M. Eliade, in his *The Sacred and The Profane*, reiterates that for primitive man, for myth making man, for homo religiosus, the search for and response to the sacred is a search for the real, the existent, or in more contemporary terms the Actual. This is not, however, an exclusive characteristic of the primitive mind, for every reflective man seeks what is to him the most real -- some type of definitive experience, e.g., that of unity, of love, renewal.

Existentially we have a combination of these pursuits. Rarely is this seeking structurally organized; rather it seems man experiences a yearning force impelling him to overcome the divisions of reality. In philosophy this has led him to struggle with reality in terms of the one and the many, matter and spirit, or creature and creator. In mystical experience he wrestles with light and darkness, love and hate. In psychoanalytic terms the conflict is between life instinct and the death instinct, conscious awareness or neurotic repression.

However we conceptualize the phenomena it is evident that there are many avenues of development which reflect man's struggle with the complex, structurally defective world in which he lives. Contemporary western technology, for example, is one such
response (and from one perspective a rather effective one for healing some of the divisions within man's world) More historically in evidence is the response of religion. And here we may note the obvious fact that particular religions and theological reflections arise from particular historical experiences (communal and individual) of the complexity and divisions within man and the world.

For the purpose of the present article I should like to study some of the implications and ramifications of process models within Catholic theology. The primary purpose of this is my belief that as long as we attempt to structure the concept of God, for instance, in intellectual models which do not reflect contemporary experience — for instance in Weltenauhuung's which stress the 'permanent given' rather than the 'evolutionary developmental' we do a disservice to both the reality of God and to the intellectual dignity of contemporary western man.

Perception and Structures

Can process models help in understanding a metaphysical insight which has gained particular attention recently, namely conceptualizing being as personal, historical and relational? In order to understand the import of such a sentence we have to know the questions which prompt such an inquiry. Some of these questions are: Is history, and human history in particular, truly significant — a source of real creativity and novelty? Or is it, to put it in admittedly gross terms, some type of
cinematic supernatural rerun -- i.e., new to man but known to God? Again, is the personal dimension of reality which man is, a source of responsibility and self-determination, and here we mean use of responsibility and self-determination which must, of necessity, affect the absolute being himself? Or, is man's responsibility basically an act of conformity -- a conformity involving discipline and commitment but, nevertheless, a conformity? Again, is tragedy in the world ultimately to be attributed to the phenomenon of sin and the mystery of God (a mystery because the question implies a notion of God as all good, all knowing and all powerful)? Or, is tragedy, and here we are involved in one of the crucial insights of a process view in all its manifestations, the necessary concomitant of a reality which is in operational struggle with structural defects, the working through of which will bring completion to both the absolute and the dependent being? Finally, pervading all of these questions is the issue: Is God truly related to and, in some sense, dependent on creation? Or, is the more traditional scholastic assertion the answer: Creation is truly related to and dependent on God, but God is not essentially dependent on or related to the world? From this last question we can see that at least two operational theological models, among many, are possible -- a scholastic one, and a process one. In attempting to answer some of the questions posed above, there is no intention of provoking or presenting a footnote debate on Whitehead's theory of reality versus Thomas' conceptualization of being. Such debates can be extremely
valuable -- yet for our purposes a few conclusions, within a process framework, to some questions raised within the Catholic theological community is all that will be attempted. If we listen with the third ear we can sense that these and like questions are being asked in many circles. The following observations reflect an individual synthesis.

**Process Models**

What are some of the theological ramifications of the use of process models in speaking about God and man? Minimally, I believe, we can note the following. Reality, as it confronts man and reflects man, is in process -- a process which is a working through of structural defects. For our purposes we can consider these structural defects operative in the area of man's physical life, his psychic life, as well as the complexity included under the category of his socio-economic-political life. (The universal givenness of this structural defect suggests a possible understanding of what religious language calls original sin.) The contemporary western angle of vision however sees the areas of human experience not as an eternally cyclic phenomenon reflecting the inherent ambiguity and limitations of creation, but rather as evidence of the capacity for growth pointing to new states of actualized development and potential. That men confirm in their own acts the structural limitations and defects surrounding them is no secret (personal sin). That we live in no utopian world, that there are many miscarriages, and that the more complex the level of achievement the more possibility for
abortion -- no one

With all this, and much of it is indeed tragic, man today is aware that he has much and can advance toward more complete control of his physical body; he is more dimly aware that he can exorcise the spirits of his psyche -- or in Freud's terms, bring about that where Id was, Ego shall become. Finally, and perhaps most confusedly and apprehensively grasped is the awareness that universal social justice and creative political stability are workable -- at least as realistic ideals. Now we may ask, is this struggle to overcome structural defects significant? Does it involve creativity and real novelty? It seems that if we have serious respect for man's activity, for the significance of his life, for the responsibility he has in using power, then we must answer in the affirmative. And yet can this process of history, as we have briefly outlined it, be a reality apart from God? That is, is it the work of grace or of man?

Recent teaching on the theology of grace has reconceptualized it in terms of personalist categories. There is no need to summarize these insights here. In addition to grace as reflecting the personal relation between God and man, we may note that grace also implies in view of the struggle with the defective structures in which man lives the achievement of Christian meaning in the world. That is, the more integrated man becomes in his psyche, the more conscious, the more free, the more creative, the more responsibility man exercises, then the more meaning in his life -- and, consequently, the more witness to grace is given. Within such a process framework we may note that the tragedy, the limitations, the sorrow that follows all men do not have to be causally
reduced to a malignant force ready to entrap man at each turn; nor on the other hand need there be the most cerebral and at times mystical flights in order to balance these realities with a God who is all good, all knowing, and all powerful. Admittedly, for some, there can be great consolation and a manifestation of faith in accepting personal tragedies as somehow meaningful within God's all knowing and omnipotentially beneficial providence. Many others, however, find such a model of God at variance with their human experience and sentiment.

Divine Attributes

Scripture speaks of God as he in whom we live and move and have our being; of God who is, who was, and who is about to be. In the light of such thoughts, and developing some of the implications of the process views mentioned above we may consider that human history and man's creative responsibility, as they encounter God, reflect a mutuality of influence: God toward creation and creation toward God. The religious word -- grace -- tries to reflect that awareness of religious man to a particular experiential dimension of human history. Thus when St. John tells us that God is love and when western theology reflects on the phenomenon of grace and speaks of uncreated (God's personal presence) and created (man's evoked response) grace, what is not realized, at times, is that in these conceptual terms what is being presented reflects not only an intellectual analysis but, more significantly, an experiential model.
What do we mean by an experiential model? A married man's love for his wife is an experiential dimension of his total human reality. One does not and can not validate, in terms of intellectual proof, the reality of such love. Rather, one can grow in maturity so that one is able to experience this particular type of human realization and, once this is had, the experience itself becomes a model enabling further growth and insights to be had. On reflection, we are aware that what is achieved is an experiential model primarily and not an intellectual or conceptual model. This brings to mind the evocative insight of Martin Buber that "all life is a meeting" -- if so, we must grow so as to be able to hear the other in all the many levels of our being.

Therefore when we say that grace is Christian meaning in the world we are saying that the process of completing and working through of the structural defects to a more integrated and meaningful creation is evidence of grace, is evidence of God's personal involvement with creation and that this dimension of reality -- which religions language mirrors -- is not in conflict or in opposition to the realization that man struggles with the world around him and is in travail in his birth pains for a world which is coming to be. In fact, it is precisely because God (Yahweh) is he who is always with us and because human creativity and responsibility are too real that we must speak of a mutuality of influence between God and man.

Conceptualizing within a process model we may note that if we understand the notion of mutuality of influence and all that is consequent upon evolutionary novelty in the world, we must necessarily say that the Attributes of omnipotence and omniscience are modified. (A modification
which from a process philosophical view is intellectually tenable and from a psychoanalytic point of view more psychologically viable.) To use a limited analogy in reference to God's omniscience, we may say that a father knows that his son will grow to maturity some day and, given a perceptive parent, he may be able to delineate not only the goal of maturity but also his son's particular character traits; yet, there is no knowledge of all the specific concretizations which will lead to this generic goal.* The biblical attributes of immanence and transcendence are normative for a christian concept of God. And within a process model framework when we speak of God as immanent in creation, we reflect religious man's awareness of God's personal presence; when we speak of God as transcendent, we reflect our awareness that we live in a meaningful world, i.e., one not destined to absurd abortion. More precisely, transcendence is, in religious awareness, the phenomenon of directionality in the process of history. The difference between evolution and chaos is the presence of developmental order. The immediacy of confrontation with ourselves and with the world around us is the source from which we can grasp the presence of the non-immediate, the non-immediate which enables there to be and for us to perceive the distinction between evolution and chaos. This presence of the non-immediate is the transcendent in our midst. It is, to use another concept, the presence of what we may call "positive actuality"; i.e. that which enables man to see and to respond to the objectively and subjectively

*It seems to this writer that the classic dispute in the theology of grace between the Molinists and the Bannesianists is impossible of solution because of the limitation of the very models which are employed.
meaningful. The notion of positive actuality as it applies to some primitive religions will be found in appendix A. For purposes of the present study we may note that "process" is where contemporary western man experiences positive actuality and thus experiences God's transcendence. (For the ancient Egyptian it is found in The Permanent, for the Zoroastrian in the Good and for those who followed the mystery cults it was found in Personal and Cosmic Renewal.) We may also consider in passing that in a process model the virtue of hope can become much more significant, for it is rooted in the very fibre of human endeavor, and yet it looks beyond. The focal point for this hope is Christ. He who has come and he who is a promise of what is to come. Christ mirrors the level of fulfillment, the goal destined for man -- and as such, is certainly known to God; yet all the particular personal concretizations toward that goal come forth and can be fully known only in the uniqueness of the creativity of the historical moment.

Models are, at best, a disconcertingly obscure approach to the reality they try to grasp. What we have attempted to outline above should not take on the image of a limping god -- depending on the foot of creation for support. If the reality of God is encountered by man as a dimension of his experience involving both conceptual and experiential models to articulate that encounter, then to modify divine omniscience and omnipotence is not to be impious but rather to affirm the totality of existence in which man participates and which takes its most profound significance from the
fact that it unfolds not only the phenomenon of man but also the further actualization of God himself. With this in mind we may note that the parousia, when God will be all in all as St. Paul states, is not a finalization of the process of growth. Rather it would seem to be more meaningful if this reality were seen as a resolution, on one level of existence, of the structural defects which encompass man, and by force of such completion, an arrival at a new mode of process and growth.

**Process, Truth and Freedom**

Having presented, within the framework of metaphysical reflection, the possibility of a modification in conceptualizing some of the attributes of God, one is able to approach the conceptualization of truth by way of process models. The crucial point of reference in this discussion is not that truth is simply relative, either in the sense of sheer expediency as in the more popular understanding of pragmatism, or that it is simply situational, again as that term applies to the more popular presentations of situational ethics. Rather the search after truth -- and here we mean not only on a conceptual level but also in the sense of an experiential witness, which last point is the precise issue in moral theology -- this search can only be understood in the light of historical development with all the implications which such a process implies. To recognize the historical relativity of one's situation and one's conceptualization and formulation of truth is the only guarantee that one
continue to live with an appreciation of truth in any absolute sense. To claim to possess truth in an absolute manner so that future development would be superfluous is to effectively foreclose any meaningful insight into reality.

If we attempt to understand morality as an experiential witness to truth, then the question of freedom presents itself. Here one should avoid two extremes: an understanding of and apparent overestimation of freedom which flavors much contemporary existentialist thought, an emphasis which seems to imply that man is radically free to create his own structures and possibilities; or, on the other hand, the approach evidenced in behaviorist psychology, which states that most is determined and freedom minimal. One approach which seems particularly viable is reflected in the work of Eric Erikson and others in the area of ego psychology within the psychoanalytic school; namely, that there is a concurrence of free and determined aspects in man. Thus, for example, a liberating synthesis comes about for an individual by means of an awareness of the historical processes which constitute his individuality. If we take this same model and apply it to man collectively, we can get a better appreciation of his situation and see that to have the capacity to grow in truth and to exercise freedom does not imply a repudiation of past insights with a consequent loss of direction (complete relativity of truth), but, rather, it implies a preservation of past insights by appreciating their historical role in one's present stage of development. As alluded to
above it is simply impossible to grasp, at any given moment in a historical continuum, all the dimensions and various levels of awareness of a given reality required to say that one's grasp of such a reality was true in the sense of immutable; and this impossibility exists, not merely because of the almost inexhaustible levels of complexity any given reality involves, but also because, unless seen in the light of historical development and sequence, the context which aids man's grasp of such a reality is lost. Therefore we should try to locate stability, creative searching, and intellectual conviction not predominantly in the content of man's reflections on truth, but in the dynamic which makes such reflections possible. This dynamic means the expansion of man's freedom, making his witness to truth appreciable.

It seems to this author that an outline of some of the aspects of a process model along the lines of the foregoing is essential if significant development in dogmatic and moral theology is to be had.

**Moral Dimensions**

We briefly outlined process structures within the background of scholastic thought in the area of dogmatic concerns in the previous section. The following is a brief examination of process and moral insight in contrast with some of the operative approaches within Catholic theology today. Frequently when a system of moral theology loses sight of man in process, it employs obsessive ruminations instead of offering developmental moral guidelines. The task of moral theology is to highlight the fact that moral decisions must be made in view of a dialogue between subjective and
objective considerations, and it should offer, by way of a norm, that integrity be evidenced in one's decisions. And in this context integrity refers primarily to the dynamics of decision, not always to the correctness of content. No inherent dichotomy between dynamic and content is meant by the previous statement; what is suggested is that it is only within the immediacy of the personal confrontation and dialogue with a moral issue that the content -- in the sense of resolution in terms of a moral ought -- can be approached. Thus in the recent question of religious liberty and freedom in the exercise of personal conscience, the Church in her teaching has been able to formalize an insight in terms of a moral ought primarily because the evidence of pluristic democratic societies supplied the necessary dynamics.

That there is growth in moral integrity and autonomy for both the community of man as well as for individual man is a self evident insight in contemporary thought. A process model situates the moral question with the ever growing humanization - to use Tielhardian imagery - of the universe. Man's growing unity among men as caused and symbolized by such products as the communication satellites and the international film exchanges, as well as his growing mastery of his physical destiny, witness DNA, are signs that what was previously conceptualized as the objective unchanging law of nature is, in present and future operative theological models, to be located within (the progressive) integrity - autonomy of man himself.
To better appreciate the line of development suggested when a moral system offers perceptive insights, we should briefly contrast it with a moral system markedly characterized by obsessive ruminations. Obsessive rumination is indicated by an excessive intellectualization, a concentration on detail to the detriment of the totality; under the appearance of objectivity it isolates thought and affect, and as a countermeasure against the anxieties that any dynamic process involves, it creates a superstructure in which moral absolutes are presented with a rigidity of interpretation and a scope of comprehension that takes on cosmic proportions. One example of this, in my opinion, is the traditional teaching on direct sterilization in certain instances. For example, to remove perfectly healthy and well functioning fallopian tubes because of a serious and persistent danger that a future pregnancy could entail has been condemned -- obviously birth control considerations enter here. Although this issue could be further developed, for our purposes it is sufficient to note that to concentrate on organic details at the probable expense of a person's life -- to consider an action a means to an end when such an action is studied outside of the total reality of intention and circumstances -- evidences obsessive ruminations of neurotic proportions. I believe that it is the lack of an articulated use of process models and the presence of a significant degree of obsessive mechanisms which lead to many of the tensions evidenced in dogmatic and moral theology today.
The present article has been concerned with synthesizing and indicating, particularly in the area of process views, some existing lines of theological development. In attempting to suggest alternate theological models what has been uppermost in mind is the conviction that to confine one's theological models to what the Church has said is to unnecessarily limit the breadth of one's vision; to study alternate models in order to see what the Church can say is to witness to one's belief in the ever present Spirit.
Notes


10. For an example of the writer's understanding of developmental moral guidelines, in the question of personal conscience and birth control, note the following:
"To speak of Christian maturity in marriage is to indicate that a person must see his acts as signs of love and not merely as acts conforming with some type of legal correctness. To speak of maturity is to state that one must carefully weigh the insights of reason and the norms given by the Church, and then concretize these factors by a personal decision made before the living God. To speak of maturity in Christian marriage is to be aware that man must always analyze his motives, always strive for marital chastity, always respect the dignity of religious authority, but pervading all of these considerations is the truth that in the twilight of life we will be judged on love. To speak of maturity in the light of the present question is clearly to realize that no physical act is intrinsically evil independent of intentional and volitional orientation -- if we are speaking of meaningful human moral acts. And finally to speak of maturity in the present question is to underline the fact that a man must make a judgment as to the hierarchy of human and Christian values involved in an action and respond to the demands of those values."


11
Appendix A: A Theological Model for the Transcendent in Some Primitive Religions

In the present discussion I would like to focus on what is one of the primary concepts operative in theological discourse, namely, the concept of the transcendent (personal). One of the continual problems for a vital theology is a viable understanding of God's transcendence. I propose that we employ a philosophical model of "positive actuality" as a way of appreciating the presence of the transcendent (personal) in the various religions to be studied; and suggest that such a model makes the notion of transcendence in Christianity more meaningful and comprehensible.

Complementing what the previous article has developed and by way of understanding this model "positive actuality" we may note that experience vis-a-vis the world which gives rise to such an awareness is a perception of an ordered or developmental sequence in the world rather than whim and/or chaos.

A structural awareness of man facing the ambiguities of existence; an affirming both the positive and negative characteristics of the phenomena around him; a description of the relational actual -- man to himself, to others, to the world and to God -- is the common "substance" of religions. For our purposes, the more significant element is the core concept, transcendence. The following examples, taken from primitive religions experience, are used as an exemplification of our thesis. Briefly,
transcendence understood by means of the model positive actuality is encountered in Egypt in terms of the Permanent, in Zoroastra in terms of The Good, for gnostic religions in terms of Personal Wisdom - although this is a pseudo-encounter, and for the mystery cults in terms of Personal and Cosmic Renewal. The following will be a brief explication of these points. (What the previous article has developed is that for contemporary western religious experience positive actuality is seen in terms of Process.)

**Egyptian Religion**

As Frankfort in his text *Ancient Egyptian Religion* indicates, the touchstone of significance for ancient Egyptian religion is permanence. The Egyptian's confrontation with the complexity of the world caused an emphasis (not monistic) on the static in the sense of the perennial; the established order, hier-archical structure; and not on the developmental, the evolving, the democratic process common in our own civilization. Consequent upon this level of awareness was their religious response by means of their two great symbols of recurrent permanence: the Sun and the Nile. Now the important point for our present discussion of transcendence is that for the Egyptians the daily conquest of the Sun and the recurrent seasonal flooding of the Nile enabled them to experience positive actuality as an awareness of a permanence (immortality) for the individual, historically first seen in reference to the Pharaoh and then by way of his mediatorship to the common man. By way of development we may say that as the land was brought to recurrent fertility and as the Sun gave fulfillment to both
life and land, so for the man who lived by Thoth and Maat (wisdom and truth) there would be a fulfillment -- the positive continuance of life. Now in view of their confrontation with the structural limitations the Egyptian(s) came to eventually conceptualize this fulfillment (this experience of positive actuality) in terms of his being united to the transcendent permanent. Thus, for example, the latter state of the Osirian mystery experience where the dead are united with Osiris. The following statements from Frankfort pinpoint the present discussion: "The dead were AKHU 'transfigured spirits' as such they were never depicted for they existed in a sphere well beyond the ken of man ... Even as a 'transfigured spirit' one had to be well equipped; but if that condition was fulfilled, death meant transition from the inconsequential existence of the single human being to participation in the perennial life of the universe." (pp. 100, 101) The highest of the gods (Ra) and/or the one sole God (Ikhnaton formulation) encountered as the polarity of man and as the source of positive actuality is, in Egyptian religion, although not of the same intensity of personal and communal experience as in mystery cults, sufficient enough to shape a religious response. That the religious response will reflect both sophisticated myth formulations as well as magical injunctions; that it will alternatively posit a pantheon of gods with one supreme ruler as well as a clearly monotheistic doctrine; and that religious concepts such as sacrifice, priesthood and prayers will be employed are all reflective of the particular cultural-scientific level of confrontation with the world which the Egyptians experienced.
Zoroastrianism

Zarathustra's confrontation with the complexity of the world around him and with the everpresent search for the real made him, in distinction to the Egyptian emphasis on the permanent as a means to the real, emphasize the necessity for every man of choosing between good and evil. Through the discipline of personal choice, the doctrine of the renewal of existence, and the teaching of the four ages we get a structuring of phenomena. Most intimately combined with this is the profound personal experience of Zarathustra of the sacred as totally good, that is, the experience of reality as positive actuality (Ahura Mazdah) diffusive through the entities Right Order, Good Mind, Devotion, Divine Dominion, Liberation, and Immortality. Yet, this positive actuality is personally encountered -- and thus the individual, through adherence to this positive good, chooses and is promised personal fulfillment (immortality). With Zarathustra, the awareness of the transcendent in terms of the good becomes a way of understanding the complex world around him. Supereminent Goodness and personal choice lead to the positing of Ahriman -- the evil principle and his entities as an explanation for the evil surrounding man. While this formulation of the complex structural world in Zoroastrianism is not definitively Manichean in the sense of matter being equated with evil and spirit with good, we do have the seeds for such a future simplistic approach to the structurally complex phenomena surrounding man. Rather the experience of positive actuality in terms of goodness prepares for the renewal of existence doctrine as well as the teaching of the four ages.
(We may summarize the four ages by the following: first, the good creation by Ahura Mazdah; second, the pollution of creation by Ahriman; third, the teaching of the true faith by Zarathustra and; fourth the consummation (judgment) of the world; i.e. does man belong to light (Ahura Mazdah) or darkness (Ahriman).) We should also note the teaching that the good deeds of man manifest and further help the becoming of God and all his entities -- a rather dynamic process concept for personal religion.

Here again we may note that although Zarathustra has an elevated notion of the Actual combined with the teaching on the necessity of personal choice (do good deeds, do good to the good, but punish the evil as a sign of your goodness), the relative primitiveness of his cultural and economic situation seems to be causative in precluding a perennially meaningful synthesis between the data of the phenomena around man with man's personal awareness of the Actual amidst this.

(We can only indicate some of the hymns of Zarathustra which should be studied in detail; cf. Yasna 34 and 45 for a summary of his teachings; Yasna 30 on creation, choice and judgment, and Yasna 43 for Zarathustra's personal response to Ahura Mazdah.)

**Gnosticism**

Gnosticism tries for a better synthesis of the awareness of complexity and transcendence but fails because it not only subsumes structural complexity beneath transcendence, that is personal experience (gnosis-wisdom), but actually obliterates the problem by effectively denying complex
reality through teaching a monistic doctrine of consciousness (individually encountered but common in all) as the constituent of all things. This massive denial of reality as anything other than consciousness with its consequent disregard for scientific technology and historical developmental actuality, combined with the schizophrenic dichotomy (body/soul) and omnipotence illusions reflected in the teachings and as such applicable to the initiate, makes it difficult to posit the possibility of "personal religion" as understood in the foregoing discussion. For in making the Real the centre of consciousness of the individual and in experiencing as positive actuality the self as reflexively encountered through occult and incommunicable gnosis, we have not the triumph of the individual and therefore a definitive breakthrough for personal religion, but rather as alluded to above, a schizophrenic system which ultimately destroys the possibility of personal religion because it has lost contact with reality.

By way of development we should note that omnipotence illusions are marked by the magical belief that the individual, by controlling his thoughts or his words or his will acts, has ultimate influence on the course of all reality. The gnostic teaching on the secret knowledge present from the beginning of creation and discovered and used by each initiate reflects such an illusion. Schizophrenia is marked by, among others, the mechanism of isolation, denial, and severe regression. Here again we may note that the gnostic dichotomy of body and mind, of initiate and non-initiate, is an isolation system; combined with this there is effective denial of complex reality both of the world and the individual, and this is evident by the lack of
creative functional productivity -- all of which indicates a serious regression from secondary process thinking to primary process thinking. And in gnosticism this regression to primary process and pleasure principle orientation is marked by an oceanic feeling of omnipotence and loss of creative individuality. As such, although using traditional religious language such as salvation, and God, it becomes the polarity of personal religion in any meaningful understanding of that term.

**Mystery Religions**

Finally we may note some general characteristics of mystery religions and show their relation to our general thesis. The complexity and diversity of different mystery cults effectively prohibit a detailed analysis here.

From what we know of the many expressions of mystery religions, we can, it seems to the present writer, locate as of primary significance both for the individual and community the experience of regeneration and/or renewal. The confrontation with positive actuality is, in the mystery religions, had through a profoundly personal participation within a community setting of the experience of regeneration, renewal, immortality by participation. This aspect is evident in the main teachings of the Tamuz, Osirian and Eleusinian mystery cults. "Mysterion cults" are, by definition, participational cults and thus we have an emphasis on the transcendent. However in contradistinction to an apparent similarity to gnosticism, we do not have in mystery religions a denial of complex reality and/or a regression from the real world. In the mystery cults, transcendence in terms of positive
actuality reflects regenerative participational experience. The complexity of the world is structured by the various myth formulations, that is, the various "beliefs-legends-tales" are an approach to complexity which by finding an archetypal formula hope to find a way of structuring the significant. Now in these various myths what is important is not their historical accuracy -- for in different stages of mystery religions this aspect can be completely overlooked, e.g., the Eleusinian cult. Their values is in their archetypal significance. With this archetypal structuring of the complex world around us, the type of transcendent experience becomes clear. That is, a profoundly personal regenerative/renewal (for the individual, community and cosmos) is the experiential response to the dynamically ever-present real which myth archetypal formulations imply. The mystery rites transcend the myth structure and evoke a unitive experience with the ever-present reality supporting them (anamnesis). It is only by personal experience that the archetypal structures can be appreciated for their true significance -- therefore the secrecy prevalent in mystery cults. That is, positive actuality in terms of renewal awareness is simply not open to demonstrable analytic study, and any attempt to do so would be profaning the truth of an existential level of awareness by subsuming it under analytical demonstrative categories. These cults are not gnostic because there is no pretense of omnipotent manipulation of reality or schizophrenic division of mind and matter.
By way of brief conclusion we may note that even here, by reason of historical setting, the mystery religions' confrontation with the complex phenomena of the world does not (can not) take into account contemporary scientific insight such as process and evolution. Christianity with its many mystery religion elements and its teaching on the Trinity, Incarnation, and Parousia is capable of a more profound understanding and dynamic expression of the transcendent personal.

Bibliography:


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