

# THE LOSS OF THE SELF-OBJECT TIE AND RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

MARK W. BAKER  
*The LaVie Center*  
*Pasadena, California*

This article asserts that religious fundamentalism is best understood as an interpersonal phenomenon rather than an intrapsychic belief system, especially when it functions as resistance within the context of insight oriented psychotherapy. Two manifestations of religious fundamentalism are examined. Conservative Fundamentalism, Liberal Fundamentalism, and their respective meanings in the life of a client are discussed from the psychoanalytic perspective of intersubjectivity theory (Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987).

Freud (1927) characterized the psychoanalytic perspective on religion in his article, "The Future of an Illusion," as "born from man's need to make his helplessness tolerable" (p. 5). From his perspective, certain people create the illusion of an omnipotent benevolent God because "the terrifying impression of helplessness in childhood aroused the need for protection" in such a way that no other solution seemed fitting (p. 5). Freud's interest in his article was to expose the defensive function that religious doctrines play in one's psychological world, in that he "recognized them as being, in their psychological nature, illusions" (p. 5).

Thankfully, psychology's interest in religion did not begin and end with Freud, and the quest for additional understandings of the meanings and influence of religion has continued (e.g., Allport, 1950; Fromm, 1950; James, 1902/1961; Jung, 1938). Although it is true that religion can be used as a psychological defense, the unilateral conclusion that religion always plays a defensive role in human experience is myopic. Or, as Allport and Ross (1967) put it, "To know that a person is in some sense 'reli-

gious' is not as important as to know the role religion plays in the economy of his life" (p. 442). We cannot speak intelligently about one who is religious simply by knowing whether he or she is religious; we must also know how he or she is religious.

My goal in this article is to clarify what aspects of religion Freud and others who view religious doctrines as psychological defenses may have been observing which led to their conclusions. I will attempt to delineate two particular categories of religious experience, Conservative Fundamentalism and Liberal Fundamentalism, that operate as defenses against psychological threat, leaving room for a variety of other categories of religious experience that may not.

To understand the distinction I am making between these two forms of fundamentalism, I must say a few things about the trend in modern psychoanalytic theory represented by self psychology (Kohut, 1971) and intersubjectivity theory (Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987). In particular, an intersubjective perspective on the nature of human experience has assisted me greatly in my ability to understand fundamentalism and to work with it in psychotherapy.

## THE INTERSUBJECTIVE NATURE OF FUNDAMENTALISM

Heinz Kohut (1959) began a revolution in psychoanalysis when he suggested that psychoanalytic treatment should be restricted to the implementation of only two psychological processes: empathy and introspection. This thinking began a movement toward an "experience near" psychology designed to relieve therapists of the burden of the adjudication of reality in the therapeutic hour and placed the emphasis instead upon tracking, as nearly as possible, the experience of clients through a process of empathic understanding. This process of empathic attunement between "self" and "object" maintains

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the "selfobject tie" (Kohut, 1971) between the client and therapist, which results in a safe enough relationship for repressed developmental longings towards growth to be remobilized within the transference.

Unfortunately, Kohut (1971) viewed religion in a similar manner to Freud as a "relationship of the true believer to his God in which the figure of the perfect and omnipotent God, with whom the powerless and humble believer wants to merge, corresponds to the ancient omnipotent self-object, the idealized parent image" (p. 106). Although Kohut disagreed with Freud in many respects, he saw religion as resulting from failures in needed developmental experiences which result in an attempt to merge with the protection and power of God through the belief in a union with him. Although I do not see this as a description of all religious experiences, I do see it as descriptive of the religious experience of fundamentalism.

The psychological construct of fundamentalism (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) has been well researched psychologically and improved upon with the separation of dogma from dogmatism (Rokeach, 1960) to aid in a clearer understanding of the defensive aspects of religious thinking. This research has shown that people may be dogmatic even though they may not be fundamentalists in their beliefs. Based upon this distinction, I have separated Conservative from Liberal Fundamentalism as two expressions of religious dogmatism because I have found these two manifestations of religiosity to be equally dogmatic in the process of religion even though they are extremely different in their dogma. This perspective on fundamentalism suggests that the relational context within which it arises is as important as the content of the religious dogma being expressed. This interpersonal emphasis on psychological processes is compatible with the "experience near" intent of Kohut as well as the more recent developments in intersubjectivity theory (Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987).

Stolorow, Brandchaft, and Atwood (1987) have clarified the interpersonal nature of the psychoanalytic task with their development of intersubjectivity theory. It is their view that both therapist and client bring their unique subjective perspectives to the therapy relationship, which results in a transference experience that is co-determined by the contributions of both subjectivities. Similar to self psychology, intersubjectivity theory places its emphasis upon the empathic-introspective investigation into the subjective experience of the client and removes the

more classically psychoanalytic emphasis upon disabusing clients of transference distortions and illusions. It is the subjective meanings that clients make of their experiences that become the focal points of therapy, not whether or not their thinking conforms to generally accepted classes of mental health. Contrary to Freud's (1927) thesis that illusion masks the true meaning in one's life, it is through the understanding of the particular "illusion" that each individual creates that we discover the "true" meaning he or she makes out of life. Intersubjectivity theorists would agree with Winnicott (1960) who identified the role of illusion in the establishment of symbol formation within the child as crucial to the developmental process. "Good enough" mothering involves responding adaptively to the infant's illusions by never questioning their veracity, not by disabusing the infant of his or her distortions.

From an intersubjective perspective, the notion of possessing a mind that is isolated from others and completely individualistic psychologically is a myth (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992). Thus, religious fundamentalism that pretends to hold beliefs that are isolated from the relational context from which they emerge "serves to disavow a set of specific vulnerabilities that are inherent in human existence, vulnerabilities that otherwise may lead to an unbearable sense of anxiety and anguish" (Stolorow & Atwood, p. 8). The establishment of the sense of having made up one's mind distances the fundamentalist from what might otherwise be an unbearable embeddedness of human experience in the relational milieu with others. One can talk of particular beliefs existing within an individual, but one cannot talk of any understanding of those beliefs apart from the relational contexts within which they are both developed and expressed. From this perspective, the goal of therapy is not to disabuse clients of their religious illusions (as Freud suggested), but to attempt to emphatically understand the role of religious thinking in their lives.

I would like to now turn to a more precise description of the difference between Conservative and Liberal Fundamentalism.

### CONSERVATIVE FUNDAMENTALISM

The first dimension of religious fundamentalism I would like to describe here is what is typically thought of when referring to fundamentalism, which I shall call Conservative Fundamentalism. Conservative Fundamentalism is a religious experience arising within a relational milieu that is characterized by dis-

crete theological dogma and adherence to religious scriptures, submission to ecclesiastical authority, identification with an ideological community, and union with God. Conservative Fundamentalism results from a relational context that is constructed to preserve a connection to a much needed source of selfobject experience while warding off some threat to a sense of self.

Conservative Fundamentalism is typically found among religious groups where the two most basic human needs as defined by Kohut (1971), mirroring longings and idealizing longings, are being adequately met. Mirroring longings are met by an omniscient and omnipresent God who is experienced as miraculously attuned to the believer's need. Idealizing longings are met as a divine omnipotent Other is experienced as ubiquitously available for protection and guidance. These foundational selfobject experiences serve to intensify commitment to the religious context in which they are found and provide the requisite motivation to insure ongoing connection and devotion. In most instances, twinship longings (Kohut, 1984) also emerge, which are desires to experience the presence of essential likeness with others or to not be alone in the universe. Then, horizontal relationships become extremely important, and commitment to the fellowship of believers takes on a life-sustaining significance.

Religious experiences in which mirroring, idealizing, and twinship longings are being met do not result in pathogeny. In fact, these are environments that Kohut would predict to be exemplary for psychological growth. However, Conservative Fundamentalism results when an additional dynamic arises in the religious context. Trop and Stolorow (1992) provide the critical key in understanding the resulting defensive structures that underlie Conservative Fundamentalism with their conceptualization of the self-delineating selfobject transference.

Given the above circumstances, a natural state of expansiveness, or desire for growth, will be experienced. Perhaps the most fundamental selfobject experience is longed for at these junctures, the longing for the validation of one's personal and unique experience. Trop and Stolorow (1992) have termed this the self-delineating selfobject experience or the facilitation of a sense of a demarcated self having the quality of boundaries. If the relational matrix in which this expansiveness presents itself does not have the capacity to respond with the requisite attunement, a variety of defensive operations may be

employed to cope with the resulting injury. In these instances, restitutive behaviors are employed to restore a failing sense of self as the needed selfobject experiences are inadequate or missing.

The longing to have one's inner experience validated as unique is often experienced by others in the Conservative Fundamentalist community as a demand for distinctness that is threatening. This threat may then evoke a withholding of empathic attunement to the emergent self-delineating longings and a threat to the psychological well-being and vulnerable sense of expansiveness results. Conservative Fundamentalist contexts that have, in positions of leadership, strongly idealizable figures with assiduous mirroring requirements are particularly vulnerable to this intersubjective constellation. As a result, Conservative Fundamentalism considers individual differences within the community of believers to be a threat. Once this impasse is reached, one may rebel and leave, or comply and stay. Compliance takes on the form of meeting the requisite mirroring needs of the religious leaders at the expense of the further development of one's psychological distinctiveness.

A concomitant psychological activity arises at this point within Conservative Fundamentalism that serves to restore the now precarious selfobject tie to the religious group or leader. To replace a sense of confident connection with the idealized other, concrete symbols that encapsulate structures of experience are often manifested in Conservative Fundamentalism. Atwood and Stolorow (1984) refer to this as the process of concretization. In Conservative Fundamentalism, the use of ritual, concrete religious dogma and a fervent reliance upon the literal interpretation of a holy text provide tangible pathways for connection to the idealized other. The otherwise tenuous selfobject tie is now defensively reinforced, providing a restitutive function for the previously threatened sense of emerging self.

Conservative Fundamentalism usually results in an entrenched pattern of concrete symbolization as a means of preserving psychological existence, because a limited number of options are allowed to make sense out of new relational experiences. Threats to the sense of self are warding off through the reliance on discrete sets of dogma as concrete proof of a connection to the idealized other, but the laying down of new psychological structures is actually prevented by the same process. Conservative Fundamentalism becomes a closed system that per-

petually stimulates basic human longings and thwarts self-delineation and growth simultaneously.

### LIBERAL FUNDAMENTALISM

The second dimension of religious fundamentalism that I would like to discuss is Liberal Fundamentalism. As with Conservative Fundamentalism, a relational context exists that stimulates a number of longings, mobilizing the desire for growth. However, in the case of Liberal Fundamentalism, the selfobject tie to the idealized other is severed through some injurious disappointment or experience of abandonment that did not receive the necessary affective responsiveness from the religious milieu. A compensatory process is turned to which substitutes a belief in the omnipotence of one's own mind for the missing, but needed, idealizing selfobject tie. A rigorous adherence to one's own dogma replaces the soothing presence of an idealizable other.

The threat to a stable sense of self and well-being is warded off within Liberal Fundamentalism, but, as with Conservative Fundamentalism, this is achieved through strategies designed to defend against the loss of needed selfobject experiences as opposed to addressing the now thwarted longings through new, authentic selfobject experiences. Liberal Fundamentalism is also a closed system, as the trauma over past disappointments in the area of idealization needs leaves a fear of venturing out to find new idealizable attachments, a situation which further strengthens the attachment to the experience of the omnipotence of one's own mind. The comfort achieved here is compensatory at best, and often an underdeveloped self-soothing mechanism results, leading to existential despair that is always near at hand.

Liberal Fundamentalism does not describe any particular system of dogma, as the brilliance of one's own mind is the essential element for its participants. Consequently, Liberal Fundamentalism is less predisposed to appear within organized religion than Conservative Fundamentalism and can be found to utilize any system of thought that allows for the personal organization of it. Like-minded thinkers are seen as validating, and twinship longings are stimulated by the congregation of such similar souls. Additionally, a defensive attachment to a particular world view or seminal thinker may disguise the underlying fear of retraumatization in Liberal Fundamentalism, and the compensatory appearance of an idealizing tie may be present as long as it serves to reinforce the conclusions of one's own omnipotent

thinking. However, a confident and comforted sense of self is rarely achieved, and ideas which are encountered that are discrepant from the thinking of the Liberal Fundamentalist are viewed as inferior and attacked or dismissed as useless.

### TREATMENT CONSIDERATIONS

The treatment of religious fundamentalism in psychotherapy poses some difficulty for the therapist. In the case of a client entrenched in Conservative Fundamentalism, the client may rely upon concrete religious language for avenues of reassurance, since threats to the sense of self are especially likely to be present in the beginning stages of treatment. This reassurance may take the form of a need for the therapist to share in a specific understanding of religious dogma to bolster a precarious sense of connection to a religious experience outside of the transference. The urgency of the need for this understanding may be experienced as a requirement on the part of the therapist to be in complete agreement with the content of the client's dogma. The resultant countertransference urge to analyze pathogenic religious beliefs is likely to reinforce the sense of threat to the external religious experience and heighten the urgency of employing defensive mechanisms to strengthen the tie to the much needed Conservative Fundamentalism.

In the case of a client immersed in Liberal Fundamentalism, a somewhat different countertransference requirement may be experienced by the therapist, one that centers around the adequate appreciation of the brilliance of the client's omnipotent mind. The therapist may experience the urgent need for attunement to certain states of mind as a demand for superior intelligence on the part of the therapist. A confrontation of this as defensive intellectualization may result in a strengthening of the need for a defense against the perceived threat to the self-sustaining benefits of Liberal Fundamentalism.

Kohut (1984) and Trop and Stolorow (1992) provide a helpful understanding at this juncture, in characterizing the phenomenon of defense as being in the service of psychological survival. It is the understanding of the function that a particular defense serves that is critical in defense analysis. Through the careful empathic investigation of religious fundamentalism, vital selfobject functions as well as emergency self-restitutive activity can be discovered to explain the urgent attachments found within both Conservative and Liberal Fundamentalism. When

the necessity of these mechanisms is appreciated by the therapist, the experience of threat in the transference is lessened and an openness to further psychological investigation becomes possible. Without this acknowledgement, a strengthening of attachments to selfobject and restitutive experiences outside of the transference may result, making the investigation of the transference experiences within the therapeutic hour of less affective salience for the client or even an outright threat.

To illustrate these concepts, I would like to present a case example which deals with both Conservative and Liberal Fundamentalism. Although it is unusual to experience both of these dynamics in a single psychotherapy case, I think this particular case brings out the dynamics that underlie religious fundamentalism in a way that might be helpful.

#### THE CASE OF DONALD

Donald is the oldest of two sons born to a hard-working, but emotionally uncommunicative owner of a small retail store in the North-West. His mother was a homemaker who gave Donald all the attention a boy could want up until he was 10 years old. When he was 9, however, his mother became pregnant unexpectedly with his younger brother, and everything changed for Donald. His childhood dream world was transformed into a nightmare.

Instead of being the center of his mother's devotion, he now became a nuisance who was complicating her attempts to give her unrestricted affection to her new child. She became increasingly impatient and abusive towards Donald and frequently demanded that he entertain his brother and guard against any acts that might disturb the younger boy. Donald could recall numerous occasions when he would be required to swing his brother in a blanket, which the boy enjoyed, until Donald's arms became painfully tired. His protests of physical pain fell on deaf ears with his mother, and his feelings of being an extension of her narcissistic needs were even less understood. On one occasion, when traveling in the family car, the younger boy couldn't wait until the next stop to relieve his bladder, so he urinated in a paper cup which Donald was required to hold until the family had reached their destination.

Eventually, a room was created for Donald in the basement of the family home to insure that he would in no way upset his brother. This created a feeling in Donald that there was something about him that needed to be banished from the family's presence.

Merely being a 9- or 10-year-old boy resulted in the punishment of isolation and an experience of being personally defective.

Although he was not raised in a religious home, Donald underwent a religious conversion to Christianity while attending college. He experienced the conversion as an unconditional acceptance by a loving Father who knew his every imperfection and wanted to include him in his family. Donald was being invited up out of the basement. He immediately discontinued his drug usage, which he was using to medicate himself against painful feelings of defectiveness, and enthusiastically joined the community of Christian believers at his school. There he found an attractive Christian woman with compatible beliefs and married her a short time later. He was relieved to experience the soothing presence of an idealizable Father who had sought him out to love and care for. Donald referred to this experience as the most dramatic turning point of his life, a time when he felt unconditionally treasured by a powerful and attentive God in the face of lifelong feelings of defectiveness.

Donald spoke of a vitality and self confidence that he experienced only in the environment of his church family. Even though he never received any formal theological training, Donald spent several years regularly involved in a lay-teaching capacity at his church. He recalled with pleasure the hours of preparation he spent on each class he taught there. He was never paid in any formal capacity, yet he took great pride in contributing to the spiritual lives of the church members. Donald became a biblical scholar in his own right and was able to expound on any number of passages of Scripture in a sophisticated and meaningful manner.

At this point, Donald's religious experience appeared to be primarily a selfobject one, facilitating a developing sense of self, greater affect tolerance, and enhanced relational ability. Although I would refer to involvement with his church as a conservative religious experience for him, it was not a Conservative Fundamentalist one. His church was adequately providing for his fundamental needs of mirroring, idealization, and twinship without any obvious threats to his emerging sense of self. Unfortunately, things changed for Donald. At some point Donald began to have disagreements with the leadership of his church, and he responded with a defensive sense of entitlement to his new-found role of significance in his spiritual family. After a series of

painful confrontations, Donald began to fear that he had only the choice to comply and stay or rebel and leave, so he left.

Donald sought comfort in a different church some miles away, but seemed unable to recover from the psychological injury he suffered when his position as an informal leader of his previous church was taken from him. He was now left with a terrible paradox in his life: Either God did not really care about human tragedy, or Donald was somehow morally defective in God's sight and not worthy of that care and protection. The first he found theologically untenable, whereas the second he found psychologically devastating. As both of these options left Donald with overwhelming feelings of powerlessness, suicidal ideation surfaced out of a desperate fantasy to regain a sense of control in his paradoxically tragic world.

From Donald's perspective, he felt that God had failed to protect him once again from the banishment from his position of prominence in his "family." Tormenting feelings of defectiveness were being revived, and the selfobject tie to his idealizable God was now being threatened. Donald attempted to save himself from slipping back into the basement of total rejection by joining his new church and immersing himself in the Conservative Fundamentalism he found there. At this point Donald became more authoritarian about his theological dogma and religious rituals, emphasized the rote memorization of Scripture texts to ward off painful experiences in life, and became more motivated by his fear of God's punishment than his attraction to God's love (which was a major shift from Donald's previous religious experience). But the reenactment of his childhood trauma was too overwhelming for Donald, and he became suicidally depressed. He eventually came to the realization that the safety of his Conservative Fundamentalism was failing to adequately deal with the seriousness of his depression and sought therapy for his condition.

His treatment began with Donald's idealizing longings in the forefront of the transference almost immediately. The night after his first session Donald reported having the following dream:

I was visiting someone's apartment (I think a woman's) with one or more other guys. When we entered the apartment, there was a man lying on the couch who got up when we came in. He was introduced to me as a well-known disc jockey from Idaho, although I had never heard of him. He was at this apartment as some sort of surprise celebrity mystery guest for

whatever occasion brought us all there (a birthday or something). When I met him I thought to myself, "Well, he might be a big deal in Idaho, but he's certainly no big deal here!" And I thought it was all kind of comical. I think I even made a couple of wisecracks about it. Then I seem to remember going into the bedroom to change clothes.

This initial dream signaled Donald's desire to have me be an idealizable figure to assist him in the "occasion" of his therapy, and, at the same time, it warned me of his retreat into defensive grandiosity as an attempt to deal with his anticipated disappointment. Although Donald did not know me, he had been given my name from a well-known psychologist, and he entered therapy with his idealization longings stimulated. As we came to see later in treatment, Donald's fears of retraumatization in this area were almost simultaneously mobilized whenever he felt his idealization longings begin to emerge. A variety of defenses, especially devaluation, were employed to support his defensive grandiosity in the service of protecting a threatened sense of self.

The intensity of his religious conversion experience left Donald with a hopefulness about finding this unconditional acceptance again with some "surprise celebrity mystery guest," but the rejection he felt from his church experience left him with an even stronger dread that idealizable figures can do nothing but eventually abandon him to some psychological basement where he belongs.

The first year of treatment centered around Donald's depression resulting from the loss of his connection to his church and, to some extent, to God. On an unconscious level, Donald hoped that he would find in therapy a connection with an idealizable man who could guide him into confident manhood, as both his emotionally distant father and, subsequently, his God had failed to do. During this year Donald decided to leave his second church, which was performing more of a defensive restitutive function for his shattered self-esteem than a growth-producing selfobject one and looked to his relationship in therapy for the unmet needs he longed to have satisfied. Donald achieved a significant degree of progress during this first year, evidencing a decreased depression and an increasing vulnerability in the transference.

Late in the second year of treatment, Donald's medical insurance, which paid for a large part of his treatment, was unexpectedly changed by his employer, and he was forced to reduce the frequency of his sessions significantly. He was humiliated that he

could not afford my regular fee, yet was desperately in need of the assistance that therapy offered. Both his financial performance and improvement in therapy had partly served the defensive functions of providing concrete evidence of his acceptability to his therapist. He had transferred his Conservative Fundamentalism to our transference relationship in that he expected his ability to concretely perform up to the standards of his idealized authority was his only hope for acceptance, and his unique needs as a person would only result in abandonment, as it always had before. He had now lost the central basis for feeling esteemed by the only idealizable father figure left in his life.

At this point, Donald left his reliance upon Conservative Fundamentalism and shifted to Liberal Fundamentalism as a major source of maintenance for his self esteem. The use of religious ritual, adherence to conservative theological dogma, and a reliance upon concrete scriptural evidence to validate his connection to God were no longer important to Donald. Now emerging in Donald's life was a new religious experience characterized by a much less idealized view of God, a disconnection from any form of institutional religion, and an unyielding adherence to his own theistic view of the world as the truly correct one. With a threat now entering the transference relationship, Donald turned to Liberal Fundamentalism for much-needed functions to sustain his psychological life. He began to read the original works of one particular ancient theologian and could find only in him a like-minded thinker who resonated with his now enlightened mind.

The once comforting experience of idealization in the transference now shifted to a painful exposure in the presence of an ideal other toward which Donald could only feel envy. I came to embody all of the qualities he considered to be ideal for himself, and he was forced to sit across the room from this image of perfection that only reminded him of his loathsome defectiveness. Donald necessarily retaliated with a defensive devaluation of me. It was apparent that Donald's descriptions of the ideal qualities he saw in me were now not the manifestations of idealization longings, as he was no longer comforted by our relationship but felt demeaned by it instead. The painful humiliation that he now felt in the transference pointed to his use of a defensive self ideal (Baker, 1996) as a shield against the retraumatization that he was now experiencing. Intense fears rose in Donald that he would be an

object of contempt in my eyes, a situation which forced him to rely upon Liberal Fundamentalism for reassurance as he defended against humiliating scrutiny in the transference.

Donald found in Liberal Fundamentalism a comfort in remaining distinct from his previous religious affiliations and the stimulation of a twinship longing in his companionship with his favorite theologian. Attunement to the comfort he felt from his Liberal Fundamentalism and an appreciation for the significance of these elements in Donald's life were experienced as acts of understanding in the transference, which allowed for the repair of the transference relationship. However, as Donald experienced the revival of his genuine idealization longings, he now experienced an almost immediate fear of retraumatization. Unable to rely upon concrete pathways of connection to an idealizable therapist, as in the past, Donald found himself automatically devaluing the very thing he felt to be ideal.

This process of archaic longing stimulation and dread of repetitive trauma intensified over a period of several months. Donald's repeated devaluation of me continued until a significant turning point in the fourth year of treatment. In response to countertransference reactions to this steady attack upon me, my contributions to the therapy took on a cautious quality which was interpreted by Donald as further evidence that he was being excluded from my personal world as a result of my disdainful view of him. In one rather emotional session, following a series of devaluing statements, Donald demanded to know whether or not I liked him. I followed with, "No, I don't like you very much when you are making such devaluing statements of me. And that is why I am trying so hard to be careful with my comments towards you at those times."

This statement resulted in a significant shift in the transference. Donald experienced this as evidence that he could make an impact on an idealizable other and that what he had to say did matter. In subsequent sessions, he seemed almost enlightened by the thought that his comments could produce such an effect upon me, and the degree of defensiveness in the transference began to change. Although there was a measure of compliance present, Donald's motivation to discontinue his attacks on me did not appear to be primarily the result of wanting to meet a perceived requirement of mine to not be devaluing. Instead, Donald displayed an openness to the possibility of a relationship with an

idealized other who might be able to be impacted by his feelings.

At this point in the therapy, Donald began to reflect upon his Liberal Fundamentalism with a greater degree of examination into the function it was playing in his psychological life. His idealization of an ancient theologian now was recognized as not only a twinship longing, but it also served the purpose of insulating Donald from the consequences of allowing those same feelings of idealization to be present in the transference as well as in his relationship to God. He had turned to his own "excellent mind," which he shared with this dead theologian, as a substitute for the missing ideal other who might be alive in his life today. The reawakening of idealization longings in the transference had been too terrifying, given Donald's history of disappointment in this area, and the interpretation of Liberal Fundamentalism as his preferable solution to this dilemma was gradually being clarified.

The appreciation of Donald's Liberal Fundamentalism as necessary to his psychological survival opened the door in his treatment to more extensive discussions surrounding the nature of Donald's unmet longings and what he was endeavoring to do about them in his life. As opposed to viewing his Liberal Fundamentalism as a dysfunctional illusion serving as avoidance of his feelings of helplessness, the recognition of its vital significance in his psychological survival facilitated the revival of idealization longings in the transference. A family reunion could only be entertained if a father figure was present who was capable of being impacted by Donald's feelings and responding to his needs.

A sensitivity to the crucial role of idealization in the shift from Conservative to Liberal Fundamentalism in Donald's world assisted in the analysis of the transference relationship in this case. An appreciation of the functions that his religious experience played in the maintenance of a secure sense of self allowed for a deepening of the transference relationship, rather than causing a defensive retreat into religious fundamentalism. Donald's longing to be treasured by an idealizable other was interwoven in the transference of his religious experiences as well as in the transference of his therapy. As his fears in his transference relationship with me became more consciously addressed, a more genuine relationship emerged between Donald and me as well as between Donald and God.

## CONCLUSION

Closed mindedness has a context. The apparent rigidity found within religious fundamentalism is best understood to be in the service of psychological survival. Vitrally needed selfobject and restitutive functions provided within Conservative and Liberal Fundamentalism serve to preserve a sense of self, even in the face of the psychological threat created by religious fundamentalism itself. Treatment in therapy must acknowledge the life-saving mechanisms, employed for the sense of self, within Conservative and Liberal Fundamentalism in order for the client to entertain alternative pathways to selfobject experiences. It is through the establishment of new selfobject experiences that alternative beliefs can be developed and a broader range of affective, cognitive, and spiritual strategies can be assimilated into one's way of life.

Blanket statements about religion as a defense against painful feelings need to be reviewed critically, so that a more accurate understanding of the function that religion plays in an individual's life might be ascertained. Identifying the defensive nature of religious fundamentalism distinguishes it from the self-object nature of religious experiences that are facilitative of developmental growth.

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#### AUTHOR

BAKER, MARK W. Address: The La Vie Center, 650 Sierra Madre Villa, Suite 110, Pasadena, CA 91107. Title: Executive Director; Licensed Clinical Psychologist. Degrees: BA, Psychology & Personnel Administration, University of Kansas; MDiv, Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary; PhD, Clinical Psychology, Fuller Graduate School of Psychology. Specializations: Intersubjectivity theory, integration of psychology and theology.