

# **The Use of Religious Imagery for Psychological Structuralization**

by  
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## Summary Description

In this chapter, I explore how the use of implicit or explicit religious imagery *during therapy* may enhance or inhibit psychological structuralization or transformation. Psychological structuralization refers to the distinctive configurations of images of self and other that shape and organize a person's subjective world and give one a cohesive sense of self. Development of one's personality involves the differentiation and integration of self and other representations. This process begins with establishing a sense of body boundaries, moves through a phase of relying on significant others (called self-objects) to provide one with a sense of self, stability, and self-worth. Gradually persons internalize the functions provided by these significant others so that they acquire a solid sense of self. When the personality structure is consolidated, the person can tolerate and integrate diverse and contrasting affective experiences. The person then becomes able to recognize both the positive and negative qualities of others, whose unique feelings and needs are distinct from one's self.

Optimal personality structure allows a person to assimilate new experiences without fearing that his or her subjective world will disintegrate or dissolve. It also allows a person to transform the underlying structure of the self in ways that increases the person's ability to be more fluid (less rigid), articulate, and choiceful in all aspects of one's life.

Through the methodology of case study, this chapter provides a detailed description of the process of structuralization through the use of religious imagery in the case of Bob. Bob's initial imagery of a masked/unmasked man during therapy revealed the core issues to be dealt with in therapy. I then trace the therapeutic process of personality development and transformation through Bob's selection and use of four predominant religious images influenced by the Judaeo-Christian tradition: the Christ light; the Madonna and Child; the Prodigal Son; and Jacob wrestling with the angel. Two important aspects of Bob's faith facilitated his healing process. Bob believed that God wanted him to develop truthful and faithful relationships with God and others, and that God wanted Bob to be genuinely himself. In addition, "Bob trusted that the therapeutic process was a crucial part of his 'spiritual journey' insofar as it would help him deal with those defensive patterns or developmental deficits that prohibited him from attaining and maintaining the quality of relationship with self, others, and God that he so desired." (110) Bob was not disappointed in his trust