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Birth of The Living Gods? Exploring the Pre- and Perinatal Aspects of Religious Development

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ABSTRACT: Rizzuto and Freud consider that the origins of God representations can be traced to early parental relations, but Rizzuto postulates that Freud underestimates the "complexities of this derivation, especially the role of the mother" (Wulff, 1997, pp. 343-344). To what extent is Rizzuto right in agreeing with Freud? Is there any evidence to support how God can be represented in pre and perinatal terms, within a psychodynamic framework? This hypothesis postulates that in parallel to postnatal findings, uterine and birth experiences possibly predispose the individual to form God representations later in life, through underpinning affective and environmental factors. The origins of our God representations are underpinned by early parental influence as advocated in the different perspectives of Rizzuto and Freud. One thinks that Rizzuto's redress of maternal influences on our God representations can be addressed further with reference to the developmental factors relating to the mother-fetal dyad through pregnancy. There is a global proliferation of scientific and therapeutic interest in fetal life, suggesting that embryonic experiences have a lasting impact over the life span. If this is the case, then uterine experiences can colour the formation of our God representations. It is deemed important to grapple with the pre- and perinatal research available, mainly through the work of Stanislav Grof and Frank Lake, within the framework of Freud and Winnicott, in order to explore the possible impact of prenatal life for the religious development of the individual in relation to their parents and God representations.

KEY WORDS: Pre- and perinatal, mental representations, religious development, God representations, uterine attachment experience

INTRODUCTION

"Psychologically speaking, God is a secondary object, one built upon the contributions of culture and other experiences with parental

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objects. The culture offers the word 'God' and its multitude of affective and psychic referents" (Rizzuto, 2006, p. 21).

In *The Birth of the Living God*, Rizzuto demonstrates the multidetermined nature of 'the living God' metaphor across Eastern and Western religions. For Rizzuto, the origins of God representations are diverse, and not the outcome of singular perspectives, as claimed by the more exclusive, though important, attribution or attachment theory. John Bowlby's three volume series on *Attachment and Loss* are an invaluable source for psychological observations, easily applicable to our understanding of the formation of our God representations. A memorial conference at the John Bowlby Centre continued to make links between attachment and neuroscience, with relevance for our understanding of the personality structures underlying our God representations.

My interest is in the psychology of religious development, especially the under-theorized mother-infant relationship's influence in the formation of God representations from pre-conception onwards; how our God representations can be traced to early parental relationships and whether there is any evidence for pre- and perinatal underpinnings contributing to the formation of our God representations, within a psychodynamic paradigm. Freud made a huge contribution to our understanding of religion in relation to the father, though recently the mother's input in the religious development of the child has been more comprehensively recognized. It is fortunate to have the grounding work of feminist projects: critical, inclusive and analytical research in the psychology of religion. The mother-infant relationship has gained more attention through re-examining women's psychological active agency in religious life and practice, according to Diane Jonte-Pace, and genderized images of God have been addressed (Jonte-Pace, 1997, p. 64).

This hypothesis postulates that the origins of God representations can be traced to early parental influences, and that uterine and birth experiences impacting on our personality development, possibly predisposes the individual to form God representations later in life. The origins of our God representations are traced to early parental influences as advocated in the differing perspectives of Rizzuto and Freud. I think that Rizzuto's redress of postnatal maternal influences on our God representations can be pursued further back in our developmental life-history, with parallels in the prenatal developmental factors relating to the mother-fetal dyad in relation to the formation of our God representations.

There is a global proliferation of scientific and therapeutic interest in fetal life, suggesting that cellular embryonic experiences have a lasting impact over the life span. If this is the case, then uterine experiences can colour the formation of our God representations. It is deemed important to grapple with the pre- and perinatal research available, mainly through the revolutionary work of Stanislav Grof and Frank Lake, within the framework of psychodynamic thinkers: Rizzuto, Freud, Winnicott, Klein, Erikson, Bowlby and others, in order to explore the possible impact of prenatal life for the religious development of the individual in relation to their parents and God representations.

Clinical and theoretical intuitions regarding uterine experience in relation to God representations have been hovering on the periphery since the beginning. However, the current emphasis on prenatal life in other disciplines highlights the fact that a considerable mass remains perhaps marginalized in psychoanalytic discourse in relation to God representations, taken up by the fringe therapeutic community and promoted in pop-psychology.

So why has this demotion occurred? It is postulated that historically, the uproar in the psychoanalytic community over Otto Rank's (1924) publication of *The Trauma of Birth* and the resulting untenable situation for Freud, both politically and theoretically, instituted a line of demarcation in future theoretical developments leaving an uncomfortable sense of foreclosure on the issue. Exploring the underlying processes of the formation of God representations draws one to formative experiences from the beginning of life, and anxiety being one of the main manifestations of such experiences is inevitably foundational to our personality structure in the formation of our representations of God.

Feminist perspectives are proposed towards a contribution and address of this material within the psychological framework of religious development across the life span. For religious development, Kathleen O'Connor advocates hermeneutic and narrative approaches as offering more realistic alternatives to classical stage-based theories [Freud, Fowler, Kohlberg] and traditional-hierarchical conceptions of development based on 'linear causal explanations' that reduce and ignore human and religious differences in development (O'Connor, 1997, p. 102).

In hermeneutic approaches 'development is framed in contextual and relational terms', rather than in terms of growth and maturation. O'Connor's perspective offers hope for developments in future psychology of religion, through hermeneutic approaches to religious

experience and change, facilitating an exploration of belief and unbelief and 'the generative interaction, collaboration and integration of psychoanalytic and social constructionist, cognitive and affective, and developmental and clinical perspectives' (O'Connor, 1997, p. 103).

To a certain extent, Rizzuto and Freud agreed with each other in tracing the origins of God representations to early oedipal relations. Freud understood God, in the vein of "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 32), from an historical and deterministic perspective tracing psychic phenomena to their rationalistic and biological roots and origins as 'an exalted father'. Freud's differing perspectives on religion run throughout his works; however most explicitly expressed in *Totem and Taboo (1912), Future of an Illusion* (1927) and *Civilisations and its Discontents* (1930). Alternately, Rizzuto's deconstructionist interpretation, is grounded in early object relations (especially Winnicott), and is more inclusive of other experiences, especially recognizing the role of the mother for our representations of God.

Rizzuto had stated that the personal God of our private considerations predates the God of organized religion, "when the child forms in the first five years of life the basic self and object representations that are to colour his or her entire life experience" (Rizzuto, 2001, p. 49). It is, therefore, our parental relationships that influence the formation of our God representations in diverse ways. Through a firm academic and therapeutic commitment to shedding light on the prenatal stages of religious development, the question will be addressed: Is there any evidence to support how our God representations can be understood in pre- and perinatal terms?

Freud considered God representations to be based on illusion—defensive wish fulfillment, and delusion—belief based on wish fulfillment counter to reality (Callaghan, 2003, p. 24). Rizzuto, in contrast, states the creative aspects of illusion. It is important to differentiate between God representations in their solipsist and cultural context, as personal and social constructs and the objective reality that conceivably does exist as Ultimate Truth, as God. Plato's forms offer examples of the ideal. Our God representations, however, are I think disconnected from the true essence of God.

There will be two prominent strands to this article. First, it is important to trace the postnatal origins of God representations to early parental influences, mainly through the work of Rizzuto and Freud, and Antoine Vergote's helpful contribution to our understanding of God representations. Secondly, the possibility of there being pre- and perinatal dispositions to the formation of God

representations will be explored. Rizzuto's singular reference to birth in her book demonstrates her recognition of the overriding influence of relationship in the formation of our God representations. John Bowlby's theory of attachment and separation through the relationship of the birth process is crucial to our unfolding understanding of configurations of God over our life span. The affective dimension of religious experience will be explored—an area of psychoanalytic practice requiring more acknowledgement.

Erikson's humanistic application of epigenetic psychosocial phases of development brings into focus his bipolar perspective of the basic characteristics of personality structure; especially trust versus mistrust in the mother-infant relationship, with parallel implications for fetal development, which is discussed in relation to the formation of God representations.

First, let us turn to Rizzuto's and Freud's perspectives on the parental origins of God representations.

Rizzuto and Freud: Parental Origins of God Representations

"*The evidence shows first of all that God is represented as a complex unity holding the two parental dimensions in tension. Although, in Christian language, God is addressed as father, God is, just as well, a maternal figure in virtue of his immediate, available, and welcoming presence*" (Vergote, 1982, p. 207).

Religious development emerges in a new form once the mother-infant relationship becomes the focus of the origins of religion: "when the transitional space between caretaker and child and the transitional objects that emerge are assumed to be the origin of our God representations … religion is conceived as a basically interactive process; religious development can be correlated with the development of object relations in a psychoanalytic perspective" states Streib (2001, pp. 145-146).

With reference to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (online), representation means: 'presence, bearing, air', or 'an image, likeness or reproduction', or 'appearance, impression on the sight' and 'action or act of exhibiting in some visible image or form'. Using the same source God refers to 'a superhuman person (regarded as masculine) who is worshiped as having power over nature and the fortunes of mankind: a deity'. To make into a god is to deify; to worship as a god. The specific Christian and monotheistic sense of 'God' is: 'The One object of supreme adoration; The Creator and Ruler of the Universe'. In

summary, representation "refers to anything which stands for, or represents, something else…the ideas we form of the world around us, the mental images we construct" (Fraser & Burchell, 2001, p. 272).

It is clear that our God representations take many forms; a broad range of psychical structures, statues or real figures of worship, and as to what kind a person worships, will tell us many deep facts about them. It would appear that one's representation of God fits with one's personality structure—if one uncovers the kind of God one relates to (and this differs from person to person) one learns about the underlying personality structure.

Freud, a rationalist, was confident that truth claims can be made. Alternately, as Peter Vardy states "postmodernism denies there are any such rocks of certainty …any meta-narrative… once truth is truly abandoned, then there really is no truth to be sought; people must be content with truth that is simply dependent on perspective" (Vardy, 2003, p. 12). Postmodern constructionists are relativist, while considering that there is a reality to behold, there is no possibility of knowing it and places "knowledge within the process of social interchange", according to Gergen (1985, p. 266). The solipsist view recognizes reality invented by the individual and one can debate the extent to which the solipsist position is possible considering cultural influences. Our constructions of God are important in relation to what they reveal about our current personality structure—the story they tell of our life history and the culture from which they are derived.

Rizzuto, the Freudian psychoanalyst, utilized clinical findings from the life histories of twenty patients and theoretical insights from works by Freud, Erikson, Fairbairn, and Winnicott (Rizzuto, 1979). Rizzuto accepts Spiro's definition of religion as 'an institution consisting of culturally patterned interactions with culturally postulated superhuman beings' (Spiro, 1966, p. 96). God representations have arguably nothing to do with belief in God: Rizzuto, on the one hand, accepts God representations as projections of human endeavor: "as experienced by those who do and do not believe in them … I have studied the history of their lack of belief in a God they are able to describe" (Rizzuto, 1979, pp. 3-4).

Rizzuto advanced Freud's focus on the father as the origins of religion, by acknowledging the influence of the mother in the formation of God representations. Rizzuto elaborates positively on the function of 'illusion' facilitating the child's separation from the mother (Rizzuto, 1979, pp. 177-180). Winnicott postulates the transitional objects of the teddy bear and blanket serving a time-limited purpose, while the God representation is subject to increasing catharsis in early

development, and sustains its function as an available real illusory transitional object throughout life. God, like all transitional objects is located "outside, inside and at the border", states Rizzuto (Winnicott, 1958, p. 2). God "is not an hallucination" and in health does not "go inside" nor does the feeling about it necessarily undergo repression–it is not forgotten and it is not mourned (Winnicott 1958, p. 5). It seems that God representations, according to this view, are based on developmental needs originally met by the mother, and later articulated through images in complex psychical ways.

Generally, the relationally based transitional object is "gradually allowed to be decathected, so that in the course of time it becomes not so much forgotten as relegated to limbo… it loses meaning… because the transitional phenomena have become diffused… over the whole cultural field" (Winnicott, 1958, p. 5). Representations of 'God', amongst other transitional objects do have a special place because 'he' is the cultural creation offered to humans for their private and public re-elaboration of those primary ties—especially to the mother, according to Rizzuto. The God representation undergoes revision through the intimately related parent and self-representations prevalent at the time of the Oedipus conflict and in late adolescence, when the individual needs to integrate a self-representation to face the life decisions ahead, states Wulff (1997, p. 344).

In *The Birth of the Living God*, Rizzuto analyses at each stage of development, in relation to the parents, the conditions for belief in the formation of our God representations. At the oral stage and early infancy with no 'God' representation formed, basic feelings of trust and mistrust for future emerging images of God are established; at the anal stage, the condition for belief and unbelief are the feelings of absence and presence; the phallic stage brings frequent idealization of the father or other primary object or, otherwise, lacking admiration from the child, creates a 'God' of doubt or unbelief. And during the oedipal stage, the child's God representation relates to both parents changing with the resolution of the oedipal conflict. At the latency stage, the God representation is based on protection or, through disappointment and despair, a turning away from God. In adolescence, separation from the internal object leads to a multilayered 'God' representation (Rizzuto, 1979, pp. 180-201).

In Freud's view, the oedipal phase is concerned with the relationship between fathers and sons. However, the God representation of one of Rizzuto's patients, Fiorella Domenico, illustrates mainly her oedipal "internalized idealizing love" for the father: the daughter-father relationship had not yet been documented

by Freud (Rizzuto, 1979, pp. 93-94). In Moses and Monotheism, Freud traces the origins of Christianity through guilt of a primitive patricide. Freud considered religion's primitive origins in his historical exposition 'Totem and Taboo'—a totemic god having its source in a father, the sons of whom deified him. In *Civilisation and its Discontents*: Freud states in relation to religion: "the whole thing is so patently infantile, so foreign to reality", considering that religion relates to unmet childhood needs (Freud, 1930, p. 74).

In tracing the origins of 'God' representations through parental influences, Rizzuto credits Freud's thinking as being the most cogent. Freud had argued that boys around the stage of the resolution of the oedipal complex incorporate their parental images, particularly that of the father, into the formation of their God representation. During this process, libidinal wishes become sublimated and where sublimation does not occur, the child develops a libidinal attachment to either his image of God or to another father substitute. Due to the increasing detachment from their parents, and the superego therefore receding with "the images they leave behind, there are then linked the influences of teachers and authorities, self chosen models and publicly recognized heroes, whose figures need no longer be introjected by the ego". The ego having strengthened, Freud surmises, "all who transfer the guidance of the world to Providence, God… still look upon these ultimate and remotest powers as a parental couple" (Freud, 1924, p. 168).

In relation to maternal influences on our 'God' representations, Rizzuto considers Freud's account for the "permanent representations from the mother to the godhead forming the inner world of object representations" (Rizzuto, 1979, p. 6). Freud states that at the age of five an important change occurs-'a portion of the external world has, at least partially been abandoned as an object and has instead, by identification, been taken into the ego and thus become an integral part of the internal world' (Freud, 1938, p. 204). This newly formed psychical agency carries on the functions formerly performed by people in the external world called the super-ego; the conscience, functioning in a judicial capacity: observing, judging and threatening the ego with 'a severity for which no model has been provided by the real parents' (Freud, 1938, p. 205).

Rebalancing Freud's underestimation of the mother's role in the formation of 'God' representations, Rizzuto recognized that the child is known and read by her mother and the mother's face organizes the child's experience, for the making of a more or less cohesive sense of self for the formation of God representations. Lake suggests that there

are two vital needs of every child in these foundational first three years, which can be summed up as: the face of the mother and the voice of the father; the smile of loving recognition; and the word of guidance (Lake, 1966, p. 179).

Our God representations reveal a great deal about underlying parentally influenced internal and social processes. Brendan Callaghan suggests that the way Mary, the Mother of God, is thought of and represented effects how men and women develop, reflecting changes and differences within the processes of development—our internal processes are entwined with cultural processes and our internalized 'objects' are shaped by the symbols of Christianity (Callaghan, 1996, pp. 402-403). Callaghan suggests that as the representation of Mary becomes more perfect, the representation becomes more divorced from real experiences of men and women. Women then become denigrated for embodying imperfect characteristics seen as evil and are projected onto as "witches" (Callaghan, 1996, p. 407).

In aiding our understanding of the formation of our God representations, Ann Belford Ulanov reflects on how our internal images of the feminine and the spirit are influenced: "what is inside is certainly ours—it is after all inside 'us'—but it is comprised of bits of 'them', not only specific other people, but also images of our culture and historical time" (Ulanov, 1990, p. 143)—and "among the more central and rapidly-changing symbols are those of the feminine, of woman and hence of the relationship between women and men" (Callaghan, 1996, p. 404). Gemma Fiumara suggests that current concepts from developmental research indicate that what the infant internalizes is not the person he deals with but the process of mutual regulation. Fiumara considers that it is not the 'bits' of persons, nature and culture that are absorbed but types of relations, and that we "grow through the absorption of the affective and structural links that exist between everything we experience in our inchoate vicissitudes" (Fiumara, 2001, p. 113).

In considering the underlying structure of God representations, Christopher McKenna, Jungian psychoanalyst and director of Saint Marylebone Healing and Counselling Centre, UK, considers the power of God images to maintain a rigid defensive system; the more benign ways that these images develop correspond to changes to our self image, through modifications of the defensive structure. MacKenna concludes that a God image "may be the only safe container for our longing for perfection, so long as our attitude towards it is one of worship rather than identification" (MacKenna, 2002, p. 325). Perhaps

the longing for perfection is an unmet need from infancy for parental unconditional positive regard—one of the conditions of worth put forward by Carl Rogers.

Rizzuto was aware of the use of God representations to avoid transferential issues, for silencing the super-ego and the potential use of 'God' representations to aid integration and relating to the world (Rizzuto, 1996, pp. 409-431). Rizzuto's lending of Kohut's concepts of transferential mirroring and a self-object bond is a useful explanation of the maternal origins of the God representation (Rizzuto, 1979, pp. 185-188). Rizzuto states that appropriate mirroring of self in the mother's reactions is essential for constructing a cohesive sense of self, at the core of our 'God' representations (Jones, 1991, p. 43).

Rizzuto is right to state that Freud was basically correct in tracing the origins of the 'God' representation to early oedipal relations. Yet, it is also true that Freud underestimated the complexities of this derivation, especially the role of the mother. Freud contributed vastly to our religious understanding of the oedipal origins of the God representation of the figure of the father, and it is appreciated that he was analyzing religion in a particular time and cultural context. Rizzuto acknowledges the importance of the oedipal complex and expands its exclusive focus, considering 'God' representations as complex and belonging to every developmental stage.

To the extent that Rizzuto is right, it will be pertinent now to explore the possible derivations of God representations firstly from perinatal stages of life.

Perinatal Origins of God Representations

"*I saw that the second Person, who is our Mother substantially—the same very dear Person is now become our Mother sensually. For of God's making we are double: that is to say, substantial and sensual. Our substance is that higher part which we have in our Father, God almighty. And the second Person of the Trinity is our Mother in kind, in our substantial making—in whom we are grounded and rooted; and he is our Mother of mercy, in taking our sensuality.*" (Julian of Norwich, 1975, pp. 159-160)

Perinatal influences on the formation of God representations have been documented in religious development for many years. Freud, amongst others, referred to the religiously connected "oceanic" feeling: "the source of the religious energy which is seized upon by the various Churches and religious systems", in Freud's view (Freud, 1930, p. 64).

This feeling of "eternity" is described as an unbounded subjective state, relating to the infantile stage of limitless narcissism (Wulff , 1997, p. 320), one of "almost intangible quantities" and therefore difficult to study (Wulff, 1997, p. 285). One may assume that Freud's description of the oceanic feeling is of a healthy archaic uterine experience. Although one may argue that the oceanic feeling is more akin to mysticism than God representations; this being upheld depends on one's definition of 'God' representations. The uterine experience, for example, most likely contributes to a sense of God's presence in the Universe, originating in the fetal-maternal relationship.

It was Thomas Verny's (1982) pioneering *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child* that pointed up the impact on the embryo by parental and other social and environmental factors. Further, Stephen Khamsi, PhD, a practicing experiential primal psychotherapist in North California, suggests that the birth process may have lasting influences on personality development and, by implication, can affect the formations of our 'God' representations. With the wealth of more mystically-oriented experiences, this will have implications for understanding the origins of these experiences. The traditional opinion, in contrast, denies that neonates are neurologically adequate to register, code, and store perinatal experiences (Khamsi, 1987, p. 1).

The perinatal perspective, postulated by Stanislav Grof, a psychiatrist and Freudian psychoanalyst, may not be in line with Rizzuto and Freud's more traditional psychoanalytic thinking, yet it is deemed essential to pursue possible parallels between postnatal and perinatal life, to further our understanding of the origins of God representations. Grof's experiential shamanic approach is highly controversial. Grof hypothesized an understanding of the perinatal perspective through his extensive observation of adults reliving birth experiences and their consequent 'God' representations. It is therefore suggested that the pre-dispositional formations of 'God' representations originate in the womb, prior to the time claimed by Rizzuto and Freud. If this is so, the implication of this perspective can only add to the importance of Rizzuto's and Freud's hypotheses of the vicissitudes of 'God' representations at different developmental stages. It appears necessary to expand the parameters of the psychodynamic framework to include pre- and perinatal influences.

Religious experiences of death and rebirth, formerly explored experimentally with LSD*25*, and then replaced with the therapeutic "holotropic" breathwork technique, demonstrate that adults appear to be able to relive birth and uterine experiences, according to Grof. Grof reveals that representations of God, linked with their underlying birth

experiences, are not limited to blissful unifying moments, but, at times, as "agonizing encounters with loneliness, hopelessness, guilt and death", proceeded by "a dramatic death-rebirth struggle that may be accompanied by visions of explosive energy, orgiastic cruelties…bloody torture and execution" (Wulff, 1997, p. 92). Following a series of such struggles, accompanied by physical symptoms, often including visions of sacrifice and wild ritual associated with ancient religious practices (Wulff, 1997, p. 920) and mandala-like configurations (Grof, 1985, p. 93), suggested to Grof that breathwork offers "indirect" access to the archetypal layers of the unconscious as conceived by Carl Jung. Abraham Maslow, although claiming to be an atheist, emphasized peak experiences as being key to the spiritual realms—self-actualizing experiences being like those reported by mystics of visions and religious experiences.

In relation to perinatal links with God representations, Jung contends that humans display predispositions through a pre-formed psyche. Jung considers an *a priori* factor in all human activities: "the inborn, preconscious and unconscious individual structure of the psyche…the preconscious psyche…of a new-born infant—is not an empty vessel…on the contrary, it is a tremendously complicated, sharply defined individual entity" with, in my opinion, the inevitable capacity for being disposed to the formation of 'God' representations through cellular absorption of affective and environmental influences (Jung, 1972, p. 11). Jung's view is contrary to the Freudian model that mainstream psychiatry and psychotherapy has accepted the notion of the new born child as a "tabula rasa", whose development is entirely determined by childhood experiences. Current medical theory still states that the experience of birth cannot be stored in the child's memory. The reason given by medicine is the immaturity of the cerebral cortex of the newborn. The more tangible noxious aspects that the foetus may contend with are: nicotine and other drugs; poor nutrition; and the less tangible—distressing emotions experienced bio-chemically across the placenta.

Jung's ideas on predispositional states offer insights regarding patterns of functioning, described by Jung as images, which are the form of the activity and the typical situation in which the activity is released (Jung, 1972, p. 120). In relation to the cross-cultural origin of God representations, Jung considers that "these images are 'primordial' images in so far as they are peculiar to whole species, and if they ever 'originated', their origin must have coincided at least with the beginning of the species" (Jung, 1972, p. 12).

Jung's four archetypes, Mother, Rebirth, Spirit and Trickster, form

Jung's hypothesis of the collective unconscious as the gathering place of forgotten [repressed] contents (Jung, 1972, p. 3). Jung states his conception of the collective unconscious at the deeper level is universal rather than personal, consisting of collective representations across cultures. Jung expressed rebirth through transcendence and transformation, in relation to understanding underlying aspects of images of God. Freud believed personality was laid down at birth, or before—Jung considered possibilities for renewal and change. Jung links transcendence of life, the continuation of life through transformation and renewal, through death and rebirth of a "god or godlike hero" (Jung, 1972, p. 51).

Ideas on structural alterations of the personality are claimed by Jung as implying the phenomena of possession. Unfavorable images of God stem from the darkness of the unconscious, characteristics of the anima—fickle, capricious, uncontrolled and emotional, demonic intuitions, malicious, mystical (female) and animus—obstinate, harping on principles, dogmatic, world-reforming, and argumentative, domineering (male). All ideas of rebirth, according to Jung, are founded on natural transformations, the process of individuation (inner transformation and rebirth into another being) with symbolism expressed in dreams. The 'other being' is a part of ourselves—the comforting and protecting personality maturing within us, with whom dialogue can be held, used in Gestalt technique, and relationships with our God representations.

In thinking about the effects of birth on our formation of God representations, Sallie McFague proposes the models of God as Mother, Lover and Friend; the model of the Mother, highlighting the physicality of birth and symbols of life's continuity being created – blood, water, breath, sex, food, conception, gestation and birth, she argues is at the centre of most religions including Christianity, expressing the [potential] renewal and transformation of life (McFague, 1987, p. 104).

McFague argues that our God images are seen through a perceptual grid as proposed by George Kelly's personality theory. Bannister and Fransella state that Kelly's construct theory does not rely on a person's ability to verbalize his constructs but on an ability to make discriminations, with application to an unborn child, emphasizing the field of [religious] inter experience rather than behavior, as in learning theory (Bannister & Fransella, 1971, p. 9). Kelly's theory raises questions as to what extent our God representations are based on anticipation and prediction, and from which stages of life these sources are established.

Freud's writings demonstrate his recognition of the significance of perinatal experience for our psychological understanding of the origins of religion and formation of our God representations. At the heart of the significance of birth, in Freud's view, is its possible representing of a prototype of later anxiety, arguably linked to issues of coping in religion. Freud postulated three forms of anxiety: reality based, moral, and neurotic—the former being the most powerful for the formation of our God representations, according to Hood (1992) resulting from objectively real sources of pre- and perinatal danger.

Freud postulates the origins of "the longing for the father" emerging in *The Ego and the Id* (Freud, 1923, p. 58): "The super-ego fulfills the same function of protecting and saving that was fulfilled in earlier days by the father and later by Providence and Destiny" and that here "is once again the same situation as that which underlay the first great anxiety state of birth and the infantile anxiety of longing—the anxiety due to separation from the protecting mother" (Freud, 1923, p. 58). The separation from the mother, creating inordinate amounts of anxiety for the infant, would be split off and projected defensively into structures of God representations, following Kleinian theory.

On the other hand, where birth is less problematic, following undisturbed uterine experiences, greater connection with the representation of the Creator God would be feasible: "For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139).

Melanie Klein paid attention to the ego's earlier mechanism of defense—an application of her theory is useful for understanding the formation of God representations. The infant protects itself by denying and repudiating unwelcome reality and other ways of communicating experiences that cannot be verbalized into images of God or onto figures of worship. Klein distinguishes four mechanisms of defense: splitting of the ego occurs where it cannot prevent the "bad" part of the object contaminating the "good" part, by dividing it or it can split off and disown a part of itself. In relation to uterine life, the foetus introjects via the umbilical cord, the emotions from the mother [her own and those absorbed from her social-cultural environment].
Introjection occurs when the foetus/infant internalizes what it perceives or experiences of the object. Projection then occurs: the ego fills the object or creates the God representation with some of its own split feelings and experience. Projective identification takes place when the ego projects its feelings into the object with which it then

identifies, becoming like the object which it has already imaginatively filled with itself, as recounted by Mitchell (1986, pp. 20-21).

The ego utilizes these defenses in coping with the inner world and the continuing interaction between inner and outer. Its destructive feelings which are emanations of the death drive, create a great deal of anxiety, states Klein. The baby fears that the objects of its rage, including the breast that goes away and frustrates it will retaliate. Through self-protection it splits itself and the object into a good part (for example a loving God image) and a bad part (for example persecutory God image), so projecting all its badness into the outside world in order that the hated breast might become the hating and hateful breasts—the paranoid-schizoid position, according to Klein (Mitchell, 1986, p. 20). One may surmise that it is Klein's model of the paranoid-schizoid position that clarifies how repressed uterine experiences become projected into God representations through the process of splitting. Lake claims that the paranoid-schizoid position dates from the beginning of post-natal life, suggesting that the feelings involved originate bio-chemically in prenatal life, contributing to fetal personality structure and the possible formation of our God representations (Lake, 1980, p. C44).

The depressive position, in Klein's view, occurs developmentally when the ego becomes more able to sense that good and bad can exist together in the self and other person. The baby rages against the mother for the frustrations she causes but, in place of fearing retaliation, guilt and anxiety are experienced for the damage enacted in fantasy, according to Klein. To overcome this position, the baby wishes to undo or repair the earlier fantasized destruction of the actual and the internalized mother, states Klein. At the same time it internalizes the damaged and then restored mother, combining these new internalizations as part of the self's inner world (Mitchell, 1986, p. 21).

Insight contained in psychological writings on perinatal experiences, perhaps indicates substantial evidence to support the thesis of distinct parallels between perinatal and postnatal parental experiences influencing the formation of our representations of God, cross-culturally and within a psychodynamic framework.

Epigenesis, Attachment and God Representations

Erikson considers conscience to be:

> "*...that inner ground where we and God have to learn to live with*

> *each other as man and wife. Psychologically speaking, it is where the ego meets the superego; that is, where our self can either live in wedded harmony with a positive conscience or is estranged from a negative one*" (Erikson, 1958, p. 195).

Relevant to exploring the possibilities for pre- and perinatal influences for the formation of God representations, Erikson's psycho-social theory of the life cycle *The Eight Ages of Man*, offers some parallels with postnatal observations (Erikson, 1958, pp. 247-274). Erikson borrows *epigenesis* from embryology, in describing his approach to the psychology of religious development, one [understandably] that he projected across the entire life-span, in Wulff's (1997) view. Erik Erikson, in altering Freud's stage-based theory, emphasizes the essential need for the establishment of trust between mother and infant. It is a time when religious feelings of hope are being created through the care giving in the relationship, inevitably extending from the relationship in the womb. From trust develops hope and faith in a religious tradition or God, according to Erikson. Erikson states that psychological growth proceeds analogously to the development of fetal organ systems.

Lake considers that hope is an expectant attitude of the spirit, bridging the gap between the needy "I" and the source in the "Thou" (Buber's model) with a trust based on previous experiences of trustability which strengthens faith. Faith based on past good experiences reverberates on the circuits of memory, giving "body" or reliable "substance" to the one who is longed for, when absent from sight, according to Lake. The link between the "I" and the "Thou" retains its substantiality by faith, through hope, in Lake's view (Lake, 1966, p. 183). The I-Thou relationship is the healing aspect of the encounter between the individual and analyst, or with our God representation, active in the present.

Each phase of Erikson's model of psycho-social development, represents a crisis to be overcome with the outcome of a virtue: autonomy versus shame—will; initiative versus guilt—purpose; industry versus inferiority—competence; identity versus role confusion—fidelity; intimacy versus isolation—love; generativity versus stagnation—care; and ego integrity versus despair—wisdom. Erikson categorizes the life-span in terms of the social conditions people typically face during different stages of their life, according to Watts *et al*. (Watts, Nye, & Savage, 2002, p. 106). Lake recognizes separations of good and bad, heaven and hell, and so forth, as the result "when the fetus in recoiling from maternal distress, splits

vertically down the body…so this right/left, good/bad, dextrous/sinister division is a basic one" (Lake, 1980, p. 4). Wasdell claims that in all these instances the adult is displacing into the social environment the polarities of idealization, "emanating from primal impingement and presenting in the innate defenses against anxiety" (Wasdell, 1982, p. 18).

James Fowler, influenced by Piaget and Kohlberg organized his stage theory of faith development considering the earliest stages of developmental influence in uterine life. Piaget understood infant development as a "succession of cognitive and emotional separations" (Fowler, 1991, p. 34) where earliest faith achieves an intact sense of self throughout, via the basic interchanges of care; "while it does not determine the course of our later faith, it lays the foundations on which later faith is built" (Fowler, 1991, p. 34). Erikson asserts that "basic trust is the foundation of psychic life but also of religious development" (Erikson, 1963) and conceivably would affect our formations of God representations.

Fowler emphasizes the idea of power relations which are perhaps prevalent from the beginning of fetal life, with dependency on the mother, having influence on our choice of God representations. In relation to prenatal influences on the formation of God representations, Fowler postulates primal or undifferentiated faith as largely inaccessible to inquiry—its beginnings traced to an amniotic symbiosis during pregnancy. After birth, bonding and attachment *continue* with the primary caretaker in the child's experiencing rhythms of intimacy and in the texture of her environment. Balancing this sense of being cared for is the threat of negation, an 'ontological anxiety', initially associated with the passage through the birth canal, states Fowler. Trust, courage, hope and love contend with threats of abandonment, deprivation and inconsistency:

> …much that is important for our lives of faith occurs in utero and in the very first months of life. We describe the form of faith that begins in infancy as Primal faith…This rudimentary faith enables us to overcome or offset the anxiety resulting from separations that occur during infant development (Fowler, 1991, p. 34).

Where there is lack of trust, there is fear—perhaps fear of the mother—which sets the pattern for all future relationships with people and with God, because, according to Lake, one's trust of God has its roots in the infantile trust of mother and father (Lake, 1966, p. 779).

Saint Theresa of Avila states that the obstacle to spiritual progress is the lack of the will to love in response to the love of God (Lake, 1966, p. 779).

Possible parallels between prenatal and postnatal influences raise the question: How are attachment issues relevant to God representations?

Attachment issues and our relationship with God have strong parallels. The Buddha had recognized the power of attachment and sought to recognize, avoid and transcend it. John Bowlby and neo-Freudians such as Harry Stack Sullivan, conceive of the first year of life in terms of interpersonal relationships, meaning more than the orality and expression of pre-genital instincts as articulated by Freud. Bowlby developed ethological attachment theory: "…to discuss the theoretical implications of how young children respond to temporary loss of mother" (Bowlby, 1969, p. xi), including similar Freudian and Kleinian themes of love and hate, anxiety and defense, and attachment and loss.

All the evidence, Bowlby states, points to loss of mother-figure as a dominant variable for pathology in young children: "… the responses of protest, despair and detachment (repressed feelings for mother) … occur when a young child is separated from his mother" (Robertson & Robertson, 1967, 1969, 1973)—"the young child's hunger for his mother's love and presence is as great as his hunger for food," generating loss and anger, clinging and rejection, mourning, defense, trauma, sensitivity, splitting, ambivalence, security, displacement and repression, which can be demonstrated in this thesis (Bowlby, 1969, p. xiii). It is my understanding that all the above specific variables stem from prenatal existence and underlie our structure of God representations.

In drawing on the control systems theory, God representations can be understood in terms of their most important relational dimensions. Bowlby considers the nature of attachment: "… the formation of a bond is described as falling in love, maintaining a bond as loving someone, and losing a partner as grieving over someone," with potential loss of the relationship causing anxiety (Bowlby, 1979, p. 69). Therefore, "God" functions psychologically as an object of attachment or loss; as a relationship. According to Greeley, "each person's religious story is a story of relationships" (Greeley, 1981, p. 18), a deep emotional bond (Kirkpatrick, 1992), and religious emotion expressed in the language of love (Thouless, 1923, p. 132) as parental love: "I led them with cords of human kindness, with hands of love. I was to them like those who

lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them" (Hosea 11: 1-4).

Freud considered religion to be based on an exalted father figure. Kirkpatrick suggests, understandably that religion is conceptualized as an exalted attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 1992). The lasting impact of the umbilical connection, a lifeline between the foetus and mother's blood stream and reconstructed with God, will undoubtedly help us to comprehend the relationship between self and God representations over the life-span. The quality of the early uterine attachment relationship, in my opinion, lays the foundations for the quality of all subsequent attachment relationships and is probably the most important theory for our unfolding developmental understanding of our God representations. Attachment conditions between the foetus and mother, and infant and mother provide crucial relational parallels, enhancing our understanding of religious development and formation of our God representations. Let us now turn to examine possible evidence for the pre- and perinatal origins of the formation of our God representations.

The Question of Pre- and Perinatal Underpinnings of God Representations

"There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable—a naval, as it were that is its point of contact with the unknown" (Freud, 1900, p. 186).

Is There Any Evidence to Support Perinatal Origins of the Formation of our God Representations?

Grof links the deepening of experiential religious experience to a variety of birth-related phenomena: struggling to be born and or of delivery, or as adults reliving aspects of their biological birth, a level of the unconscious referred to by Grof as *perinatal*, pertaining to events that immediately precede, are associated with, or follow biological birth (Grof, 1985, p. 435). In the encounter with birth-death "is the opening up of areas of spiritual and religious experience that appear to be an intrinsic part of the human personality and are independent of the individual's cultural and religious background and programming," claims Grof (1975, p. 95). Grof organized the wide range of experiences of death and rebirth on the perinatal level into four experiential patterns, he named Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPMs), drawing from the biographical level and extensive forms of suffering.

There are links between BPMs and Freudian erogenous areas–the oral, anal, urethral, and phallic zones, in Grof's view (Grof, 1985, p. 101).

In assessing the possible evidence for pre- and perinatal links with God representations, it would be helpful to briefly review Grof's stages of perinatal development, as follows. BPM I is the biological basis of the fetus' symbiotic relationship with the mother which can be undisturbed and ideal or interfered with—physically, biologically, chemically and psychologically (c.f. Appendix IV). Grof claims "… pleasant and unpleasant intrauterine memories can be experienced in their concrete biological form…subjects…can experience an entire spectrum of images and themes associated with it"—nature and cosmic unity would seem to trigger the underlying structure of images of a loving God (Grof, 1985, p. 102). Uterine disturbances would be associated with images of danger, pollution and "insidious demons" (Grof, 1985, p. 102) and "the mystical dissolution of boundaries is replaced by a psychotic distortion with paranoid undertones," claims Grof (c.f. Appendix V; Grof, 1985, p. 105-106). Again, Wasdell questions Grof's assumption of the "ontological validity of the spiritual or transpersonal facet of the perinatal matrices" (Wasdell, 1979, p. 4).

Grof relates psychopathological syndromes to uterine experiences; schizophrenic psychoses with paranoid symptomatology, feelings of mystical union, encounters with metaphysical evil forces and karmic experiences. In naming these syndromes, Grof refers to conditions linked with prenatal experiences in the final fortnight before the birth begins, according to Lake (Lake, 1980, p. C56). Grof makes parallels with positive memories in postnatal life and situations from later life where needs are satisfied. It is possible to identify our God representation with that of a symptom, one that can be viewed at "more distance" and our understanding altered, so modifying the God representation in relation to the self.

According to Grof, the second perinatal matrix describes the onset of biological delivery; the uterine equilibrium is disturbed by chemical signals and contractions. The outliving of these experiences is *cosmic engulfment*, increasing anxiety and an imminent threat, in Grof's view. God representations take the form of a three-dimensional spiral, funnel, whirlpool, being swallowed by a terrifying monster, such as a dragon, leviathan or python, recounts Grof. During Ignatian spiritual direction, I experienced a positive vision of a tunnel of light, one which I immediately identified as a God representation, offering life beyond my experienced struggle, with a sense of being blocked with no exit (c.f. Appendix VI).

Grof claims that these images "show deep experiential logic," for example, the whirlpool symbolizes serious danger for an organism floating in a watery environment (as does the unattached blastocyst in the womb). The symbolic counterpart is the experience of nightmarish no exit or hell, involving a sense of being stuck, caged or trapped with psychological and physical torture, observes Grof (1985, p. 112). Identification with figures of torture may occur: sinners in hell, inmates in asylums, archetypal figures symbolizing eternal damnation. According to Grof, in this matrix there is a negative vision of the world where the individual is subjected to an overwhelming destructive force. Links with Freudian erogenous zones are unpleasant tensions and pain on all levels, considers Grof.

Associated memories from postnatal life are severe psychological traumatizations, emotional deprivation, rejection, threatening situations, repressive family atmosphere, ridicule and humiliation, according to Lake. Grof considers the stark facts of bodily, mental and relational agony, due to negative umbilical influx, become transposed into "mythological, metaphysical and symbolized "re-presentations" of that which is not directly bearable," claims Lake (1980, p. C56). These insights offer a different perspective to our understanding of "psychotic" experiences.

Grof describes experiences in the BPM III, as at the second clinical stage of biological delivery, when the foetus is propelled through the cervix, involving a massive struggle for survival. A death-rebirth struggle ensues with possible demonic episodes, in Grof's view. Related archetypal themes suggested by Grof, are "images of the Last Judgement, the extraordinary feats of superheroes, and mythological battles of cosmic proportions, involving demons and angels or gods and Titans" (Grof, 1985, p. 116). The demonic aspect of this stage of the death-rebirth process can represent difficulties for the therapist and client, according to Grof.

Religious and mythological symbolism draws on systems that glorify sacrifice or self-sacrifice—pre-Columbian sacrificial rituals, visions of crucifixion or identification with Christ, and worship of "the Terrible Goddesses," states Grof. Other images relate to religious rituals and ceremonies, phallic worship, fertility rites, or the classic symbol of the Phoenix whose old form dies in fire and whose new form rises and soars onwards to the sun, during transition from BPM III to BPM IV, in Grof's view (c.f. Appendix VII, Grof 1985, pp. 118-119). Grof claims that this stage religiously represents purgatory and that Freudian erogenous zones relate to physiological activity, bringing sudden relief after prolonged tension (Grof, 1985, pp. 121-122).

Grof relates how BPM IV corresponds to the third stage of the delivery through the birth of the child, when the agonizing birth struggle comes to an end, and from darkness faces the light. The umbilical cord is cut and is now anatomically separate from the mother. This stage represents the resolution of the death-birth struggle, states Grof. The experience of transition from BPM III to BPM IV involves a sense of annihilation of "hitting the cosmic bottom" followed by blinding white or golden light of supernatural radiance, displays of divine archetypal entities, rainbow spectra, or peacock designs, writes Grof (1985, p. 123).

The individual experiences a deep sense of spiritual liberation, redemption and salvation, associated with a surge of positive emotion towards the world and an increased zest for life, according to Grof (1985, 124-125). The divine epiphany can emerge at this stage as an abstract image of God or personified representations from different religions, or encounters with great mother goddesses such as the Virgin Mary, Kali, Isis or Cybele, in Grof's experience (c.f. Appendix VIII). Postnatal links involve memories of personal successes and termination of dangerous situations, i.e. the end of wars or revolutions. Grof considers that terrorism originates from the terror experienced in the birth struggle, as discussed at a Conference in the House of Lords, through invitation of an interfaith group, 'The Dialogue Society', when I addressed the question: What is the cause of terrorism? (August 2006). Freudian erogenous zones are associated on all levels in BPM IV, with satisfaction immediately following activities that release unpleasant tension, according to Grof (1985, pp. 126-127). Wasdell is critical of Grof's unquestioning acceptance of his own assumptions, and over rejecting of the Freudian psychoanalytic school "from which he has departed somewhat tangentially" (Wasdell, 1979, p. 4).

Isabelle Clarke, a clinical psychologist, states that "psychosis and spirituality both inhabit the space where reason breaks down," likened to unitive experiences of the divine and, in my opinion, much like unboundaried "oceanic" experience, as described by Freud (Clarke, 2002, p. 1). James (1902) had also indicated the foundations for a framework of spirituality which recognizes the value of psychotic experiences and expansion of the "margins of consciousness" (p. 226):

> It is evident that from the point of view of their psychological mechanism, the classic mysticism and these lower mysticisms spring from the same mental level, from that great subliminal or transmarginal region of which science is beginning to admit the existence, but of which so little is really known. That region

> contains every kind of matter: "seraph and snake" abide from side by side (James, 1902, p. 419).

According to Lake, Grof focuses at BPM IV on birth as deliverance, subjects speaking of profound relief on arrival, looking then for bonding with the mother to occur, resulting in disappointment (, 1985).

Is There Any Evidence to Support Prenatal Underpinnings of the Formation of Our God Representations?

Contemporaries of Winnicott's were the less well known British analyst F. J. Mott, M. Lietaert Peerbolte in the U.K. and Nandor Fodor in the U.S. who followed leads into uterine life through their patient's dreams. Mott paid much attention to prenatal existence and, in *Creative Consciousness*, he draws a parallel between the developing person at conception and the formation of God representations, stating that the faculties learned after birth are based on social memory, so the lessons learned before birth are drawn from a "storehouse" of organic memory (Mott, 1939, p. 70). The procedure in both cases is the same: "the method of integration does not change, but whereas in one case the integration is one of cells into bodies, in the other it is a question of bodies into religious groups," according to Mott (1939, p. 70).

Frank Lake, a medical missionary to India and a psychiatrist, established the psychodynamic pastoral counselling training project known as the Clinical Theology Association [now called The Bridge Pastoral Foundation]. The work of both Peerbolte (1954, 1975) and Mott are particularly referred to by Frank Lake in his conception of the Maternal-fetal Distress Syndrome. Mott conveys the *blood feeling* of the placenta as *knowledge*, which Lake developed into his theory of umbilical affect, designating the impact of the mother's state of being on the foetus.

Lake's insight highlights the significance and impact of the mother's early emotional experiences during pregnancy. There is mounting scientific evidence that "imprinting" occurs with the person, especially through responses to uterine met and unmet needs becoming imprinted into the cellular structure of the personality, arguably underlying the very early dispositional formation of our God representations.

Positive uterine experience, as described by Lake, may consist of the "flow of the mother's positive, aware, attention giving emotional regard to the developing foetus within her," creating a religious

experience of union with the Absolute, according to Lake (1980, p. C41). Negative experience may consist of the fetus' presence needing recognition by the mother, which, when denied, creates confusion and distress at having no accord in the uterine universe. If Lake is right, the ability of the fetus to respond, creates personality developmental patterns of action and behavior for later formations of God constructs. Yearning at this stage becomes fixated, in Lake's view. The pain of unmet needs is perpetuated in fixated tensions and displaced into "hysterical" conversions and the persecutory confusion becomes the false closure of paranoid projection into subsequent God representations, through splitting, according to Lake (1980, p. C41). It is the mother's countenance that imparts worth to the infant, according to Lake: "that one who could give so much, gives so little is felt to be persecutory. The infant spirit looks out fearfully towards a 'god' whose face is full of scorn at its own, evidently contemptible face" (Lake, 1966, p. 180).

Simone Weil (1909-1943) had articulated affliction in innocence, in its threefold aspects: mental and emotional distress, physical, and involving social degradation. Weil considers affliction as an uprooting of life, like death, made present to the soul by the immediate apprehension of pain constituting the nail, the point is applied at the very centre of the soul (Weil, 1959, p. 77). Lake recounts that it is the innocent upon whom affliction seizes, it utterly overpowers them, branding *every cell* of the body (Lake, 1980, p. T12). Weil's remedy was 'supernatural love', which seems to be where this Jewish teacher of philosophy, felt herself connected with Christ.

It makes sense that the foetus will be imprinted with maternal-paternal-social environment experience at such a vulnerable and helpless stage of development (Lake, 1982). Lake's psychodynamic model of uterine experience appears useful in pointing towards greater understanding of human suffering, although it may be considered unscientific. I think that there are invaluable insights in Lake's work to be developed, especially the psychodynamic and object relations parallels with fetal experience and subsequent contortions of God representations. Lake was writing about the development and impact of fetal emotions for its later life in a way that has not been done before or since; so comprehensively exploring links between blastocyst-fetal-infant developmental affect and the formation of representations of God.

Lake acknowledges how persecutory representations of God occur, tracing their origins to fetal distress. As with Freud's Dr. Schreber, God becomes the persecutor and sadist-in-chief; yet Lake suggests that it is

part of Christian pastoral care to present the face of Christ's persecution to the "persecuted" until they can accept His identification with them, rather than fantasized opposition of them, in Lake's view (Lake, 1966, p. 1134). Chris Barks, a Lakeian psychotherapist, told me that: "Frank Lake's work helped me the most, reliving my Grandmother's experience of losing her fourth child, took the persistent pain in my heart away."

Roger Moss, a psychiatrist, counselor and group facilitator with the Bridge Pastoral Foundation, spoke with me, stating that Lake referred in several places to "Blastocystic Bliss" and the mystical state of union with the Absolute (Lake, 1982, p. 85). Moss says: "For me, this does not deal with representations of God, so much as union with God." However, Moss then refers to *With Respect* where Lake states "what the human mother is to the human infant, Christ is to the human soul. The 'ground of Motherhood' resides in Jesus Christ" (Lake, 1982, p. 266). This passage from Lake, "touches on the thoroughly familiar theme that our parents give us, through their relationship with us, our first inkling of what God may be like," states Moss. Yet how does this show itself before birth? Moss postulates that:

> … our uterine experiences of God are sometimes very positive: love in its many forms kindles our ability to relate to a greater Love still. This love may be communicated through the mother's body, her hormones, her psychic closeness, her spoken and intuitive messages. The father's role is mostly mediated through mother's responses to him (and I have found myself wondering whether this could be a prototype of the mechanism through which Roman Catholics prefer to approach God the Father "through Mary").

Moss continues, referring to more negative experiences:

> Quite often, primal explorations discover more negative representations of God—in the rejection or abandonment by the mother, or in the cruelty of the father, for instance. Having experienced this psychotherapeutically, I certainly have a better understanding of the gradual progress of the people of Israel in their understanding of God through the Biblical story.

Wilhelm Reich (1951) takes Christ as a symbol for the innocence of fetal life; the primal pain from the womb through birth will be inflicted on the growing baby—a kind of emotional "crucifixion." Reich describes

how the baby becomes enmeshed in "armoring"—"the inner qualities become in the formation of a typical character neurosis, entombed behind this armour" (Boadella, 1988, p. 5). Object relations would recognize the central need for ego formation which becomes distorted in the interests of defensive character formation. The "false self," described by Winnicott, protects the true self (Winnicott, 1965). R.D. Laing describes how, through disturbed pre- and perinatal time, collusive symbiotic relationships may re-enact early fetal or infantile patterns, becoming "corded" rather than "bonded" (Laing, 1959); this can be extended to a conceivable God construct at times of transitional identity, in Laing's view.

If it is possible to trace memory back to very early cellular life, and current neurological research is showing that it is, then this storage of experience is evidence for early prenatal pre-dispositional formations of God representations. Lake suggests that the foetus deals with the umbilical maternal input, through *symbolic* resistance. Lake thinks that different parts of the body are used symbolically to express the fetal warfare and images and metaphors determine the outcome "and it is such that the intra-uterine struggle and its defeats or prolonged running battles enter the emotional and perceptual life of adults as profoundly distorting factors" (Lake, 2005, p. 51). To reconcile the whole adult-fetal person the Word of God would have to come in as a reconciling symbol: "as metaphors that carry across reality from the Creator, making reparation to the innocent afflicted creature so as to re-establish trust, the images must be really representative of the personal identification of the Redeemer," according to Lake (2005, p. 51).

One of his biographers, Peters, suggests that Lake's clinical and theoretical developments were considered with skepticism and dismissiveness, mainly for the purported lack of supporting medical and biological evidence for fetal consciousness (Peters, 1989, pp. 161-186). Current medical literature suggests there is a global expansion of medical research focused on stem cells. Dr. Stephen Minger, Director of the Stem Cell Biology Laboratory at King's College in London, said "this is a very, very, young field, most people in the world have only been working with these cells for two to three years. Prior to 2002 if you wanted to do human embryonic stem cell research it was almost impossible to gain access to cells."

Prenatal Religious Affect

In attempting to elucidate the possible evidence for prenatal influences on God representations, it is necessary to explore seemingly intangible areas of research, such as prenatal cellular structure and affect, in attempting to ascertain the likelihood of early imprinting at conception and preconception on consciousness and personality, leading to the formation of God representations.

Writing from a postnatal perspective, Rizzuto states that affect is central to human relations, it is mediated by representational processes, and divine relationships emerge from it (Rizzuto, 2006, p. 25). Affect is arguably the most significant organizer of God representations. Without affect, psychic life does not exist. In relation to this, "when religious scientists measure the wish for closeness to God under the impact of a subliminal separation stimulus, they are measuring not only attachment but also affect. Affect is what makes desire a desire" (Rizzuto, 2006, p. 25).

David Black highlights current knowledge on brain development—responding not to genetic patterning but from the "emotion laden interactions" especially in the first weeks and months of life (Black, 2002, p. 323). Anne Baring, a Jungian analyst, considers that "the crucially important time for the formation of the nervous system and future brain functioning is the first three months of pregnancy and particularly between day 15 and 28 after conception when the neural tube is developing" (Baring, 2005, p. 3). Furthermore, the triune brain system would appear to have possible correlations with conceptions of the trinity in Christianity, according to Baring. We have three brain systems which continuously interact with each other. The reptilian region provides our instinctive survival reflexes, the mammalian our capacity for empathy and group bonding and neo-cortical and frontal lobes provide our capacity for abstract thought, self awareness and consciousness, in Baring's view (Baring, 2005, p. 3).

Sue Gerhardt argues that research on the development of the brain in infants shows neuroscience, psychology and biochemistry developing a better understanding of emotionality and relationality, states Gerhardt, and no doubt there will be huge implications too for the holding environment of the womb. Gerhardt claims that a new understanding is emerging of "human infancy and the development of our 'social brain' and the biological systems involved in emotional regulation" (Gerhardt, 2004, p. 1-2). Gerhardt believes that an individual's foundations are built during pregnancy and in the first two years of life, "when the 'social brain' is shaped and when an

individual's emotional style and…resources are established" (Gerhardt, 2004, p. 3). The state of the social brain of the infant would affect the formation of God representations in complex ways.

David Black describes Edelman's idea that the brain develops aspects of its physical structure in response to the person's experience of the world (Edelman, 1992). At birth the infant's brain holds a multitude of potential synaptic links, connected in relation to the infant's experience of parental holding. Black contends that the persistence of the effects of early patterning may be written in our neurons (Black, 2000, p. 20). Early prenatal attachment patterns may make it impossible, constitutionally, for certain relationships with God to develop (Black, 2000, p. 20).

Nine months of life in the womb, is arguably, a strong environmental influence in terms of the bio-chemicals that are absorbed by the baby, as passed on from the mothers blood supply, in the very earliest gene expression. Along with the sharing of parental genes upon entering the world, there is already an inherent disposition "soft wired" into the brain. This soft wiring is expressed as difference in the ratios of neurotransmitters to each other and this in turn is the result of a difference in the number of proteins in the cell membranes of neurons, affecting personality formation and God representations.

As Baring states, we are aware now that the developing foetus in the womb registers everything the mother is experiencing. The foetus is sensitive to music, especially Mozart apparently, and to the quality of the environment. All external influences affect its heart and nervous system and "the transcendent experience of intense bliss comes from the limbic system; the infant can know these feelings in the womb and in the first few moments of being reconnected with the mother after birth and in close contact with her touch, her voice, her body and her smell throughout infancy," states Baring (2005, p. 4).

Such sensory experiences, as described above, are inevitably the foundation of later feelings of love and trust, joy and ecstasy, which colour the formation of our God representations. It would seem that multidisciplinary parallels between prenatal and postnatal life are offering enhanced understanding of the influences of very early uterine development on the formation of personality structure and therefore of our God representations.

Conclusions

In Western medical thinking there is an increased practice of prenatal screening, testing and the selective abortion of fetuses, likely

to be born with a disability. As Bromage has suggested, one of the reasons for the increasing uptake of prenatal diagnosis is a "method of 'aesthetic normalization, aimed at satisfying the postmodern predilection for faultlessness' but where 'on many levels, difference and the 'other' are generally becoming more accepted" (Bromage, 2006, p. 42). In relation to the Kleinian perspective on the formation of God representations, we have discussed the possibility of acceptance of "good" and "bad" aspects of ourselves, others and for our God representations. Current debate surrounding the sanctity of "life issues" continues, recently demonstrated in the responses of Cardinal Martini; including the beginning of life, artificial insemination, stem cell research, use of condoms, abortion and euthanasia (Martini, 2006, p. 6-7).

From observations of the bonding behavior shown by the new born during the first hours of life:

> …the high degree synchronization and transaction that he shows during interaction with his mother, and the capability that many mothers have of immediately establishing a relationship with him, we can arrive at the conclusion that bonding after birth, described by many authors as a separate entry, is really the continuation of the intrauterine contact that began long before" (Righetti, 1996, p. 55).

Especially noticeable in the mother-fetus relationship is the bond of emotional dialogue that takes place between them.

The uterine experience continues into the postnatal maternal-infant relationship, and has profound influence on how we later represent God, learned through the evidence posited by a range of psychodynamic and humanistic oriented theorists. Lake and others have demonstrated the impact of the mother's health on the foetus, communicated through the umbilical cord, with implications for attachment strengths and weaknesses in the developing child-parent relationship and formation of God representations. Erikson and Fowler, amongst others, recognize how early uterine experience lays the foundations for trust, leading to faith in relation to the formation of God representations.

Although scientific and medical evidence is fast accumulating, the conclusions are still tentative and speculative. This study therefore constitutes a very humble, yet determined, attempt to address prenatal material within the discipline of religious development across the life-span. Freud conceded that there is more continuity between

uterine and postnatal life, applicable to the formation of our God representations, than may have been generally accepted in the history of the psychology of religion:

> There is much more continuity between intra-uterine life and earliest infancy than the impressive caesura of the act of birth would have us believe. What happens is that the child's biological situation as a foetus is replaced for it by a psychical object relation to its mother. But we must not forget that during its intra-uterine life the mother was not an object for the foetus, and at that time there were no objects at all. (Freud, 1925, p. 138)

The conclusions emerging from medical science encourage a revisiting of Freud's tentative and unrefined views on the significance of prenatal and birth experience and how these experiences may impact on the formation of our God representations.

Assumptions outlining mental life can be linked in some meaningful way to religious affective states, as being significant for the formation of our God representations. In this account a basic conceptualization of pre- and perinatal religious development attempts to frame this topic in a psychologically object relational perspective, mainly posited by Rizzuto. Contemporary religious developmental research conceives of the mother-infant dyad as mutually self regulating, proposed by humanistic psychology through Erik Erikson, otherwise suggesting that the child's religious object world is significantly populated by an internal representation of these regulatory processes in relation to our configuration of God.

In contrast to Freud, the important difference between our private and religious behavior was recognized by Erikson, who was interested in woman's "inner space" and the dissimilarity between the private meanings of obsessive-compulsive behavior and religious rituals as commonly shared meanings. In gaining further understanding of religious development through our God representations: "we must accept knowledge from any source that can, with sufficient reliability although not foolproof, give us some inkling about the religiosity of human beings and its psychological foundations," states Rizzuto (2006, p. 27).

With reference to the possible pre- and perinatal aspects of this study, in describing the child's capacity to represent or remember, Rizzuto states that nobody really knows when this begins and that psychoanalysis has struggled with this concept. Furthermore, it can

only be assumed "that if the child is to become a normal human being, his experience must be classified, organized under some biological or psychic process, which sooner or later permits him to represent" (Rizzuto, 1979, pp. 183-4). Rizzuto thinks that "in the first few months of life the child manifests a certain ability to represent," whether present at birth or organized postnatally, she considers that the representing capacity follows two regulatory processes: (1) a constant process of dynamic synthesis for self-integration; and (2) the principle of multiple function. There is reason to conclude that this ability to represent includes configurations of God. Where the breast replaces the umbilical cord as the primal 'oral' cavity, questions of the derivations of postnatal perceptions from their prenatal equivalents as pre-dispositional factors in the formation of God representations arise.

The work of Grof and Lake offers rare and pioneering insights into possible pre- and perinatal experiences, contributing to the formation of our God representations. Lake, a medical doctor and psychiatrist, was mainly talking about how the foetus feels, based on the evidence of intuition and extensive therapeutic observations of their era. Grof and Lake have achieved pioneering work in progressing our understanding of this murky area of uterine life; work that I hope will be taken up and developed, especially in relation to gaining insight into our most personal and private representations of God.

The central question surrounds whether God is recognized in powerful experiences of bliss and paradise, claustrophobia and agrophobia, agony and ecstasy, as mystical or as primal.

This limited exploration of the vicissitudes of the earliest aspects of the maternal-infant relationship, from when the cells are first forming, offers acknowledgement of the impact of the maternal-paternal-social environment on the person at this very early stage of development–at the time of personality formation, structuring our God representations. There is, in my opinion, a wealth of evidence to suggest that from conception onwards, and arguably beforehand, God is present at this very early developmental stage, which is nurtured throughout the uterine experience, and expressed in our later re-presentations of God. Our personality structures begin at conception paralleling the formation of our God representations. This study leaves ample room for considering the significance of pre- and perinatal life braided into future religious development, recalling Allport's words: " … it is up to modern man, the weaver, to take the strands of science and bind them with values and purpose" (Allport, 1950, p. 79). Piontelli's (1992) work *From Fetus to Child* has introduced the possibilities of observing the life of the foetus in the womb, bringing

the pre- and perinatal into the psychoanalytic field.

Juliet Mitchell on a conference: "Sibling Development" at London Centre for Psychotherapy (July 2007) agrees that we need to extend the psychoanalytic framework to include the pre- and perinatal aspects of our development, to aid our understanding of the impact of uterine life and the event of birth across our life-spans. In my opinion Irigaray creatively articulates the origins of our God representations:

> The imaginary and the symbolic of intra-uterine life and of the first bodily encounter with the mother…where are we to find them? In what darkness, what madness, have they been abandoned? And the relationship with the placenta, the first home to surround us, whose halo we carry everywhere, like some child's security blanket, how is that represented in our culture? (Irigaray, 1991, p. 39).

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