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# Oedipus and Jesus: Psychoanalytic Readings of the Crucifixion

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**Abstract:** This paper outlines various theoretical formulations of the Oedipus complex, as elaborated in selected writings of Sigmund Freud, Paul Ricoeur and Hans Loewald and considers how these can be used to provide psychoanalytic interpretations of the death of Jesus as understood in Christian theology. It is argued that Freud's interpretation of the death of Jesus fails to engage with the Trinitarian shape of the orthodox Christian narrative and as a result lacks resonance with believers. This paper therefore turns to the work of Hans Loewald in dialogue with Ricoeur and Freud, to provide a more contemporary alternative reading of the death of Jesus as presented in the Christian tradition. In providing oedipal readings of the crucifixion, this paper does not argue for or against the truth of the Christian narrative, but instead considers what psychological truths or wisdom can be found in the symbolism of the crucifixion.

**Keywords:** crucifixion; Oedipus complex; Freud; Ricoeur; Loewald

## 1. Introduction

This is a theoretical paper that explores how various psychoanalytic models of the Oedipus complex, as elaborated in selected writings of Sigmund Freud (1913, 1939), Paul Ricoeur (1974), and Hans Loewald (2000, 2007), can be used to provide interpretations of the death of Jesus as understood in Christian theology. This paper argues that Freud's reading of the death of Jesus from the perspective of the Oedipus complex fails to engage fully with the Trinitarian shape of the Christian narrative and in doing so does not offer a convincing psychoanalytic reading of the crucifixion that would have resonance for believers. By way of contrast, Ricoeur develops Freud's notion of the Oedipus complex, adopting a more authentic understanding of the death of Jesus as evident in orthodox Christianity. However, Ricoeur's reading fails to capture the key themes of mourning and loss that are so pivotal in Freud's understanding of the Oedipus complex.

In this paper, I therefore turn to the work of Hans Loewald (2000, 2007) and his understanding of the Oedipus complex to provide an alternative reading of the death of Jesus. In recent years, interest in the work of Hans Loewald has been renewed in psychoanalytic circles (Mitchell 2019), and particularly in the psychology of religion (Jones 2001; Stevens 2006). Loewald was a Freudian psychoanalyst who, according to Jones (2001), perceived himself to be not an innovator but rather an interpreter of Freud's ideas. Applications of Loewald's ideas in relation to understanding the death of Jesus on the cross, developed in conversation with the work of Freud and Loewald, will therefore be of interest to many contemporary psychoanalysts and psychologists of religion.

Loewald's inclusive understanding of the Oedipus complex, in dialogue with Ricoeur and Freud, provides a more nuanced and contemporary psychoanalytic reading of the death of Jesus that not only encapsulates themes of mourning and loss, but also retains an orthodox understanding of the death of Jesus. Loewald's understanding of the oedipal complex moves away from the emphasis on the father–son dyad inherent in Freud and Ricoeur's work to a more inclusive understanding of all parent–child dynamics. Applying this contemporary oedipal lens to the death of Jesus, while retaining aspects of Freud's



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original oedipal theory relating to mourning and loss, provides a psychological interpretation of the crucifixion that enables us to transcend the gendered nature of the crucifixion scene. Therefore, the death of Jesus I will argue in this paper exemplifies something about what it means to be human, whether male or female, believer or non-believer. In writing about psychoanalytic interpretations of the crucifixion, it must be acknowledged that the relationship between psychoanalysis and Christianity has not always been an easy one (Meissner 1984). In the light of Freud's legacy, psychoanalysts have tended to perceive religion as a defensive pathology and therefore not a place from which sources of psychological wisdom can be sought or even imagined. This has led Julia Kristeva (2009), renowned post-feminist Lacanian scholar, and notable atheist, to argue that psychoanalysts have far too readily accepted the 'death of God,' and as a result have overlooked the pervasiveness of psychoanalytic ideas in the history of religion. This paper, in providing oedipal readings of the crucifixion, does not intend to argue for or against the truth of Christianity, but instead, in light of Kristeva's observations above, to consider what psychological truths or wisdom can be found in the symbolism of the crucifixion. I hope that by drawing upon the work of Ricoeur and Loewald to interpret the death of Jesus, this paper will provide a challenge to Freud's reductionist interpretation of the crucifixion and offer a richer psychological understanding of the Christian narrative that might speak more powerfully to the believer and the psychoanalyst. This paper will therefore act as an apologetic for the validity of the psychological wisdom inherent in Christian tradition.

## 2. The Death of Jesus within the Christian Tradition

The death of Jesus on the cross is arguably the most significant defining feature of Christianity. As Moltmann (1974), a leading contemporary theologian suggests: 'The death of Jesus on the cross is the centre of all Christian theology. It is not the only theme of theology, but it is in effect the entry to its problems and answers on earth' (p. 204).

In the Christian tradition, the four canonical gospels of the New Testament tell the story of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. These stories are echoed in the Nicene Creed, a statement of belief for Christians all over the world, which declares that Jesus the Son of God became incarnate, was made human, died, was buried, and subsequently rose again to be with God the Father. As the creed states, for our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Christians have traditionally understood the death and resurrection of Jesus in Trinitarian terms. The doctrine of the Trinity holds that there is one God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (McGrath 2008). The second person of the Trinity, God the Son, becomes incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, who is therefore understood as both fully human and fully divine: two natures united in one person. From a Trinitarian perspective, it is God the Son who is crucified on the cross, but not God the Father. This has led theologians such as Moltmann (1972, 1974) to argue that in Trinitarian terms we must understand the death of Jesus as first and foremost an event between God the Father and God the Son. As Moltmann states: 'The dereliction expressed in Jesus' death cry must first of all be understood strictly as an event between Jesus and his Father and as an event between this Father and his Son, and so paradoxically as an event between God and God' (Moltmann 1972, p. 285).

## 3. Sigmund Freud: The Oedipus Complex and the Origins of Religion

'It is with the Oedipus Complex', according to Paul Ricoeur, 'that psychoanalysis stands or falls' (Ricoeur 1974, p. 470). Freud's concept of the Oedipus complex emerged over time, from his letter to Fleiss in 1897, in which he began to sketch out its initial structure, to his paper on the *Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex* in 1924. The Oedipus complex is built upon the idea that during the phallic stage of psychosexual development, the boy's sexual feelings toward his mother begin to intensify and he begins to experience

his father as a rival for his mother's affections. The son fears that if he acts upon his desires toward his mother then his rivalrous father will castrate him. Consequently, he experiences hatred and rivalry toward the father for barring access to his mother. The son therefore desires to kill his father, both to eliminate him as a rival and to protect himself from the threat of harm. Resolution occurs when the boy abandons his desire for his mother and identifies with his father's authority, which forms the nucleus of superego and in turn reinforces the incest taboo (Freud 1924).

In Freud's writings, the Oedipus complex and the origins of religion are tightly entwined. In *Totem and Taboo* (Freud 1913), Freud discussed the characteristics of totemism among primitive people and argues that the practices of totemism arose out of a need to create a substitute father (i.e., the totem) and manage the repressed desires of the oedipal complex. Therefore, according to Freud, the two taboos found in totemism (the prohibition around the killing and eating of the totem animal, and the taboo against incestuous relationships within the tribe) corresponded to the repressed desires of the Oedipus complex: to be rid of the father and to gain exclusive access to the mother (Westerlink 2014).

To explain the origins of totemism and the need for a father substitute, Freud (1924, 1939) draws upon Darwin's primal horde theory and asserts that in prehistoric society there was a primal horde with a despotic father who had possession of all the women in the tribe and banished his sons when they reached a certain age. The band of brothers rose up to kill the father, motivated by sexual envy, greed, and hatred. The primal father had been both feared and envied by the brothers, and in killing and devouring the father, they came to identify with him and acquired a portion of his strength. However, following the murder of the father, the sons felt terrible guilt and remorse for killing their beloved father and sought atonement for their guilty deed. Totemism, therefore, served as a partial attempt to bring about a reconciliation with the father and, with its substitute father, helped them to ease guilt and disguise the expression of repressed wishes to dispose of the father.

At the center of Freud's understanding of the origins of religion, then, is a collective traumatic event: a primordial patricide (Zvi Lothane 2012). This killing of the primal father has embedded in the human psyche a long-lasting memory of a traumatic event, along with feelings of guilt and remorse, which is passed down from generation to generation and forms what Perelberg (2015) argues is the basis of the oedipal complex. But regardless of the brothers' remorse toward the father and the attempt at reconciliation, the driving forces of religion—namely, the sons' sense of guilt and their rebelliousness—never became extinct, but continue in disguised forms in various religious traditions.

#### 4. Freud and the Death of Jesus

According to Freud (1913), the death of Jesus is simply a replay of the collective traumatic event and accompanying oedipal ambivalence that forms the foundation for all religious traditions. For Freud, the death of Jesus in the Christian tradition frees humanity from original sin and from misdeeds against God the Father. Such need to be free from original sin, he postulates, can only be understood in the light of the law of talion, in which the murder of one human can only be atoned for by the sacrifice of another human life. Therefore, the blood sacrifice of Jesus confirms there must have been an earlier murder, namely, the killing and devouring of the primal father. The sacrificial offering of Jesus to God by humanity is therefore an implicit acknowledgment and atonement for the original 'guilty primeval deed' (Freud 1913, p. 216). Furthermore, Jesus' celibacy is a further confirmation of an act of atonement. The rebellion of the original band of brothers against the father was motivated by their desire to access the women of the tribe, and in his renunciation of women Jesus is again acknowledging and atoning for their guilt.

Freud continues to argue that the reference shown toward Jesus following his death demonstrates how Jesus comes to be understood to be God, thus replacing the religion of the father by a religion of the son. This is evident for Freud in the Eucharistic feast, which he sees as a continuous 'fresh elimination of the father, a repetition of the guilty

deed' (Freud 1913, p. 217). Thus, in Christianity and the Eucharist in particular, the killing of the father and the triumph over him is celebrated. Freud's reading of the death of Jesus therefore encapsulates the dual nature of this oedipal ambivalence: Jesus carries the guilt humanity bears for killing the primal father and the desire to make recompense for this; and Jesus also becomes God, which provides an outlet for humanity's continued resentment of the father (Ricoeur 1974).

Freud's reading of sacrifice has some affinity with the satisfaction model of the atonement (i.e., that Jesus redeemed humanity through his sacrificial death on the cross) evident in Christian theology. However, the emphasis he places on the killing of the Father rather than the Son misreads the Trinitarian framework of the Christian narrative (Orgel 2011), in which it is understood that it is God the Son who suffers and dies on the cross and not God the Father. As a result, Freud also misses the opportunity to consider an oedipal reading of the death of Jesus in which the different roles both father and son play in the Christian narrative are fully accounted for. For such a fuller reading of the Christian tradition, I will turn to the work of Ricoeur and Loewald.

### 5. Paul Ricoeur and the Oedipus Complex

In his essay *Fatherhood: from Phantasm to Symbol* (Ricoeur 1974, pp. 468–99), Ricoeur develops Freud's notion of the Oedipus complex to provide an alternative reading of the death of Jesus. For Ricoeur, the Oedipus complex is built upon the projection of infantile omnipotence, in which the father is perceived to be all-powerful. As a result, what emerges, he suggests, is a 'phantasm' or image of a father who seizes power that he is unwilling to share with the son. This phantasy creates a dynamic of fear and rivalry between the father and son, which forms the basis of the castration complex. Thus, Ricoeur asserts that complex is dissolved when the son, on a psychological level, kills the father, but then subsequently internalizes and identifies with him. Ricoeur's understanding of the Oedipus complex, therefore, follows a similar trajectory to that of Freud in which rivalry with the father, the fear of castration, and the importance of identification with the father are foregrounded. Identification is therefore only sustained through having killed the omnipotent father.

Ricoeur parts ways with Freud when he introduces the notion of mutual recognition and the role of the 'real' or 'mortal' father in helping to navigate a successful resolution of the oedipal complex. For Ricoeur, for the oedipal complex to be resolved, the father that the son kills must be the phantasy of the omnipotent father, or what has been termed the 'narcissistic' father (Perelberg 2015), rather than the 'real' or 'mortal' father. In taking back the projection of omnipotence, and killing the narcissistic father, the son comes to recognize the real, mortal, and fallible father and seek identification with him.

However, in the process prior to identification, Ricoeur notes that the relationship between father and son has been harmed—one by murder and the other by remorse. A full resolution of the Oedipus complex therefore occurs when each acknowledges the harm done to the other. For this mutual recognition to occur, the son needs to destroy the omnipotent phantasies he holds toward the father, and the father must sacrifice some of his own authority over the son (Oliver 1997). For Ricoeur, the goal and outcome of the Oedipus complex, therefore, is one of mutual recognition, in which the father and son both play a part in instituting a more realistic image of fatherhood.

### 6. Mutual Recognition and the Death of Jesus

According to Ricoeur, for those who recognize the Oedipus complex as instinctual to humanity (in which category he includes himself), then understanding the death of Jesus as a return of the phantasm of the paternal murder as postulated in Freud's interpretation, together with a vow of submission to the father, and the rebelliousness of the sons, is a valid reading of the crucifixion. From this perspective, Jesus' death is understood as a murder, committed as the result of omnipotent desire that is immortal. In Ricoeur's reading here the father is considered an omnipotent figure who, once demolished, becomes internalized

and immortalized. Furthermore, if we see the death of Jesus in terms of punitive sacrifice or penal substitution (as has often been done in the history of the church) then, Ricoeur suggests, this Freudian reading of the crucifixion is right. Humanity is guilty of something (namely, the murder of the father), and needs to be punished and make recompense.

However, Ricoeur suggests that psychoanalysis in conjunction with Christianity can offer an alternative reading of the death of Jesus that suggests a different image of the Father and a different mode of atonement. This alternative reading of the death of Jesus rests on the notion that the crucifixion is not essentially a murder, as postulated by Freud, but the death of the 'suffering servant' or 'the just one.' The murder of the father, as seen in Freud's interpretation, is replaced in this reading by the willing sacrifice made by the son. The death of Jesus therefore moves from a being 'killed by' to 'dying for.' To support his argument that Jesus was not given as a sacrifice to pay for the sins of humanity, but chose freely to give of himself, Ricoeur quotes the Gospel of John (chapter 10, verse 18), in which Jesus is reported to say: 'No one takes my life. I give it freely'. The reading of the crucifixion presented here by Ricoeur therefore is not one of a murder but of an extreme form of self-abandonment and giving.

Ricoeur argues that Freud was right in holding that 'Jesus by taking sin onto himself has himself become God at the side of the father and is thus set in his place' (p. 493). If this is so, however, Ricoeur suggests we need to recognize that Jesus reveals 'a dimension of the father to which death by compassion belongs primordially' (p. 493). While we can therefore talk about the death of the father, this death is of a phantasm of omnipotence and a return of the repressed, involving 'a supreme dispossession of self, on the level of the most advanced symbol' (p. 493). For Ricoeur, therefore, both the son and the father die on the cross, but in different ways. With regard to the father, what is killed on the cross is a false image of God as an omnipotent father. In this respect, following Hegel, Ricoeur argues that to pronounce 'God is dead' is not to declare atheism, but to declare the death of an image of a transcendent, all-powerful God. In the suffering and death of Jesus, the phantasy of the omnipotent God is destroyed, and in place of this childhood image of protection and rescue a more realistic or mature image of a compassionate and immanent father emerges. Thus, God the Father becomes manifest in God the Son as he takes his place at the right hand of the Father.

In Ricoeur's reading of the Oedipus complex and the death of Jesus, therefore, a new image of God the Father emerges, in which God the Father can be seen free from childhood phantasy and projections. In the death of Jesus, we can see how we might relate to our own primary caregivers, and how we should go about the separation process. Thus, Ricoeur tries to disentangle the death of Jesus from theological models of the atonement such as penal substitution, and draws closer to an exemplarist reading, in which the life and death of Jesus via compassion point to a new image of God and provide a model that humanity can emulate. In Ricoeur's reading of the crucifixion, however, there is no mention of human sin, guilt, or loss, or of the need to make recompense, all of which are central features of the Freud's understanding of the Oedipus complex and his interpretation of the death of Jesus. Furthermore, Ricoeur does not explore what the potential psychological ramifications are of killing the image of the omnipotent father God. When Jesus cries on the cross 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Gospel of Matthew, chapter 27, verse 46), for example, one could argue that Jesus is experiencing the absolute loss of the father, and expressing the pain of mourning. In Freud, this loss of the primal father is clearly acknowledged and mourned. But in Ricoeur's work, there appears to be no room for mourning the father who has been killed. It is at this point that the work of psychoanalyst Hans Loewald, emphasizing the themes of guilt and mourning as central features of the Oedipus complex, which can help us understand the psychology of the crucifixion better.

## 7. Hans Loewald and the Oedipus Complex

In his paper *The Waning of the Oedipal Complex*, Hans Loewald (2000) argues that the essence of the Oedipus struggle is the desire for emancipation from parental authority.

In seeking this emancipation, he asserts, it is necessary to murder the parents (commit parricide) and destroy them as 'libidinal objects' (Hans Loewald 2000, p. 241). What drives the Oedipus complex then is not simply the fear of castration, as suggested in the reading of the Oedipus complex in Freud, but the desire for emancipation and the emergence of the self as an autonomous and separate human being (Ogden 2006). For the self to gain autonomy, the act of parricide must take place (Levy 1995).

This search for emancipation and the resulting parricide, according to Hans Loewald (2000), produces feelings of guilt for the child, whether male or female. These feelings of guilt need to be experienced and tolerated in order for separation from parental figures to occur and for the individual to master the Oedipus complex. Therefore, a central task of the Oedipus process is not only to be able to murder the parents but also to be able subsequently to atone 'for destroying them in fantasy' (Chodorow 2003, p. 904). Such atonement for parricide is achieved via the process of identification with and internalization of the parental figures. In the process of internalization, parental authority lives on in the formation of the superego, and parental figures become immortalized. This leads Loewald to state that paradoxically the internalization process not only documents parricide but 'at the same time is its atonement and metamorphosis' (Hans Loewald 2007, p. 241). Thus, atonement is achieved via the parental figures' continued presence in the psyche. However, Loewald stresses (2007), successful internalization of lost objects and atonement can occur only when one has fully mourned the loss of these objects and experienced the associated feelings of guilt. What we also see in the work of Loewald his understanding of the oedipal complex is the move away from a father-son dyad to a parent-child understanding of separation and development.

Hans Loewald (2000) recognizes that seeking to separate from parents is not a one-way process, and parents themselves are impacted upon by the psychic experience of being 'killed.' Parental figures can therefore be ambivalent and resist the process of separation, as Loewald elaborates: 'In an important sense, by evolving our own autonomy, our own superego, and by engaging in none incestuous object relations, we are killing our parents. We are usurping their power, their competence, their responsibility for us, and we are abnegating, rejecting them as libidinal objects. In short, we destroy them in regard to some of their qualities hitherto most vital to us. Parents resist as well as promote such destruction no less ambivalently than children carry it out' (Hans Loewald 2000, p. 242). This leads Ogden (2006) to argue that the resolution of the Oedipal complex also lies in the desire not just to atone for parricide but also the ability 'to restore to the parents their (now transformed) authority as parents' (Ogden 2006, p. 7). Thus, in the process of identifying with and internalizing parental authority, the parents continue to live on, and the guilt the child feels for seeking emancipation and committing the act of parricide is appeased.

Central to Loewald's understanding of the Oedipus complex is his contention that one cannot appease the guilt experienced unless one has fully mourned the loss of the parents and relinquished infantile objects. In order to fully internalize parental figures, and successfully navigate the Oedipus complex, one needs to be able to engage in what he calls 'true mourning' (2007, p. 1118). This process of mourning allows for the formation of the superego, a process of separation and identification to have occurred resulting in internal stabilization.

## 8. Loewald and the Death of Jesus

Hans Loewald did not write at length on the death of Jesus. In his paper, *Internalization, Separation, Mourning and the Super-ego* (Hans Loewald 2007), however, Loewald makes a brief reference to how he perceives the crucifixion to provide a symbol *par excellence* of the process of internalization. Thus, according to Loewald: 'Christ is not only the ultimate love object which the believer loses as an external object and regains by identification with Him as an ego ideal. He is, in His passion and sacrificial death, the exemplification of complete internalization and sublimation of all earthly relationships and needs' (Hans Loewald 2007, p. 1117). In this respect, Loewald hints at a Freudian reading of the cross, with Jesus as

father to the believer, and is open to the same criticisms that were levied at the limitations of the work of Freud discussed above.

Nevertheless, Loewald's work can also be developed, in light of some of Ricoeur's comments, to help us explore how a Trinitarian reading of the death of Jesus can provide a symbolic representation for the processes involved in working toward a successful resolution of the Oedipus complex. First, drawing upon Ricoeur's exegesis of the life of Jesus as outlined in the Gospel of John, we can argue that Jesus as Son was not sacrificed by God the Father, but chose freely to give his own life (Gospel of John, chapter 10, verse 18: 'No one takes my life. I give it freely'). If this is the case, then in the process of becoming incarnate, the Son chose to separate from the Father. Jesus therefore has not killed God the Father by 'murdering' him, as suggested by Freud (1913) in *Totem and Taboo*, but by leaving him. As Loewald argues, although in separating we do not intend to kill our parents, nevertheless we come to do so. On the cross, therefore, Jesus experiences the loss of God the Father, and thereby embodies and symbolizes the suffering that is the death of one's parents.

Second, in the light of Loewald's ideas with regard to various stages in the resolution of the Oedipus complex, it is possible to argue that the cross symbolizes Jesus' experience of separation from God and associate mourning. I have already mentioned above Jesus' cry on the cross: 'My God, My God why have you forsaken me?' (Gospel of Matthew, chapter 27, verse 46). Some theologians have argued that this cry from Jesus is an indication that he felt abandoned by God the Father (Alwyn 2016). On the cross, therefore, Jesus is not just suffering physical pain and humiliation, but also a profound experience of the absence and loss of God the Father. He is 'truly' mourning the father. Loewald argues that part of the separation process requires mourning to take place. We need to be able to acknowledge our loss in order to separate out from the parent and in turn internalize them.

Third, however, in order for the Oedipus complex to be resolved, Loewald argues that the father must agree to relinquish his authority. God the Father, therefore, must assent to the sacrifice of the Son, for separation to occur and mutual recognition to be reached. Therefore, Jesus, as the Son of God, can only become God if God the Father does not bar access to his authority. In this reading, therefore, a symbol of fatherhood emerges that is based upon mutual recognition and equality, and not on the image of the 'murdered' or 'narcissistic' father. This concurs with Ricoeur's reading above.

Fourth, following Jesus' death as traditional Christian doctrine teaches, Jesus is resurrected from the dead and ascends to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. As the ascension in orthodox Christian doctrine, Jesus does not replace God the Father but becomes his representative. In this sense, the resurrected and ascended Jesus can be seen as internalizing God the Father, confirming Loewald's view that once separation occurs, we internalize our parents and they become immortalized. In this respect, one could argue that through his incarnation, death, and resurrection, Jesus as Son has both simultaneously killed and immortalized God the Father and in turn made atonement for the sins of humanity.

In summary, therefore, in the light of Loewald's understanding of the Oedipus complex, it is possible to argue that both God the Father and God the Son die in different ways on the cross, but that through the process of suffering and mourning they are both subsequently, and in different ways, resurrected and immortalized. Drawing on Loewald and Ricoeur, we therefore might say that Jesus' death on the cross provides a symbol for the resolution of the Oedipal complex, in which Jesus is perceived not as passively submissive to the will of the Father, since he gives of himself freely (Ricoeur 1974), but as one who actively chooses to experience the pain of separation as a necessary means for psychological growth. In this way, Loewald is correct that Jesus provides a symbol *par excellence* for how we engage in the process of separation, mourning and loss, to ensure a successful resolution of the Oedipus complex.

## 9. Summary

Moltmann (1972, 1974) argues that the death of Jesus on the cross is first and foremost an event between God the Father and God the Son. In drawing upon oedipal readings of the crucifixion in this paper, I have therefore focused specifically on the relationship between father and son (or parent and child) as understood in the writings of Sigmund Freud, Paul Ricoeur and Hans Loewald. I have argued that Freud's reading of the crucifixion can be criticized for failing to engage with the Trinitarian shape of the Christian narrative and, in doing so, lacks resonance for the believer and fails to provide a rich model for understanding the resolution of oedipal desires.

In contrast, Ricoeur argues that the crucifixion kills off the 'omnipotent' or 'narcissistic' primordial father figure, as outlined in *Totem and Taboo*, and reveals a God of love through the example of the Son, who is not 'murdered by' but 'suffers for.' Ricoeur, therefore, is interested in developing what he perceives as a mature image of God freed from infantile projections of omnipotence, and thus opens the way to see the cross as offering a potential model for the resolution of the Oedipus complex. What is missing from Ricoeur's analysis, however, is the notion of mourning or the need to make recompense for the psychic killing of the omnipotent father, which is pivotal in Freud's understanding of oedipal complex. In this respect, his work fails to appropriate some of Freud's key ideas regarding the ambivalence of love and hate we feel toward the father, and thus toward any God image.

In Loewald's formulation of the Oedipus complex, we see him recapitulating the themes of guilt, remorse, mourning, hate, and the need for recompense that are detailed in the work of Freud. However, for Loewald, psychological growth comes to all of us via the search for autonomy and the need psychologically to kill one's parents in order to be able to separate from them. In our desire to separate, we feel a deep sense of guilt and remorse, and seek to atone for what we have done. For Loewald, the internalization of the father is therefore an act of atonement. Thus, in killing the parents we subsequently resurrect them into our psyche and they become immortalized. In this way, we can perceive the relationship between God the Son and God the Father to go through a similar trajectory. As with Ricoeur, Loewald's work thus points toward a reading of the cross that offers a possible resolution of the Oedipus complex.

Both Loewald's and Ricoeur's readings of the crucifixion also open up the possibility that God the Father and God the Son are both affected, though differently, by the event of the crucifixion: the Son by leaving the Father and offering himself freely as a form of sacrifice for humanity, and the Father by experiencing the sacrifice of separation from the Son. In contrast with Freud, in whose work on the Oedipus complex there is no reference to the father being affected by the son, both Loewald and Ricoeur therefore open up a possible dialogue with theologians such as Moltmann (1974), who likewise challenge classical notions of the divine impassibility of God the Father.

By investigating the theoretical application of these three oedipal perspectives on the death of Jesus, it has not been my intention to replace theological readings with psychological ones, or to argue for or against the truth of the Christian narrative. It has been my aim to show how the symbol of the cross is open to a rich tapestry of multilayered interpretations that can speak to our psychic lives and help us understand the perils involved in the process of separation from primary caregivers, to assumptions regarding moral development in which we come to recognize fully the existence of the 'other.' Jesus' death on the cross, in the light of these psychoanalytic readings, teaches us something about what it means to be fully human.

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