat being of nothing less than social chaos and individual breakdown. To give up known ways of behaviour and embark on the unknown were felt to be intolerable". Such reactions have nothing to do with the actual environmental changes and threats experienced, but reflect awareness of impending abreaction of primal impingement and trauma if the defences are further undermined. I will say more about the effects of sustaining the primitive social defences against anxiety in due course. At the moment, suffice it to say that if intelligence is the capacity of an organism to adapt functionally to changes in its environment, then the effect of unresolved primal stress, (contained by primitive defence mechanisms and reverberating with every element of loss, learning and change), leads to a massive suppression of the potential intelligence and adaptability of homo sapiens.

The process by which the defences are maintained is fairly clear. The lost, internalised, and idealised, good primal environment is projected onto the experienced world of the here and now. The view of reality is moulded and structured to conform to this idealised good primal environment. In so far as the experienced environment is life-supportive it provides objects, persons, constructs, and symbols onto which the unconscious material is mapped. The other side of the coin, the lost, idealised, bad primal environment, denied and repressed into foetal unconscious, also emerges in the transference onto the boundaries of the experienced here and now. The *Weltanschauung* is therefore split into good and bad, heaven and hell, divinity and demon, light and darkness. The battle between good and evil is projected individually and socially up to cosmic levels. Here it can be safely worked through since it is ultimately distanced from its primal, intrapersonal origin. Within the displacement construct, good

overwhelms and evicts bad, be it in the myth and ritual of Rama, the theology of Incarnation and Atonement, the process of a Western, or the symbolism of science fiction.

With a good primal environment in the ascendance and the bad primal environment effectively denied, the construct can then be re-introjected, reifying the dominance of the good primal environment, and suppressing awareness of its bad counterpart. Existentially this is experienced as cleansing, forgiveness, integration, wholeness, in which the bad parts of the self are removed and the good parts strengthened and affirmed.

Multiple parallel reinforcement of this process occurs during nursing, in the family group, through education and social interaction. If the socialisation process is ineffective because of the failure of any given element to reinforce the defence system, then the person or group concerned is deemed to be deviant, a weak point in the social defences, and appropriate controls are brought to bear, either in terms of religious manipulation, remedial education, legislation backed by police power, or psychological 'treatment'. These efforts at defence reinforcement are generally effective. In so far as they fail, the person or group concerned has to be contained in such a way as to minimise the effective reverberation of primal terror for the rest of the community.

The main desired effect of the process of defence maintenance is the containment and reduction to within tolerable levels of primitive psychotic anxiety. In so far as the defence maintenance process is adequate, individuals, families, groups, institutions and society itself are able to function in a more or less coherent way, in a condition of normal psychosis. Social defence maintenance systems are institutionalised and given the task of preserving common social defences against common primal anxiety. These function in the form of feedback loops, returning to within tolerable limits of the norm those persons, groups and segments of society which deviate too far from the normal position. This collusive, system-preservative function, is exercised indiscriminately toward any deviant, whether the deviation be that of psychotic, disturbed, anti-social behaviour, the acting out of primal phantasies of paranoia, retaliation and persecution, or whether the deviant be on the other side of the distribution curve, with high levels of personal integration, awareness of the primal trace, openness to unconscious content and therefore the ability to 'see through' the common social defences. Either extreme threatens social norms with exposure to primal chaos. It is my thesis that the function of religion in society is precisely that of the validation of normal social defences against anxiety. As such, religion in its construct (symbolic and verbal), and ritual, represents, in institutional form, the sustaining keystone of the social psychosis.

Functional Religion as a Defence Maintenance System

In his recent book entitled "The Dynamics of Religion", Bruce Reed describes religious behaviour in terms of an 'oscillation process'. The cycle is divided into four elements, for which he uses the terms, intra-dependence, regression, extra-dependence, transformation. A person or group engaged in work activity within secular society is deemed to be intra-dependent. In other words the primal object is internalised and the anxiety and dependence-carrying functions associated with the primal object are internal, unconscious and covert. As the religious cycle is entered, the subject moves from the position of intra-dependence, through a process of regression by which the internalised primal object is externalised and attached to given symbols, construct, rituals, surroundings, persons, of the religious medium. In this stage the externalised primal object is celebrated, adored, worshipped, clarified as

wholly good, in relation to which the suppliant perceives the self as bad and in need of precisely those qualities perceived to be vested in the externalised, primal object. This phase of the process is described as extra-dependency. The transformation stage completes the cycle and during this part, dependency is withdrawn from the externalised, projected, primal object, which is in turn re-introjected, providing the self with an internalised, good, primal object, with its concomitant bad other half more effectively denied and projected, than was the case at the beginning of the cycle. The worshipper thus emerges into the initial position of intra-dependency better defended from the ambivalence and anxieties arising from awareness of the bad parts of the self and their concomitant environmental mirror.

The author further makes the distinction between process and movement, where process refers to the oscillatory cycle of behaviour, and movement sums up the construct in words and symbols used to provide meaning for the process (those wishing to follow this material further are referred to Chapter 4, pages 70 ff. of *The Dynamics of Religion*, Bruce Reed, DLT, 1978).

Clearly there are important links between this description of religion in process and our previous treatment of systems of defence maintenance. The underlying mechanisms in Bruce Reed's work are blurred because of his dependence for an interpretative framework on the work of W.R. Bion who is in turn dependent upon Melanie Klein. I submit that the concept of 'primal object' now needs expanding and referring particularly to primal environment. Secondly, reference to the mechanisms of introjection and projection with respect to the primal object or environment would help to clarify the description of the phases of regression and transformation within the oscillation cycle. Thirdly, the mechanism of idealisation leads us to see the primal environment as split into an idealised good and a concomitant, idealised bad form, one of which is held, albeit symbolically, open to consciousness, the other denied and held unconscious. Once this is understood the oscillation cycle of functional religion can be seen more clearly as a process by which the primitive, paranoid-schizoid defences against anxiety are given validation in terms of construct, both verbal and symbolic (the movement) and are effectively reinforced behaviourally through the ritual (process) of oscillation.

If the process of religious worship is perceived in terms of regression to intrauterine dependency in an idealised good position, with subsequently reified defences against the irruption of primal impingement, either in terms of the environment persecuting the worshipper, or in terms of the worshipper retaliating against the environment, then the whole process takes on a new light. Church architecture and furnishings, roles and rituals, words and symbols fit coherently together. Functional religion manages primal angst within the social system through a process of projection and introjection, idealisation and denial. It also provides supremely, by displacement, a compensation for the lost, idealised, good primal environment, so effectively sustaining the paranoid-schizoid defences against primal anxiety as norms within the social process.

Defence Erosion

It is essential for the effective performance of a defence maintenance system that its process remain unconscious. Once the symbol construct is 'seen through' and the connection made between the religious symbol world and the idealised primal field, the efficiency of the defence maintenance system is undermined. With maintenance functions in abeyance the

defences themselves begin to erode and the primal anxiety previously held in bay irrupts into consciousness at every level of society. Many factors are contributing to defence erosion in our contemporary world.

Firstly, there is the steady breakdown of established religion within industrial cultures. The reasons for this are manifold, but a key to the phenomenon lies in the fundamental inability of religious systems to adapt to environmental change, precisely because religious institutions are created around those defence mechanisms, which, while controlling the irruption of primal angst, also suppress data concerning environmental change. Thus, the more rapid the process of social and environmental change, the more archaic and dysfunctional the traditional religious institutions become.

The second major factor leading to the erosion of anxiety defence systems is that of a massive increase in communication and mobility around the world, leading to cultural pluralism and the juxtaposition of many and varied religions, ideologies and value systems within the same community, as well as the constant cross-cultural interface of the global communications network. As a direct consequence, the construct systems used to reify the paranoid-schizoid defences against anxiety in different cultural settings are also juxtaposed. Since their effectiveness requires belief in the ontological validity of the symbols used, this constant relativisation of constructs previously deemed 'absolute' undermines their effectiveness in maintaining anxiety defences. As the various constructs are 'seen through' the common underlying processes for which the various constructs are parallel symbol carriers, are laid bare. Again the result is that the primal processes, previously repressed into the social unconscious, begin to irrupt.

A third element contributing to the erosion of the defence systems is the increasing power and sophistication of modern psychoanalytic insights and procedures, applied to both individual and social behaviour.

The final contributory element to the erosion of anxiety defence systems to which I wish to draw attention is that of the current turning point in world dynamics. It has become clear from our studies of growing congregations that regression into paranoid-schizoid defensive behaviour onsets at that point at which the initial surge of growth of the church begins to slow down, as the resources of the worshipping community begin to be over-stretched by the rising population. In his paper on 'Churches at the Transition between Growth and World Equilibrium' (Zygon Vol7 No.3), Jay W. Forrester writes,

"A vast new set of ethical and moral dilemmas now faces man as humanity begins to encroach on the physical limits of the world. If exponential growth of population and industrialization were to continue at the present rate, the entire globe would be inundated in a few decades. Such growth is becoming progressively harder to sustain. Many of the political and economic stresses we are now experiencing can be traced to the clash of growth colliding with a fixed natural environment.

"In all of the social systems that we have examined, from the simplest corporate subsystem to the most complex of world interactions, the great stresses and the great changes in social pressure come at the point where growth begins to slow down and equilibrium begins to be approached. It is during the transition period that turmoil is greatest. Humanity is now approaching the transition from world-wide growth to equilibrium..... During the next several decades.... we can expect rapidly growing social stresses of a magnitude, a distribution and a diversity that have never before been encountered."

The myth that the world itself corresponds to the idealised good primal environment is breaking down. The holding capacity of the womb of Mother Earth is being reached, with a result that the underlying dependency framework of humanity is being shaken. The sun, moon and earth carry fundamental primal transference in all major world religions (including Christianity). It is therefore inevitable that all world religious systems are undergoing increasing stress at this point in world history. For evidence we need seek no further than the mounting emphasis on world mission, and the resurgence of the fundamentalist streak in each of the main religious strata - sure signs that the 'community of faith' feels itself threatened both in membership and construct.

The effects of defence erosion are felt at all levels of society. Increased experience of primal anxiety is reflected in psychosomatic phenomena, in breakdown of mental health, increase in the suicide rate, rise in the consumption of alcohol, (a good indicator of social anxiety), family breakdown, fractured relationships within the industrial sector and increasing internecine strife, social anarchy, terrorism, vandalism, etc.

As anxiety defences break down so the transference and projection of primal material becomes more overt. Each in-group perceives every out-group as a potential threat, as the previously denied bad primal environment creeps back into consciousness, albeit initially identified with the here and now data of environmental transaction. On a minor scale this phenomenon underlies much of the paranoid-schizoid behaviour just outlined. On a major international scale, inter-tribal and inter-racial conflict is exacerbated by primal transference, in particular the major ideological splits emanating from industrialism and reified in the East/West divide, are overwhelmed with mutual paranoia. It is, I suggest, this process which feeds the international arms race, blocks the effective enactment of UNCTAD resolutions and eventually generates precisely that persecuting, resourceless, environmental impingement on the racial boundary, which is feared. Compensatory activity is inevitably dysfunctional, since it seeks to sedate symptoms of paranoia rather than remove the phantasy causes. Underlying anxiety is in fact increased by increased armament, leading to an exponential arms race. On the other hand, hysterical demands for disarmament, without any attempt to remove the underlying source of anxiety, also feed the flames of paranoia. Political moves to the right and increasingly authoritarian means of social control, information suppression, infringement of human rights, escalating police powers and military intervention are other dysfunctional results of the process.

In the light of the foregoing it is clear that attempts to reinstate the defence maintenance systems in society are not only ineffective, but fundamentally dysfunctional. They are ineffective because of the continuous defence erosion dynamics at work. They are dysfunctional because they perpetuate, in social process, the suppression of man's capacity to adapt to a changing environment, and, moreover, while sedating levels of primal angst so that man consciously lives at peace, in a dynamic form they facilitate the projection and acting out of the repressed and denied negative content of the unconscious within social and environmental transactions.

Inevitably pressure is on to defend, bolster and shore up the defence maintenance systems. This process is, I take it, parallel to the rise of fundamentalism within the systems themselves, and is seen in, for instance, the shifts in Papal strategy within the Roman Catholic Church and the tightening of its theological framework; the call for the renewal of functional religion inherent in Bruce Reed's work; the campaign to preserve unchanged the

wording and formulation of liturgy, whether it be headed by an Archbishop Lefebvre, or a Professor David Martin; current concerns with Church Growth, Nationwide Evangelism or prophetic indictment of the Godlessness of the nation also fit within this framework.

Towards a Process of Integration

As Feuerbach wrote in 'The Essence of Christianity', progress in religion takes place as "what was formerly contemplated and worshipped as God is now perceived as something human". In other words progress in human knowledge and development comes about as that which was previously idealised, split off, projected and denied, is reintegrated within the human psyche. This is not an appropriate place for a major treatment of the dynamics of integration, but the paper would be incomplete without a brief summary of the material.

There are two ways of handling primal psychotic anxiety trace. The material may be repressed, utilising high levels of energy and necessitating rigid application of anxiety defence mechanisms, both individually and socially. Alternatively, the traumatic material can be released or 'bled out' of the system, followed by the lowering and dismantling of the anxiety defence mechanisms. It is still too early to see the eventual implications of this second alternative, but already it is clear that the major diminution of the volume of previously pent up psychotic anxiety, releases massive energy for creative synthesis and environmental transaction on the part of the human organism. Not only are the paranoid-schizoid phantasies withdrawn from social process, thus enabling functional change without undue stress, but the split between conscious and unconscious areas of mental activity appears to be annealed, making major new synthesising power available within the human mind. It is as if a mainframe computer, whose core store was totally taken up with internal program, is able to discharge that program and free its major processor for on-line problem-solving.

Those who have operated previously in a highly defended position, particularly those with deep religious commitment to the anxiety defensive process, often experience the early stages of integration as realised hell. High levels of personal support are essential during this part of the process, as previously repressed negative areas and paranoid persecutory material become temporarily dominant. Primitive emotional responses previously equally repressed are released as pain, anguish, terror, rage, grief and guilt emerge. Gradually the oscillation between the idealised good and bad primal environments and their introjected counterparts subsides. Energy of idealisation is withdrawn, as the area of primal trauma is re-entered. A period of deeply conflicted ambivalence and depression may ensue as energy previously invested in the split, idealised phantasies is withdrawn and reality-orientation becomes more dominant. As abreaction of the primal traumatic impingement is completed, grief rises to the surface. This is because the impingement signalled the loss of the womb-world - that fundamental or archetypal bereavement, in displacement and compensation for which man expends so much energy in search of heaven, projecting into myths of life after death the unconscious trace of life before birth.

Such a process of personal integration may take anything from a few weeks to several years, depending on the intensity of primal impingement and the consequent intensity of the primitive anxiety defences. Working through of the consequences of integration takes the rest of life. At present, very few people have passed this way and their consequent isolation

is very difficult to tolerate. Each one who has laid aside, as no longer necessary, the primitive anxiety defences which are normal in surrounding society, is perceived as fundamentally threatening by that society, since their very presence resonates the psychotic anxiety held at bay by the normal defences.

Not only are isolation and alienation the lot of primal people, but they also have to cope with quite massive changes in their experience of themselves. The integration of conscious and unconscious parts of the brain brings the capacity for symbolic creativity into constant use. Speed of synthesis and problem solving increases massively. The number of independent variables which can be held in the mind at once goes up. Multi-dimensional problem-solving is increased. The time span which can be held in mind, the number of orders of aggregation handled with comparative ease, the level of management exercised... all these evidence significant shifts. In addition there is a whole new world of emotional responsiveness, a new depth of love and joy, of peace, of sexuality, of aggression, of freedom, of fear, of grief, of rage, of vulnerability. The person who has undergone and is undergoing a process of primal integration has to learn to live all over again. The implications of such process for social interaction at every level of the world community are massive and offer, I suggest, one of the most important avenues of realistic social hope for the future of humanity.

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A Fundamental Choice

Two paths now lie before us. One is the path of continued repression of primal anxiety, of escalating reinforcement of the anxiety defence systems, and inevitable and evermore unstable increase in levels of social control and oppression. The end of this road is political and racial catastrophe. It is life lived at a foetal level, under the dominion of the fear of death. The alternative is the path of primal integration - risking the re-entry of those fundamental levels of dread, constriction, persecution and annihilation and instead of shrinking back into foetal trance, courageously and consciously pushing through into the world beyond. This way lies life. It is not paradise, for paradise is a myth, but neither is it hell - it may perhaps lead humanity a little closer to reality.

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