

EDWARD EMERY

Idolization, Mourning, and Catastrophe: Transfiguring Religious Fundamentalism

One collision of worlds is between the therapeutic space and the patient who crosses that threshold who is shaped in the assumptions and frameworks of a fundamentalist religious sensibility. I shall elaborate on one case for which this encounter between hermeneutic horizons is exemplary. The intersections between intolerable psychic pain, violence, and its failed containment in the coordinates of a fundamentalist Christian system of belief are discussed. The softening of the therapeutic frame to receive and accommodate a persecutory worldview allows for the patient with a rigid and anti-analytic state of mind to find reception for underlying states of abandonment and destitution.

The transformational framework that takes on meaning for the patient and that also organizes understanding is the vertex of idol and icon with its primary significance taken from the context of Christian spirituality yet also amplified through attributable intersubjective and intra-psychic meanings. Central to how idols and icons work in the mental economy as structural signifiers is the role they play in the work of mourning. Violence is shaped by the force of idolization.

Intolerable mourning that is the founding catastrophe sponsors idolization in the economy of desire. Those caught in the spectral mimesis of a fundamentalist state of mind are characterized by an inability to mourn.

Mourning is kenotic: it pours forth, emptying itself of adhesion to rigid sacrificial models. In what I have described as mourning through the idol there is an anti-kenotic drive toward violent expiation of damage while seeking to reclaim the defaced ghost of a lost ideal. Mourning through the icon, in contrast, opens the density of frozen mourning to the illuminative light of mystery. Mourning through the icon is a weak force whose influence transfigures self states through a web of benevolent witnesses that administer care to damaged linkages.

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