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SHORT TITLE

MYSTERY RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of Graduate Requirements  
Department of Religion  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts

1950

Approved by

*[Handwritten signatures]*

THE MYSTERY RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY  
IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE OF THE FIRST  
THREE CENTURIES A. D.

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Historical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by

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June 1959

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## CHAPTER I

### EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND THE MYSTERY CULTS

#### Definition and Scope of the Problem

Many eminent scholars have considered the problem of the possible influence of the Mystery religions on Christianity. The answers given to the problem have varied greatly. The implications that follow from an exhaustive study of the whole problem are so varied, and many, that in a paper of the present dimensions it would be impossible to do justice to an investigation of them all. It is necessary, therefore, that the writer limit the scope of the investigation so that a reasonable attempt can be made to cover the pertinent material. Consequently the investigation will be concerned with the Mystery religions only as they appeared in the Roman Empire from Augustus to Constantine, and the possible influence that these religions had on Christianity during this period. This definition of the problem has been chosen for various reasons. The period in the Empire from Augustus to Constantine has been chosen for consideration because it was in this time that Christianity came into being, suffered persecution, and finally came into official favour. Also it was in these three centuries, bounded approximately by the reigns of Augustus and Constantine, that the Mysteries came to the height of their popu-

larity in the Empire and stood over against Christianity as a relative unity, being in piety and theology not so very far removed from surface similarity with Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Mithraism in particular, which was similar in growth to Christianity, reached its height of power in the third century.<sup>2</sup> The investigation has been further limited to the effect of the Mysteries on early Christianity.

### Thesis

The writer will endeavour to show by the presentation of pertinent material that it does seem probable that the Mystery religions did affect certain areas of Christian practice, but that in the final analysis there is insufficient evidence to prove this effect in any given area with any great degree of certainty.

### Limitations in Research

Part of the limitation on the accuracy of the study lies within the nature of the original sources themselves. Not only are the Mysteries difficult to investigate because of their secrecy,<sup>3</sup> but the information that is extant on

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Heussi, Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1957), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Herbert B. Workman, Persecution in the Early Church (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1906), p. 83.

<sup>3</sup>S. Angus, The Mystery-Religions and Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 39.

them from the writers of their age is biased.<sup>4</sup> Some of the writers are openly hostile as one can see from the following excerpt from Justin Martyr as quoted by Geden.

And when in the tradition of the Mithraic mysteries they relate that Mithra was born of a rock, and name the place where his followers receive initiation a cave, do I not know that they are perverting the saying of Daniel that "a stone was hewn without hands from a great mountain," and likewise the words of Jesus, all whose sayings they endeavour to pervert.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to this one finds authors who were sympathetic to the Mysteries and in their apologetics showed an attitude hostile to Christianity. The following is generally thought to be a description of a Christian woman as Apuleius sees her in one of his writings.

for there was not one single fault lacking in her . . . she was crabbed, cruel, cursed, drunken, obstinate, . . . covetous in base robberies, riotous in filthy expenses, an enemy to faith in chastity, a despiser of all the gods whom others did honour, one that affirmed that she had instead of our religion an only god by herself . . . she deceived all men, but especially her husband, delighting in drinking wine, yea early in the morning . . . .<sup>6</sup>

Besides the basic difficulty of prejudiced original material, the writer has limited his use of sources largely to those available in the Pritzlaff Memorial Library at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>5</sup>A. S. Geden, Mithraism (London: The Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 40.

<sup>6</sup>Apuleius, The Golden Ass, translated by G. W. Adlington and revised by S. Gaselee (London: William Heineman Ltd., 1928), p. 423.

### Method of Procedure

The general procedure will be to give the reader an overall picture of the first three centuries of the Christian era, with special reference to the Mystery religions and their characteristics. Similarities with Christianity will be outlined, as well as demonstrable differences. In conclusion a number of views of reputable scholars on this subject will be presented, and the writer will give his own view on the basis of the material offered.

Through the violent clash of personal power, the ideal of Roman law seemed to dwindle before the clash of personalities so that the ideals that had been instrumental in making Rome great appeared as though they had vanished, or had been radically changed.<sup>1</sup> It is no wonder, then, that historians generally agree that there was such a period in the Roman world at the commencement of the Christian era. The events of history were looked on as a process of disintegration rather than anything else.<sup>2</sup> The times were considered to be out of joint, all in all it was a bewildering age in which venerable ages had collapsed, customs and conventions had changed, and political conspiracies had arisen. Consequently the ordinary

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, The Golden Age, edited by Harvey  
 Murray (New York: Harper's Books, 1907), pp. 20-1.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, The Mystery Religions and Christianity (New  
 York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. 210.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GENERAL TENOR OF THE AGE FROM AUGUSTUS TO CONSTANTINE

#### Political and Emotional Unrest

Already two centuries before the birth of Christ the Romans had begun to feel the effects that can be brought about by corrupt government. It may be said that the appearance of Marius and Sulla in history made the Romans realize the suffering that can be caused through the violent misuse of personal power. The ideal of Roman law seemed to crumble before the clash of personalities so that the ideals that had been instrumental in making Rome great appeared as though they had vanished, or had been radically changed.<sup>1</sup> It is no wonder, then, that historians generally agree that there was much pessimism in the Roman world at the commencement of the Christian era. The events of history were looked on as a process of disintegration rather than anything else.<sup>2</sup> The times were considered to be out of joint. All in all it was a bewildering age in which venerable systems had collapsed, customs and conventions had changed, and political conspiracies had arisen. Consequently the ordinary

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<sup>1</sup>Lucius Apuleius, The Golden Ass, edited by Harvey Darton (New York: Hogarth Press, n.d.), pp. 28 f.

<sup>2</sup>S. Angus, The Mystery-Religions and Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 213.

people of the day were seeking a settled state of affairs, as well as a measure of political permanency.<sup>3</sup> In the second century A.D. disasters began to beset the Empire from all sides. Progressive disintegration loomed large. The Golden Age of Augustus had not solved the problems that lurked in the twilight of the Mediterranean world, but had only succeeded in obscuring them from the eyes of the public. The confidence that the Roman once had in his own ability and reason was severely shaken by the trends of the time. The picture of the former stouthearted Roman turned into that of a man afraid of his own shadow.<sup>4</sup>

But underneath all this unrest that characterized the age from Augustus to Constantine, there was still the bright light of hope. To illustrate this one can do no better than to quote a part of the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil.

Now has come the last age of the prophetic song of Cumae. The great cycle of the centuries is born anew. The Virgin (Justice) returns, and the reign of Saturn comes again. And do thou, O chaste Lucina, smile graciously upon the birth of that boy by whom the iron race shall come to an end and the golden race rise up throughout the world; for now thine own Apollo is king.<sup>5</sup>

Undoubtedly the hope for a new age expressed in the above paragraph was, at the time it was written, centered in the reign of Augustus, but its underlying sentiment was common

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>4</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 23.

<sup>5</sup>Frederick G. Grant, editor, Ancient Roman Religion (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1957), p. 186.

to the people of the centuries under consideration.

### The Search for Immortality and Salvation

From the time of Alexander the Great to that of Constantine there was religious and ethical striving among the people of the Mediterranean world. There was a seeking for a new vision that would put all events in their right perspective. A new knowledge of the divine had to be found that would satisfy the hearts of men.<sup>6</sup> No longer would the old local religious cults stand the tests of man's increasing wisdom and knowledge so that doubt was cast on the truth of the stories of the gods.<sup>7</sup> There was also moral dissatisfaction among the people, for they realized the corruptness of the times. Horace in Book Three of his Odes is well aware of the depravity of the period when he says,

Full of sin, our age has first defiled the marriage bed, our offspring, and our homes; springing from such a source, the stream of disaster has overflowed both people and nation.<sup>8</sup>

Orr says of the second century,

It was an age characterized by a new sense of weakness and sin, by a longing for redemption from these evils, by a yearning for immediate communion with the deity,

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<sup>6</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>8</sup>Frederick G. Grant, op. cit., p. 188.

by the craving for the assurance of a blessed life hereafter.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the knowledge of sin on the part of the people, which Fuller regards as the indication of the Orientalization of the Western mind, people were further upset by the common fears of the times.<sup>10</sup> For the ordinary people

Life was threatened and made miserable by tyranny of Fate, the caprice of Fortune, the malice of ubiquitous demons, the crushing weight of Astralism, the dread of Magic, . . . and the mystery of death.<sup>11</sup>

The world being in such an apparently sorry state caused the people to seek ways and means by which they could help themselves. The emperors too endeavoured to restore the peace and glory that once was Rome's. Augustus spent much time and money in an attempt to restore religion and the solidity that it had once brought with it.<sup>12</sup> The poor demented Caligula was not to be left out of the attempt either, but his restoration of religion was partial to Oriental influence. The Flavian Emperors also favoured the establishment of Oriental religions.<sup>13</sup>

In consequence of the state of the world as it has been

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<sup>9</sup>James Orr, Neglected Factors in the Study of the Early Progress of Christianity (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899), pp. 208 f.

<sup>10</sup>Alvin Kuhn, Shadow of the Third Century (227 Murray St., Elizabeth 2, N. J.: Academy Press, 1949), p. 252.

<sup>11</sup>s. Angus, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>12</sup>T. R. Glover, The Conflict of Religions (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1927), pp. 5 f.

<sup>13</sup>s. Angus, op. cit., p. 44.

described, Seneca's phrase "ad salutem spectat" might well be used to characterize the attitude of the Roman world at the dawn of Christianity. The cry for salvation was loud, persistent and universal.<sup>14</sup> Coupled with the desire for salvation there was also the yearning for immortality. Plutarch is recorded as having said that the hope of immortality, and the hope of future existence, is the most venerable and mightiest of all affections.<sup>15</sup> In the search for immortality and salvation, help was sought from saviours. Augustus himself was called "σωτήρα τοῦ κοινοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους" (saviour of the universal human race). And even Nero was addressed as "Nero, god and deliverer for ever."<sup>16</sup>

#### The Search for a Personal Religion

Another important part of the picture under review is that the age in question tended to destroy individuality. The city states of the centuries before had declined and finally disappeared, and now in their place there stood the monolithic Roman Empire with its ponderous organization. The individual was almost completely swallowed up in the impersonal machine of Roman government. The people became hungry for self respect and individual recognition.<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>17</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, op. cit., p. 22.

breaking down of racial, national, and linguistic barriers in the Empire in no way helped to alleviate the situation, but only heightened it.<sup>18</sup> One way in which men sought to gain individuality for themselves was through the formation of brotherhoods and guilds of a more or less religious nature.<sup>19</sup> But especially in the second and third centuries the solution to the problem of self respect was sought most frequently in the personal relationship with a deity.<sup>20</sup> The Mystery religions were ideally suited to fill this need of the day.

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<sup>18</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>20</sup>F. J. Foakes-Jackson, The History of the Christian Church (Cambridge: J. Hall and Son, 1909), p. 181.

## CHAPTER III

### MYSTERY RELIGIONS PROMINENT IN THE ROMAN WORLD OF THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES

#### Cybele

The first religious invader of the Roman world from the Orient was the Anatolian fertility goddess Cybele, whose cultus centered originally in the southwestern corner of Galatia on the frontier of Phrygia. Accompanied by her frenzied priests, the Galli, Cybele reached Rome in 204 B.C. when Hannibal was still flouting the forces of Rome in the mountainous region of Bruttium. Soon after her arrival, the matrons of Rome carried her black-stone fetish and ensconced it in the Temple of Victory on the Palatine. She became the earliest deity of foreign origin to be allowed within the city. In 202 B.C. she was officially accepted as part of the Roman pantheon. But in time, because of the menace to morality offered by her worship, the cult was banned.<sup>1</sup>

Her cult, as developed in Rome, included the worship of Attis, another deity from Asia Minor. Together they symbolized the male and female elements in nature. One version of the legend stated that Attis had been unfaithful to Cybele so that she in revenge had driven him mad and he had conse-

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Hyde, Paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire (Philadelphia: University of Penn. Press, 1946), p. 46.

quently mutilated himself beneath a pine tree into which his spirit passed, while his blood changed to violets.<sup>2</sup>

Her annual festival was celebrated in March, when the whole legend of Attis was rehearsed in a kind of passion-play. On the Ides a bull was sacrificed and a procession held in the streets in commemoration of Cybele's finding Attis. After a week's intermission, on the twenty-second, a pine tree was felled and prepared so as to represent a corpse which was then carried to Cybele's temple. On the twenty-third the log was buried and great lamentation followed, commemorative of Attis' death. On the twenty-fourth the highpriest drew blood from his arm over the altar, while the lesser priests in a frenzied state flagellated themselves and gashed their bodies in sympathy with the sorrows of the god. On the twenty-fifth Attis' tomb was found to be empty, and then the Hilaria, a carnival of license and merry-making, followed in honour of the god's resurrection, that is, the rebirth of Spring. On the following day the festival closed with Cybele's silver statue being carried in procession, and after being ceremonially washed, it was taken back to the temple. It is recorded that A. Nock has said that, "the drama of nature's death and life has nowhere found a more moving expression in ritual."<sup>3</sup>

The cult of Cybele flourished in the West for six cen-

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 47 f.

turies, and despite its revolting practices enjoyed a special position in the Roman Empire since it was under political control and was officially accepted as part of the civic cult, its holidays having a place on the pontiff's calendar.<sup>4</sup>

### Isis

The religious gift of Hellenistic Egypt to Rome was the triad of gods Serapis, Isis, and Harpocrates. Their inter-related worship was spread rapidly over the Roman Empire through the medium of Egyptian commerce. The cults of the two deities, Isis and Serapis, reached Rome at approximately the same time and were often worshiped in the same precincts, their priests teaching similar doctrines.<sup>5</sup>

Isis was the consort of Serapis. She was also the sister-wife of Osiris. When the latter was slain by the Power of darkness, she, in great grief, searched for her husband's body and buried his scattered limbs where she found them, the searching symbolizing the struggle between civilization and barbarism.<sup>6</sup>

Her worship reached Syracuse in Sicily in the reign of Agathocles who died in 289 B.C., and Puteoli in the South of Italy by the close of the second century B.C. The cult long remained obscure, the Senate vainly trying to check its ad-

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

vance because of its loose morality and emotionalism.<sup>7</sup>

But despite opposition, Isis won converts, and soon there were found shrines wherever the Roman armies went, from Africa to Britain, and from Spain to the Black Sea. In 394 A.D., however, she had her last procession in Rome, but not before she had influenced the Roman Empire for five centuries.<sup>8</sup>

In the Mysteries themselves, special festivals were held in November and March. The winter festival was a mingling of grief at Osiris' death and joy at finding his body. The spring festival marked the opening of the navigation season. In the November celebration at Rome, a mystical drama depicting the finding of Osiris was enacted. It pictured Osiris' murder, Isis' grief and wandering in search of the body, the triumph over the Power of darkness, and the resurrection of Osiris. The mourning of the priests and the initiates turned to joy when Isis succeeded in her quest, the joy being expressed in various games and banquets. Isis, as the "universal woman" and the "queen of heaven" attracted men as well as women devotees. She is the mater dolorosa of Paganism and is often likened to the Virgin Mary of Christianity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 52 ff.

### Atargatis

The first Syrian deity to reach Greece, Italy, and the West, was the fish goddess Atargatis of Hierapolis. In her cult fish could not be eaten, except by the priests. She was the goddess of generation and fertility, but her priests were eunuchs. Her temples were defiled by sacred prostitution, and adults and children were sacrificed upon the altars. The cult came to Rome with the introduction of Syrian slaves, from whom it spread to the masters. It is possible that the goddess Atargatis may have developed from the Dagon of the Philistines. The reason why priests were alone allowed to eat fish in special mystical meals was that the fish were considered to be the body of the goddess herself. The main attraction of the cult lay in its scientific astrology which appealed to the mind of the day.<sup>10</sup>

### Mithra

The most popular of the Near-Eastern cults was that of Mithra, which spread over the West at the beginning of the Christian era. It reached its zenith in the third century, and ended with Theodosius' repressive legislation at the end of the fourth. Mithraism originated in Zoroastrianism, and thus had its roots in a background that was close to that of the Hindus of India. After the collapse of Persia, some of

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 55 ff.

the priests lived in Pontus and Cappadocia, from whence the cult made its way into the Roman Empire. Its appeal was on a higher plane than many of the other Mysteries. It lay in such areas as fraternity, democracy, faith, antiquity, an impressive ritual, clerical organization, purification from sin, ethics, the concept of good and evil as antagonistic powers, the idea of a final judgment, and the promise of a hereafter. Mithra was usually worshiped in small caves, where the initiations were held. The organization was like a lodge, bound by ties of secrecy. The members called each other brothers. It is possible that the priests evolved from the idea of the Magi of Persia. They led the ritual, held office for life, and were permitted to marry only once.

In the theology of Mithra, the dead who have been initiated ascend to a better existence. Earth, air, fire, and water were sacred, and the sun, moon, and planets were worshiped.

Mithraites in various ceremonies underwent baptism by immersion, and after initiation, they partook of a sacramental meal of bread and water, commemorating Mithra's last banquet. This rite was to impart immortality.

Mithra's chief festival occasion was on December the twenty-fifth, which was considered to be the birthday of the sun. On Sundays the Mithraites had a special service of prayer, sacrifice, and the chanting of a litany. There were no women devotees and the appeal of the cult was mainly to

the military class. Because of the absence of women members the cult was more free from immorality than was generally the case in the Mysteries.

Some of the legends in Mithra spoke of a shepherd coming to adore the new-born Mithra; of a flood which covered the world and from which only one family survived in an ark; of a heaven which existed above; of a good-will in man which was eventually to overcome evil. In the end, Mithra, as the mediator between this world and the next, was to return, awaken the dead and judge the world, assigning either immortality or annihilation to men.<sup>11</sup>

The basic picture drawn of Mithra is of a beautiful young god bestriding a bull, drawing back its head with one hand, and plunging a knife into its throat with the other. Beneath the bull's belly is a scorpion biting off the genitals which are to be taken to the moon-goddess for fructification. The picture thus becomes a symbol of regeneration and rebirth.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>ibid., pp. 59 ff.

<sup>12</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 25.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MYSTERY RELIGIONS

#### Syncretism

Ever since the time when Alexander the Great waged his successful campaigns, syncretism exerted a powerful influence which confounded not only the nationality of men, but also the nationality of gods.<sup>1</sup> The Mystery religions were no exception to the rule of syncretism and were affected both in doctrine and in cult by this tendency. There was borrowing from, and mutual interaction among, the religions of the day.<sup>2</sup> The strength of many of the Mysteries lay in their syncretism. It should also be noted that in this area lay also their weakness.<sup>3</sup> The cult of Mithra was very accommodating, for example, and in no way excluded any other religion, and this syncretistic, as well as eclectic, spirit, seems to have contributed greatly to its extension among people who were religiously inclined.<sup>4</sup> This syncretism is shown in the Mysteries in general by their approaching in

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<sup>1</sup>S. Angus, The Mystery-Religions and Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 188.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>Herbert B. Workman, Persecution in the Early Church (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1906), p. 86.

<sup>4</sup>A. S. Geden, Mithraism (London: The Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 7.

varying degrees to the popular concept of religion as being a definite Gnosis.<sup>5</sup> Other examples of syncretism are to be seen in the identification of Isis with the ancient gods Demeter, Artemis, Aphrodite, Athene, Nemesis; or Serapis with Asclepios, Zeus, and Dionysus. In Mithra one finds an integration with the Babylonian sun god Schamasch.<sup>6</sup>

### Symbolism

Much use of Symbolism was made in the Mystery religions. Varro, the Roman historian, is said to have reported that in the Mysteries vessels and utensils were set out in worship to symbolize deities.<sup>7</sup> Porphyry is credited with saying that in the ritual of Mithra a bowl played an important part, being a symbol of a spring.<sup>8</sup> Also he is to have said that the votaries of Mithra used honey for many and diverse purposes.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting that the dress of officiants, as well as worshipers, in the Mysteries, played a great part and seems to have had important symbolic value.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>6</sup>Karl Heussi, Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1957), p. 19.

<sup>7</sup>Saint Augustine, The City of God, edited by Vernon J. Bourke (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1958), p. 136.

<sup>8</sup>A. S. Geden, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Apuleius, The Golden Ass, translated by G. W. Adlington and revised by S. Gaselee (London, William Heineman Ltd., 1928), p. 581.

## Redemption

The Mystery religions were decidedly redemptive in character professing to remove the estrangement that existed between man and god. They claimed to procure the forgiveness of sins and to be in a position to furnish a mediator for the initiates. This is seen most clearly in the cult of Mithra where in time Mithra himself took on the character of an intercessor. Summing up, Gardner is quoted as saying, "It was the great merit of the Mysteries that they established and cultivated a communion between the human and the divine, and that they opened ways in which man could draw nearer to God."<sup>11</sup>

## Drama

The Mysteries were primarily sacramental dramas appealing to the emotions, and producing psychic and mystic effects in order that the neophyte might experience the exaltation of a new life. One might say that the Mysteries made their appeal through the eyes, ears, and imagination, rather than through the intellect. Angus says,

A Mystery-Religion was thus a divine drama which portrayed before the wondering eyes of the privileged observers the story of the struggles, sufferings, and victory of the patron deity, the travail of nature in which life ultimately triumphs over death, and joy is

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<sup>11</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., p. 100.

born of pain.<sup>12</sup>

The religious play, then, was common in the Mysteries. There is a representation of such a religious play from the Isis cult portrayed in the National Museum at Naples.<sup>13</sup> These dramas were often accompanied by music.<sup>14</sup> The dramatic use of robes and dress can be seen in the works of Apuleius.<sup>15</sup>

### Eschatology

The Mysteries were eschatological religions being vitally concerned with the issues pertaining to life and death. They had a definite evangel of life and immortality with which to confront the mystery of the grave.<sup>16</sup> This was in contrast to the ancient religions of Rome and Greece which had nothing better to offer, when confronted by death, than the realm of the Manes or the Valley of the Shadow.<sup>17</sup> The fact that the Mysteries were eschatological in nature explains why such inscriptions as "Reborn for eternity" and "Be of good cheer" should be found on the tombs in their cemeteries.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>13</sup>Johannes Quasten, Musik und Gesang (Münster: Verlag der Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1930), p. 63.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Apuleius, op. cit., p. 389.

<sup>16</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

## Personality

The personal element in the Mysteries was an epoch-making discovery in the Roman Empire, for in the old religions of Rome there had existed only a corporate reality and validity.<sup>19</sup> Following on the decline of the national spirit there was a striving for individuality in the complex machine of the Empire, and the appeal of the Mysteries lay largely in their offering of individual recognition.<sup>20</sup> In the Mysteries all the distinctions brought about by class and nationality were obliterated and the worshiper stood there as a man in his own right. He stood there before the deity as an individual whose position was not predetermined by his either being bondsman or free, Roman or Barbarian.<sup>21</sup>

Another aspect of the personal element in the Mysteries lay in this that everyone found what he sought. As Goethe is quoted as saying, "Ein jeder sieht was er im Herzen trägt."<sup>22</sup> The carnal-minded would find in the orgiastic processions and revels an opportunity for selfindulgence; the educated would find in the Mysteries the truth that lay dear

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<sup>19</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>21</sup>Carl Clemen, Religions of the World, translated by A. K. Dallas (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1931), p. 340.

<sup>22</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., p. 42.

to their heart, no matter what form it might take; and the superstitious would find in the cults the magical value that they desired in the formulae of the liturgies and the sacramental elements of various ceremonies.<sup>23</sup>

### Knowledge

In the third and fourth centuries after the birth of Christ there was a great thirst for knowledge of God, and the Mysteries promised answers to this desired knowledge. In fact every Mystery religion promised to impart a secret, a gnosis, to those who became initiates. Part of the knowledge was facts concerning the life of the deity of which the individual was a devotee, as well as ways and means by which union could be effected with the particular deity.<sup>24</sup> The Mysteries also claimed to be able to give initiates a knowledge of the secrets of all nature, in its complex phases from before the birth of the individual to his passage and life beyond the grave.<sup>25</sup> In fact elaborate mythology was often designed for the express purpose of satisfying the urge for supersensory knowledge present in the initiates.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>26</sup>Adolf Köberle, The Quest for Holiness, translated by John C. Mattes from the Third German Edition (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1938), p. 55.

## Cosmology

The Mysteries may also be regarded as cosmic religions. Just as man was regarded as an image of the deity, the cosmos was considered an entity that was not lifeless but soul permeated. There was a decided tendency towards a pantheistic view of the world. The cosmos was something to be understood and reckoned with in the process of living. This element in the Mysteries is evinced by the compilation of elaborate cosmogonies, the mystic view of the world, the doctrine of reincarnation, the creation of theogonies, the belief in astralism and magic, and the existence of solar monotheism.<sup>27</sup> Of course not all of the above elements were common to every Mystery religion, but each possessed at least some of them.

## Secrecy

The Mystery religions were difficult to know because of the secrecy which shrouded their beliefs and practices. The knowledge which they professed to possess was only to be imparted to those who had been initiated. The meaning of their doctrines, their use of certain symbols, their staging of divine dramas, could be known only to those who belonged to the cult.<sup>28</sup> Apuleius says in Book XI of his Metamorphoses in

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<sup>27</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., pp. 69 f.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

connection with the secrets of the Mysteries, "dicere si dicere liceret, cognoscere si liceret audire."<sup>29</sup> The same author describing the events just before his initiation says that, "Then was all the laity and profane people commanded to depart . . . ." <sup>30</sup> Only the initiated were allowed to see the secret rites which attended the dedication of Apuleius.

### Ecstasy

Theophany was an important part of the Mysteries, and its occurrence was said to be granted to the initiates. The ancient mind was predisposed to such manifestations and visions, and they occurred frequently in dreams, trances, ecstasy, and various hypnotic conditions.<sup>31</sup> From this it is not difficult to realize that at times stress on spiritual ecstasy ran wild. It can be said that the promise to the initiate of entrance into intimate union with the deity was generally accomplished through ecstasy of some kind.<sup>32</sup> To see this carried into practice one need only refer to the appearance of Osiris to Apuleius which seems to have occurred in a kind of ecstatic vision.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Apuleius, op. cit., p. 580.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 579.

<sup>31</sup>s. Angus, op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>33</sup>Apuleius, op. cit., p. 595.

## Magic

Belief in magic was very popular amongst the people of the day. The following is a description of a witch given in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, and even though it may be extreme, it is probably not very far from what people thought possible in witchcraft.

Verily she is a magician, who has power to rule the heavens, to bring down the sky, to bear up the earth, to turn the water into hills, and the hills into running waters, to lift up the terrestrial spirits into the air, . . . and to lighten the deep darkness of hell.<sup>34</sup>

Because of the prevalence of a belief in magic, it is little wonder that the Mysteries were never able to completely rid themselves of the element of magic in the understanding of their ceremonies. Consequently a mysterious efficacy was attached frequently to the mere act of partaking in any particular cultic act, apart from any stress on a right motion of heart and will within the participant. The sacraments especially, instead of being conditioned by the spiritual receptivity of the individual, became virtuous in their own right, their efficacy resting more upon the simple opus operatum than anything else.<sup>35</sup>

## THE POPULARITY OF THE MYSTERY RELIGIONS

The reason for the popularity of the Mystery religions

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<sup>34</sup>Lucius Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, edited by Harvey Darton (New York: Hogarth Press, n. d.), p. 49.

<sup>35</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., pp. 254 f.

lies chiefly in this that they answered the need of the day and age. These religions satisfied the desires of the hearts of many people. By becoming a member of one of the Mysteries an individual attained a new stature, and the chaos and uncertainty of the times round about him vanished in the acquiring of a knowledge of an evangel which was designed to make a person comfortable in the universe in which he lived.<sup>36</sup> The masses sought and found salvation in the Mystery religions, which promised sacramental grace here in this life, as well as a blessed future in the age to come.<sup>37</sup> In conclusion one might say that it was the responsiveness to the longing of the human heart on the part of the Mysteries which gave them such power and permanence over and above that inspired by the gorgeous and attractive ritual they set up.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>38</sup>A. S. Geden, op. cit., p. 1.

## CHAPTER V

### SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE MYSTERY RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY

#### Confession

When an individual wished to enter a Mystery cult, he was first required to undergo examination and various forms of disciplinary preparation. He was forced to submit to a cathartic process whereby the uncleanness of the flesh was supposedly removed. In conformity with the esoteric nature of the Mysteries, the prospective member was required to take an oath of secrecy concerning the ceremonial transactions of which he was to become a part.<sup>1</sup>

From reports by Juvenal and Apuleius it appears that in several Mysteries the neophytes were required to confess their sins as part of the process of preparation. It was a kind of confessional having in outline the elements of a penitential system and an absolution. The priest generally acted as the representative of the deity in exacting the confession and pronouncing either forgiveness or penance. One might venture to say that in this area the Mysteries seem to have anticipated Catholicism and the establishment of a Confessional. The system of the Mysteries was less rigid, it is

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<sup>1</sup>S. Angus, The Mystery-Religions and Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), pp. 80 ff.

true, but the elements of the penitential system were there with the promise of the absolution for uneasy devotees.<sup>2</sup>

### Baptism

It is uncertain whether the Mysteries believed in the existence of original sin, but they had a baptismal service to wash away the sins of the initiate. These baptisms, or lustral purifications, were a requisite, and were performed according to rites which were carefully prescribed.<sup>3</sup> Porphyry is said to have reported that the initiate into the rites of Mithra underwent a baptism that was by total immersion, and which was said to expiate the sins of the person so baptized.<sup>4</sup> Mithraism, which was prominent in this use of lustral purifications, approached very closely to the usage of baptism in the Christian church.<sup>5</sup> Tertullian is quoted as saying with respect to this usage of baptism in the Mystery religions,

In certain Mysteries, e.g. of Isis and Mithra, it is by Baptism (per lavacrum) that members are initiated . . . in the Appollinarian and the Eleusinian rites they are baptized, and they imagine that the result of this baptism is regeneration and the remission of the

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>4</sup>F. Legge, Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), p. 260.

<sup>5</sup>Franz Cumont, Die Mysterien des Mithra, autorisierte deutsche Ausgabe von Georg Gehrlich (Leipzig und Berlin: Verlag von B. G. Teubner, 1923), pp. 181 f.

penalties of their sins.<sup>6</sup>

Geden reports that Tertullian pronounces this verdict on the practices of the Mysteries, "they cheat themselves with springs that yield no living water."<sup>7</sup> But the similarity exists. It is to be borne in mind, however, that these baptismal rites of the Mysteries were not static in ritual or character so that over a period of time considerable variations and modifications took place.<sup>8</sup> Does this fact perhaps indicate the influence of some outside source upon the Mystery cults?

#### Asceticism

Asceticism was prevalent in the centuries preceding, and subsequent to, the Christian era. It was not something entirely strange and foreign to the people of the day. By some authorities it is regarded as an example of the influence of the characteristics of Oriental contemplation on the Western world. The power of the West was gradually succumbing to the spirit of the East.<sup>9</sup> Another aspect of the practice of asceticism in the West was that it was partly a revolt from the excesses prevalent in the age. It was simply

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<sup>6</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., p. 81

<sup>7</sup>A. S. Geden, Mithraism (London: The Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 43.

<sup>8</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 216 f.

the swing of the pendulum from one extreme to the other.<sup>10</sup>  
So the initiands of the Mystery cults found satisfaction in the rigors of the initiation ceremonies.<sup>11</sup>

The ascetic practices in the Mysteries took many forms. Prior to initiation into the Mysteries of Isis there was involved a long preparation period which included, besides the customary sprinklings with consecrated water, an abstinence from meat.<sup>12</sup> This abstaining from meat, in order that the initiand might approach to the Knowledge of the religion in a state in which he was ritually clean and apt, is indicated in Apuleius.<sup>13</sup> Fasting in general seems to have been an accepted part of preparation.<sup>14</sup> Mithraism was not without its ascetics.<sup>15</sup> For this reason Cumont says that Christianity was similar to the cult of Mithra in its stress on asceticism.<sup>16</sup> Juvenal is quoted as saying of a devotee of Isis

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>12</sup>Gerhard Uhlhorn, Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism, edited and translated from the Third German Edition by Egbert Smyth and C. J. H. Ropes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 322.

<sup>13</sup>Apuleius, The Golden Ass, translated by G. W. Adlington and revised by S. Caselee (London: William Heineman Ltd., 1928), pp. 575 f.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 593 f.

<sup>15</sup>Louis Duchesne, Early History of the Christian Church (London: John Murray, 1933), I, 396.

<sup>16</sup>Franz Cumont, op. cit., pp. 181 ff.

that,

She will break the ice and descend into the river in winter; thrice a morning she will bathe in the Tiber and lave her tumid head in its depths. Then, with bleeding knees, she will creep, naked and shivering, over the whole length of the Campus Martius.<sup>17</sup>

Belonging to the Mysteries was costly, often involving a great amount of privation. There were expensive robes to be purchased, beautiful statues to be paid for, and extensive pilgrimages to be made.<sup>18</sup> As an example of the last mentioned point Juvenal is mentioned as saying of a devotee,

If the white-robed Io commands, the devotee will go to the confines of Egypt and will carry back the desired waters from the cold Meroc, that she may sprinkle them in Isis' shrine.<sup>19</sup>

And so in the Mystery cults ascetic practices of all kinds were engaged in such as prolonged fasts, absolute continence, severe bodily mutilations, painful flagellations, uncomfortable pilgrimages to holy places, and contributions to church funds. That is, many of the forms of asceticism practiced by saints and mystics of all ages, including those in the Christian church.<sup>20</sup>

### Initiation

Because of the secrecy shrouding much of the ceremony of

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<sup>17</sup>S. Angus, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 145 ff.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 82.

the Mysteries, relatively little is known of the actual initiation rites as they were performed by the various cults.<sup>21</sup> It is known that music and dancing played an important role, helping to provide an added catharsis.<sup>22</sup> It is more important to note that the Mysteries were revealed generally by degrees to the initiates. There existed levels of understanding and enlightenment.<sup>23</sup> In the Mysteries of Mithra, for example, the various degrees of consecration or initiation went under various titles such as crows, ravens, warriors, and lions. The novices had to go through eighty disciplines in all in order to progress to the most elevated class. These disciplines involved fasting, the rack, horrors, flagellations, and many other weird forms of asceticism and torture. All strove to be full warriors of Mithra.<sup>24</sup> It is interesting that some authorities recognize a similarity between the above mentioned rites and the ceremonies performed in Freemasonry today.<sup>25</sup> But in connection with Christianity it is thought by some that the distinction between Clerics, Full-Christians, and Catechumens, which existed in the church of the early centuries, has its analogy in the

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<sup>21</sup>ibid., p. 92.

<sup>22</sup>Johannes Quasten, Musik und Gesang (Münster: Verlag der Aschendorfschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1930), pp. 45 ff.

<sup>23</sup>Louis Duchesne, op. cit., p. 394.

<sup>24</sup>Gerhard Uhlhorn, op. cit., p. 324.

<sup>25</sup>Louis Duchesne, op. cit., p. 395.

Mysteries with their distinction of *μυσταγωγοί, μύσται, ἀμύητοι*.<sup>26</sup> The idea of degrees existing in the Christian congregation is borne out by the following quotation of St. Cyril of Jerusalem in the Fourth Catechetical Lecture, as mentioned by Kuhn.

These Mysteries (parables) the church communicates to him who is going out of the class of catechumens. Nor is it customary to reveal them to the heathen; for we do not tell to any heathen the secret Mysteries concerning the Father, and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Neither do we openly and plainly speak of them among the catechumens, but only in a covert and secret manner, so that the faithful who know them may not be injured.<sup>27</sup>

According to Kuhn, Mosheim is in accord with the idea, believing that the Christians adopted in common with the pagans the plan of dividing the sacred offices. But Mosheim regarded it as being basically a division of two classes; one public to which everyone was freely admitted regardless of his status of initiation, the other secret from which all the unprofessed were excluded.<sup>28</sup> It is highly diverting to hear the view expressed that when later on in the history of the Christian church the distinction between the truth for the cognoscenti and the simple truth for the multitude was broken down, then it was that Christianity took a step towards depravity as well as away from paganism. In other words the

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<sup>26</sup>Karl Meussi, Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1957), p. 75.

<sup>27</sup>Alvin Kuhn, Shadow of the Third Century (227 Murray St., Elizabeth 2, N. J.: Academy Press, 1949), p. 125.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

leaving out of a system of high truth for the few was a loss to the church.<sup>29</sup>

### Communion

In the Mysteries there was a striving to be at one with the deity. This involved the idea of a communion which could be attained in many ways. Perhaps the most impressive of these was the taurobolium, or bath in bull's blood. A sacrificial bull was slaughtered on a platform under which the initiate was placed, and the blood dripped through to cover him. His head and body and all his garments were saturated with blood; he turned up his head and held it so that the blood might trickle upon his lips, ears, eyes and nostrils; he moistened his tongue with it and sacramentally drank it. A variation of this was the criobolium, or bath in ram's blood. From these ceremonies came the faith in the initiate believing that he was purified from sin and born again for eternity. This purification in some cases was supposed to be valid over a period of twenty years. Nevertheless, it is here in the taurobolium, despite its magical efficacy, that Angus considers one has a ritual which is closest in its approach to the religion of the cross.<sup>30</sup> Indeed one is rather startled to see the similarity between the communion supposed to be effected with the deity through the taurobolium,

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>30</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., pp. 94 f.

and the at-oneness with, and the forgiveness of sins from, god which was believed by the church to take place in Baptism.

### Doctrine of Regeneration

The more spiritual and the more mature the Mysteries became, the greater grew the popular demand for some form of doctrine of regeneration.<sup>31</sup> One extreme form of thought in this area conceived of the initiate as being made god. It would seem that perhaps Irenaeus was influenced by this idea present in the Mysteries when he says that God became man in order that men might be divine.<sup>32</sup> The apotheosis of the individual in the Mysteries was achieved in a number of ways. One of these involved a mystic identification with the deity. The follower was the same person as the god. This is expressed in the phrase, "I am thou, and thou art I."<sup>33</sup> Another way of achieving divine rebirth was through the process of divine indwelling. The god was supposed to be actually present in the person. One can perhaps compare this with the expression of Paul "Christ in you", which occurs in his epistles in the Bible.<sup>34</sup> The heresy of Pelagianism which greatly disturbed the Church in the fifth century involved

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>32</sup>Karl Heussi, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>33</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>34</sup>Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20.

a deistic conception of man's relationship to his Maker and consequently bears some resemblance to the view held in some of the Mysteries.<sup>35</sup>

### Worship

The concept of a congregation existed in a diluted form in some of the Mystery religions. This is seen especially in Mithraism where, in order to escape persecution, they enrolled their congregations as members of legally accepted funerary societies.<sup>36</sup> The congregations of the Mysteries celebrated services of a public as well as a private nature.<sup>37</sup> Christianity was very similar to the cult of Mithra in using Sunday as a day of worship which was observed by the latter as the day of the sun.<sup>38</sup> It seems as though December 25, which was the "natale Solis invicti" for the Mithraites, was adopted by the Christian church in their liturgical calendar. It should be noted, however, that this date was also a popular feast day for other confraternities.<sup>39</sup>

Little is known of the actual services themselves in the Mysteries, as most of the worship was behind closed doors.

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<sup>35</sup>Benjamin Warfield, Studies in Tertullian and Augustine (New York: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 291.

<sup>36</sup>Herbert Workman, Persecution in the Early Church (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1906), p. 85.

<sup>37</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>38</sup>Franz Cumont, op. cit., pp. 181 f.

<sup>39</sup>Louis Duchesne, op. cit., p. 396.

But the services apparently usually consisted of hymns, adoration, sacrifice, and prayers. There was a morning litany, a sprinkling of holy water, an antiphonal chant, and finally a dismissal. The priest was clothed in white in most cults. In the cult of Isis, all the worshipers were clothed in women's clothing, and in others, all wore white.<sup>40</sup> A perpetual fire was the focal point of the liturgy of Mithra which consisted of sacrifice, libations and prayers.<sup>41</sup> In the Egyptian cult of Osiris and Isis the church liturgy had advanced to the stage where Matins and Vespers were held daily.<sup>42</sup>

Music apparently played an important role in the Mystery religions aiding the worshipers in the feeling of being at one with the deity.<sup>43</sup> The early Christian church had a heritage of hymns, but apparently because of the similar use of music in the Mysteries, the church waged a heated battle against the cultic music of the heathen.<sup>44</sup> In fact the similarity of usage in some cases was so close that it is recorded that during the reign of the Second Flavian Emperors and before Constantine made his pact with the Church, one heard of hymns being sung by the legionaries of the Empire

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<sup>40</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., pp. 121 ff.

<sup>41</sup>Louis Duchesne, op. cit., p. 393.

<sup>42</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>43</sup>Johannes Quasten, op. cit., pp. 51 f.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 81 f.

which could be chanted in common by Christians as well as Mithraists.<sup>45</sup>

The dramatic element was also a very important part of the worship carried on by the Mysteries.<sup>46</sup>

Turning to a description of the worship in the early Christian church one finds that the service was heavily charged with mystery. The church buildings themselves indicated this with their outer courts for catechumens, and their inner room for the baptized. The altar was screened. The vestments of the priests and the ceremonies performed by them were awe inspiring. This idea of mystery in the church was carried down into the medieval centuries and was revealed in the glories of the Gothic cathedrals and the practice and ceremonies of the drama of the Mass.<sup>47</sup>

#### Religious Marriage

Another concept of communion with the deity in the Mysteries was through religious marriage. This idea can be traced back to Asiatic and Egyptian beliefs concerning the possibility of copulation with the deity.<sup>48</sup> In the Mithra cult certain of the initiates vowed themselves either to

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<sup>45</sup>F. Legge, op. cit., p. 261.

<sup>46</sup>Supra, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup>Luther D. Reed, The Lutheran Liturgy (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), p. 230.

<sup>48</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., p. 112.

contenance, or to perpetual virginity, dedicating their bodies to the deity.<sup>49</sup> In Christian circles one sees a similar idea carried into practice. Augustine reports in his *Confessions* that two members of the Emperor's secret police, when they had read Saint Paul and been converted, dedicated themselves to God. Their affianced brides, when they heard this, also dedicated their virginity to God.<sup>50</sup> But the thought of the mystic marriage was clearly not implanted in the Church by the Mysteries because the idea can be found in the earliest documents of the Christian heritage. The concept was as familiar in the ancient Jewish writings as it was in the gentile environment. It must be admitted, however, in the Christian concept the society was regarded as the bride of Christ, and it was only later on in the history of the church that the stress on the individual came into popularity. In fact the church, as has been indicated, became guilty of taking the whole matter to the extreme so that virgins were encouraged to dedicate their members and flesh to Christ.<sup>51</sup> Jerome is recorded as saying to a mother on her daughter's decision not to marry a certain soldier, "She has done you a great service: you have begun to be mother-in-law to God."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>F. Legge, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

<sup>50</sup>Augustine, *Confessions and Enchiridion*, translated and edited by Albert C. Outler (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), p. 168.

<sup>51</sup>S. Angus, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 116 f.

## Sacramental Meals

The bond of sympathy with the deity was important in the Mysteries. In the sacrament the communicant witnessed and took part in the sorrows of his deity as a step to participation in the deity's triumph. It was common amongst the Oriental gods that they suffered, rejoiced, struggled, died and rose again.<sup>53</sup> The records indicate that the tried soldiers of Mithra partook of a sacrament of bread, and water mixed with wine. The similarity to the Eucharist of the Church is unmistakable. In the communion service of the Mithra cult the believers were to be strengthened in faith that Mithra would assure victory in this world, and that he would come from heaven again to bring the dead from the graves to a judgment at which he, as their mediator, would be the advocate of the initiated soul, which, purified by rites, would ascend through seven planetary spheres to paradise.<sup>54</sup> Sacramental meals were not peculiar to the cult of Mithra, but were common in the Mysteries in general. But the exact meaning of most of them is indefinite. The deity was supposed sometimes to be present as a guest, and sometimes as the host.<sup>55</sup> The similarity with the Eucharist of these practices of the Mysteries was noted by the early Church. Justin Martyr

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

is supposed to have said in his first Apology,

Wherefore also the evil demons in mimicry have handed down that the same thing should be done in the Mysteries of Mithras. For that bread and a cup of water are in these mysteries set before the initiate with certain speeches you either know or can learn.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps it was to these sacraments of the Mysteries that Saint Paul referred when he mentions the "cup of demons" and the "table of demons."<sup>57</sup> Some historians consider that the elaborate ceremonies which developed around the Lord's Supper and Baptism in the early Church were largely the result of the influence of the Mysteries.<sup>58</sup>

#### Contemplative Adoration

Communion with the deity was also thought to be effected through meditation. Through this practice the soul was supposed to be able to ascend to god. The idea was probably due to the influence of Plato. Meditation also had some value in wiping out the sins of the past. This silent worship appealed most to the women. Perhaps the most common way of meditating was through the contemplative adoration of the deity. The worshipers were aided in this by symbols or statues on which they could focus their attention. It is probable that the churches stood open during the day in order that the faithful might come in and ease their consciences or

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<sup>56</sup>F. Legge, op. cit., p. 260.

<sup>57</sup>1 Cor. 10:21.

<sup>58</sup>Karl Heussi, op. cit., p. 75.

quiet their hearts. There have been seats found in the Egyptian temples of the Mysteries which were probably used by those who were engaged in meditation.<sup>59</sup> Meditation has always been of importance in the Christian church too.

#### A Mediator

With reference to the cult of Mithra in particular, there existed the idea of a mediator.<sup>60</sup> This concept was also basic to Christian thought.<sup>61</sup> Mithra himself was regarded as supreme in the world as a mediator for mankind. He was the advocate of moral good and was the adversary of the powers of evil.<sup>62</sup> The similarity here in the concept of Christ and his relation to the world is evident. Reitzenstein is said to have explained this similarity by saying that the idea of a judgment of the world and the necessity of the redemption of each man is a copy, or even a component part of the metaphysical lot of the original man.<sup>63</sup>

#### General Concepts and Terminology

This is a large field of inquiry. Sufficient for the

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<sup>59</sup>S. Angus, op. cit., p. 133.

<sup>60</sup>Franz Cumont, op. cit., pp. 181 f.

<sup>61</sup>1 Tim. 2:5.

<sup>62</sup>Louis Duchesne, op. cit., p. 396.

<sup>63</sup>Carl Clemen, Religions of the World, translated by A. K. Dallas (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1931), p. 340.

present is an indication of just some of the similarities in these areas. Both Christianity and the cult of Mithra held to a belief in a fall of man at the beginning of the history of the world.<sup>64</sup> Both religions had a basic concept of heaven as existing above, and hell being below or actually in the earth.<sup>65</sup> Both operated with an idea of there being a corpus of knowledge which was a revelation from god.<sup>66</sup> It seems as though the Mithraists acquired the habit of referring to each other as "brother" and calling the priests "father."<sup>67</sup> In the area of terminology it is argued by some that Saint Paul used many words common in the Mysteries.<sup>68</sup> Finally, the Mithraists, in common with Christianity, held the soul to be immortal and that the body would rise again after death.<sup>69</sup>

#### Art

The art of the early Christian church was far from being an original form and genius of its own. The artists that created the sculpture which was used in the worship of Mithra are said to have profoundly influenced Christian art. It is

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<sup>64</sup>Franz Cumont, op. cit., pp. 181 f.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>F. Legge, op. cit., p. 261.

<sup>68</sup>Supra, p. 51.

<sup>69</sup>Louis Duchesne, op. cit., p. 186.

said by some that Christianity just copied, or took over the forms of art which existed in Mithraistic circles.<sup>70</sup>

#### Mission Stress

The Christian church of the first century is known for its stress on missionary activity. The journeys of Saint Paul described in the book of Acts illustrate this point. This kind of activity was not entirely unknown in the Mysteries. Mithraism was strong in its stress on the proclamation of an evangel. It possessed a strong missionary agency which Christianity did not have, namely the army. Mithraism was a popular belief among the soldier class and this agency spread the beliefs of the cult wherever it went. Through the influence of the army, Mithraism was carried to the court, so that in the third century it had chaplains in the Palace of the Caesars. Commodus was actually enrolled as a member. Diocletian and Galerius dedicated temples to Mithra. And Julian the Apostate sought to make Mithraism, or a variation of it, the official cult of the Empire.<sup>71</sup> Mithra had a second line of missionaries in the slaves of the Empire who were of Eastern origin.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Franz Cumont, op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>71</sup>Herbert Workman, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER VI

### DIFFERENCES FOUND IN CERTAIN AREAS OF SIMILARITY

#### Baptism

That the similarity of some of the sacraments common in the Mysteries to those of Christianity was taken seriously is indicated by the reported statements of Justin Martyr and Tertullian, in which they declare that certain Mithraistic rites were diabolical imitations of the Christian sacraments.<sup>1</sup> It is said that Augustine in reference to the same phenomenon remarked, "For evil spirits invent for themselves certain counterfeit representations of a high degree, that by this means they might deceive the followers of Christ."<sup>2</sup> More specifically, Holtzman is reported as believing that the doctrine of Baptism in the early church was based on the Hellenistic side of Saint Paul's theology in which he transformed Christianity after the analogy of the Greek Mystery cults.<sup>3</sup> Despite the similarity, however, differences are to be recognized.

The Taurobolium, which is regarded by some as being

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<sup>1</sup>F. J. Foakes-Jackson, The History of the Christian Church (Cambridge: J. Hall and Son, 1909), p. 185.

<sup>2</sup>A. S. Geden, Mithraism (London: The Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 64.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Schweitzer, Paul and His Interpreters, translated by G. W. Montgomery (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1950), p. 110.

closest to the idea of Baptism in the Christian church,<sup>4</sup> is still separated by a large gulf from the Christian concept. At best the similarity shows that the Mysteries may have been conscious of the Christian truth.<sup>5</sup> Considering the Taurololium one finds that it is a baptism of blood, not of water, as is the case in the Christian rite. Originally the Taurololium was closely connected with a sacrifice. Also the burial and rising again of the initiate is actually represented. The sacramental significance seems thus to be derived from a manysided symbolism. In the Christian sacrament plain water, coupled with the Word, effects everything.<sup>6</sup> The cults believed that baptism, as well as the other sacraments, were efficacious ex opere operato.<sup>7</sup> In Saint Paul's description of Baptism one finds that its effect is non-salutary on a subject who is not favourably disposed towards it. Similarly he discounts the efficacy of circumcision if it is merely an external occurrence.<sup>8</sup> In the Mysteries baptism was generally entered into by a person when he no longer desired to sin and consequently wished to undergo initiation.

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<sup>4</sup>Infra, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup>F. J. Foakes-Jackson, op. cit., p. 185.

<sup>6</sup>Albert Schweitzer, op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>7</sup>Henry D. Sheldon, The Mystery Religions and the New Testament (New York: Abingdon Press, 1918), p. 101.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

In the Christian sacrament it was the Baptism itself which brought about the change in the individual.<sup>9</sup> In the Baptism of the Church, the name of the divine person was used. Of a baptism performed in the name of Osiris, Attis, or Mithra, one knows nothing, although the act itself may have been regarded as a confession of faith in the divinity with whose worship it was associated. It is important, however, that the association of the utterance of the name with the baptismal rite cannot be directly shown to have existed in the Mystery religions.<sup>10</sup> In Christianity Baptism was a single act bringing a grace of eternal validity, which was not the case in the Mysteries.<sup>11</sup> Concluding one might say that the idea of baptism in the Church was most probably a reflection of the idea of washing present in the Jewish tradition, rather than an influence of the Mysteries.<sup>12</sup>

#### Sacramental Meals

Mommsen and Reitzenstein are said to indicate that the cults celebrated common meals (δειπνα, κυριακά) in which

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<sup>9</sup>Albert Schweitzer, op. cit., p. 226.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>11</sup>Adolf Köberle, The Quest for Holiness, translated by John C. Mattes from the Third German Edition (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1938), p. 62.

<sup>12</sup>Carl Clemen, Der Einfluss der Mysterienreligionen auf das älteste Christentum (Gießen: Verlag von Alfred Töpelmann, 1913), p. 17.

the celebrants were guests of the divinity. Here a medicine of immortality (*φάρμακόν τῆς ἀθανασίας*) planted in the souls of the participants the seeds of immortality. There was an increase in the intensification of the divine in the individual. A transformation and illumination of the participant took place. The effectiveness was supposed to be the same no matter who the participant might be, or what his predisposition to the meal. Here one sees the idea of efficacy ex opere operato again at work in the Mysteries. Saint Paul's emphasis, on the other hand, when referring to the Eucharist, is on the faith of the recipient. Unworthy eating and drinking brings only condemnation to the individual.<sup>14</sup> The stress on the receiving of immortality seems to be foremost in the sacramental meals of the Mysteries. In the agape of the Attis cult, the partakers were handed food in the typanon and drink in the cymbalon, and in this way they became mystae of Attis and thereby partakers of eternal life.<sup>15</sup> The sacramental meals were not always on the level just described, for it is said that the Mithraic Eucharist was attended at times with the performance of darker rites. Even human sacrifices were not unknown.<sup>16</sup> This seems a far cry from the simplicity of the Christian

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<sup>13</sup>Adolf Köberle, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>14</sup>1 Cor. 11:29.

<sup>15</sup>Albert Schweitzer, op. cit., p. 183.

<sup>16</sup>F. J. Foakes-Jackson, op. cit., p. 185.

sacrament in the early Church. In the Mysteries then the stress in the sacred meals varied from a heightened oneness with the deity to the bestowal of supernatural, godlike, or moralistic powers.<sup>17</sup> In the Mysteries the participant was filled with the joyous pleasure of a divinity close at hand. They tell of the apotheosis of man and of his ascent to the deity.<sup>18</sup> This is in sharp contrast to Christianity which tells of a condescension on the part of God and of his dwelling with men.<sup>19</sup> The Lord's Supper in the Church possessed an eschatological character not to be found in the meals of the Mysteries. There was a looking forward to a new world of living communion with the exalted Lord.<sup>20</sup> Clemen even says that it seems as though there is insufficient evidence from the Mysteries concerning their holy meals to warrant any conclusion as to their basic similarity to the Eucharist of the Church.<sup>21</sup> Basically the difference in the sacraments of the Church and the Mysteries seems to lie in the former's stress on the incarnation of God, and the latter's stress on the apotheosis of man.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Karl Heussi, Kompendium der Kirchen-geschichte (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1957), p. 19.

<sup>18</sup>Adolf Köberle, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 67 f.

<sup>21</sup>Carl Clemen, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>22</sup>Adolf Köberle, op. cit., p. 57.

## Pauline Terminology

Paul is frequently accused of taking terms and concepts from the Mysteries and incorporating them in his writings. Some take the extreme position and say that Saint Paul does not present the Gospel message, but the conclusions of Hellenic-Egyptian esotericism.<sup>23</sup> A more conservative view states that Paul, in setting forth his doctrine, continually referred to the ideas of Hellenic Mysticism, or to the forms of popular mythological concepts.<sup>24</sup> The possibility does seem to exist that Paul borrowed a word here and there from the Mysteries, but he also gave these words new meanings.<sup>25</sup> Schweitzer does not even admit this much and states that both Paul and the Mystery cults took hold of some of the vocabulary which already existed in the old Greek religions, and perfected it.<sup>26</sup> Others say that when one sees Paul molding his expressions along lines similar to the thought found in the Hellenistic Orient he is only following his principle of being "a Greek to the Greeks."<sup>27</sup> Some consider, however,

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<sup>23</sup>Alvin Kuhn, Shadow of the Third Century (227 Murray St., Elizabeth 2, N. J.: Academy Press, 1949), p. 337.

<sup>24</sup>Carl Clemen, Religions of the World, translated by A. K. Dallas (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1931), p. 349.

<sup>25</sup>Henry P. Hamann, Justification by Faith in Modern Theology (St. Louis: School For Graduate Studies, Concordia Seminary, 1957), p. 34.

<sup>26</sup>Albert Schweitzer, op. cit., p. 227.

<sup>27</sup>Carl Kraeling, "Reitzenstein and the Mystery Religions," The Lutheran Church Quarterly, I (1928), 176.

that Paul cannot have known the Mystery religions in the form in which they are known to have existed in the second and third centuries, because in this fully developed form they did not yet exist. Assuming the most favourable case, that from his youth up he observed the heathen religions around him, he can have only known the Mysteries in their uncompounded state, not as what they developed into when they came filled with the Greek yearning for redemption.<sup>28</sup> This last mentioned view does not seem to fit adequately with the idea Paul has of the sacraments in the Mysteries as shown in Colossians.

Some of the terms which Paul used will now be considered. He used the word *μυστήριον*. But by it he does not mean a mystical kind of knowledge, but rather something that human wisdom can not fathom or understand of itself, and thus has to be revealed by God. The term *τέλειος* (mature, complete) was used by the Mysteries as referring to the standing of an initiate. When Paul uses the term he does so in the sense that was common outside the Mysteries. Here it meant a relative perfection, or maturity.<sup>29</sup> The words *σάρξ*, *ψυχὴ* and *πνεῦμα* are also said to have been borrowed from the cults. But Paul uses them in a sense different from that current in the Mysteries. He uses the same sense as the Hebrew *בשר*, *נפש* and *רוח*, which the above Greek words translate in the

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<sup>28</sup>Albert Schweitzer, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>29</sup>Henry D. Sheldon, *op. cit.*, pp. 75 ff.

Septuagint. They mean, taken in the order given, the flesh (or unrenewed man, or the worldly spirit of man with physical desires), the spirit, and the soul. The difference in the last two is to be found in their relationship, whether it be to God or to man himself. The soul is that which God claims, while the spirit is man's own and the gift of God. The Mysteries make no such distinction. It is possible that Paul borrowed the terms *ψυχή* and *ἀγνώστια* from the religious vernacular of the day, but there arises no difficulty in interpretation or acceptance. By the word *μεταμορφῶσθαι* Paul meant reaching a supernatural goal by supernatural means. The Mysteries, when they used this word, indicated a change of essence, brought about by any kind of magic. The use of *κύριος*, can be traced back to the Hebrew word *יְהוָה* in the Septuagint.<sup>30</sup> When Paul uses the picture of Christians becoming *νότι θεοῦ* (Romans 8:14) and refers to *νόθεσις* (Romans 8:15) he was employing an idea popular in the Mysteries.<sup>31</sup> Similarity does not however imply dependence on the cults.

Some suggest that a number of the doctrines defined in the writings of Paul had their origin in the Mysteries, and in the cult of Mithra in particular. But the evidence is in-

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 79-90.

<sup>31</sup>Albrecht Dieterich, Eine Mithrasliturgie (Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von B. G. Teubner, 1903), p. 152.

conclusive, and can be interpreted in various ways.<sup>32</sup> In fact Schweitzer says that a distinguishing feature of the doctrine of Paul is that it is much more mysterious than the doctrine of the Mystery religions.<sup>33</sup> Clemen takes the view too that it is highly improbable that the Mithra Mystery, in particular, had any influence on Paul.<sup>34</sup>

### Johannine Literature

The apostle John is also said to have been influenced by the cults. But John advocates an open religion, not a secret one. He is aloof from astrology, sidereal mysticism, and naturalism. He insists on ethics, is opposed to magic, avoids pantheism, and emphasizes the historical basis of Christianity. All these things are in direct contrast to the pagan Mysteries. The book of Revelation, because of its imagery, is said to be a reflection of the influence of the Mysteries, but one can say that the author drew his images from ethnic mythology and from the language of the Old Testament, because these pictures were not the exclusive property of the cults.<sup>35</sup> So Clemen says that the Johannine literature,

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<sup>32</sup>A. S. Geden, Mithraism (London: The Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 4.

<sup>33</sup>Albert Schweitzer, op. cit., pp. 212 f.

<sup>34</sup>Carl Clemen, Der Einfluss der Mysterienreligionen auf das älteste Christentum (Gießen: Verlag von Alfred Töpelmann, 1913), pp. 56 ff.

<sup>35</sup>Henry D. Sheldon, op. cit., pp. 149 f.

despite allusions to visions and the use of terminology such as "light," and "darkness," and the expression of mystical views of Christ and God, is still far removed from the ideas in the Mysteries.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Carl Clemen, Religions of the World, translated by A. K. Dallas (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1931), p. 351.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE VERDICT OF AUTHORITIES ON THE PROBLEM

There is no great degree of unanimity among the authorities on the problem of the influence of the Mysteries on Christianity. The opinion varies with nearly every author. For purpose of illustration a number of different views will be given in the following text.

Great Influence was exerted on Christianity by  
the Mysteries

Clemen maintained that it can not be denied that Christianity acquired suggestions, forms, conceptions, and rites from its environment, part of which was made up by the Mysteries.<sup>1</sup> The influence of the Mysteries is to be seen most clearly amongst the later Gnostic and Marcionite sects and other minor divisions within the large body of Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Heussi says that undoubtedly language usage, practice, and piety of the Mystery religions influenced the church in many ways.<sup>3</sup> Robertson is indicated as going so far as to say that

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<sup>1</sup>Carl Clemen, Religions of the World, translated by A. K. Dallas (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1931), p. 342.

<sup>2</sup>Carl Clemen, Der Einfluss der Mysterienreligionen auf das älteste Christentum (Gießen: Verlag von Alfred Töpelmann, 1913), p. 83.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Heussi, Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1957), p. 75.

the Christian system is nothing but a patchwork of a hundred suggestions drawn from pagan art and ritual usages.<sup>4</sup>

Small Influence was exerted on Christianity by  
the Mysteries

Clemen modifies his view when he looks at early Christianity, and he says that here the Mysteries had only a slight influence on the Church.<sup>5</sup> One can not point to any one new use in ancient Christianity coming from the cults. One writer is of the view that "The Mysteries may have exerted limited formal influence on certain subsequent developments of Christianity but they had no influence whatever on the origin of Christianity."<sup>6</sup> Legge declares,

That, in the course of her development, she (the church) acquired characteristics which fitted her to her environment would be in strict conformity with the laws which appear to govern the evolution of all institutions; and if the power ruling the universe chooses to work by law rather than by what seems to us like caprice, such a choice does not show him to be lacking either in wisdom or benevolence.<sup>7</sup>

Geden considers that it is more or less established that the doctrines and ritual of Mithra in particular made an effect

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<sup>4</sup>Alvin Kuhn, Shadow of the Third Century (227 Murray St., Elizabeth 2, N. J.: Academy Press, 1949), p. 306.

<sup>5</sup>Carl Clemen, op. cit., pp. 81 f.

<sup>6</sup>P. D. Pahl, "The Mystery Religions," The Australasian Theological Review, XX (June, 1949), 20.

<sup>7</sup>F. Legge, Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915) II, 360 f.

although probably unconscious, on the teaching and language of some of the Christian apologists.<sup>8</sup>

No Influence was exerted on Christianity by  
the Mysteries

Reitzenstein ruled out any direct influence or contact between the Mysteries and early Christianity. The similarity between practices in early Christianity and the pagan cults is due to the presence in the Orient of a religious atmosphere of which both Christianity and the Mysteries were representatives.<sup>9</sup> Schweitzer considers that in the areas of baptism and the communion meal there is no reason to consider the influence of the Mysteries. It was only later in the history of the church that the influence came into question.<sup>10</sup>

An Influence was exerted by Christianity on  
the Mysteries

There is supposed to be a decided possibility of the Christian church having influenced the mysteries. This can be seen in their special development from the second century

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<sup>8</sup>A. S. Geden, Mithraism (London: The Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 4.

<sup>9</sup>Carl Kraeling, "Reitzenstein and the Mystery Religions," The Lutheran Church Quarterly, I (1928), 174.

<sup>10</sup>Albert Schweitzer, Paul and his Interpreters, translated by G. W. Montgomery (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1950), p. 189.

onwards. Their distinctive forms, rites, and liturgy are often a later formation strongly affected by the conditions around them. For example their later stress on σωτήρ and the promise of σωτηρία ; their introduction of a form of infant baptism; their increasing definition of a church concept; all of these phenomena indicate a dependence on Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Legge considers that especially in respect to Mithraism there was a copying from Christianity.<sup>12</sup>

There was a Conscious Copying on the Part  
of Christianity

Legge says, "In the days of her infancy, and before she thus came into her inheritance, Christianity borrowed much from her rivals over which she was in the long run to reign supreme."<sup>13</sup> Kuhn reports that Mosheim was of the opinion that the Christians, seeing that the Mysteries were held in the highest veneration by people of every country, were induced to make their religion conform in many respects to this part of the heathen world, hoping to promote thereby the favourable reception of Christianity.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the above mentioned views there are some

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<sup>11</sup>James Orr, Neglected Factors in the Study of the Early Progress of Christianity (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1899), pp. 210 ff.

<sup>12</sup>F. Legge, op. cit., pp. 260 f.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 360.

<sup>14</sup>Alvin Kuhn, op. cit., p. 95.

who think that there is insufficient evidence to settle the question. Cumont regards it as impossible to determine the influence of the Mysteries on Christianity and vice versa.<sup>15</sup> Analogies may indeed exist, but analogies do not necessarily imply dependence.<sup>16</sup> Dieterich is recorded as saying in reference to this habit of finding analogies,

It is one of the worst faults for the science of comparative religion, which is at present becoming constantly less cautious, to overlook the most natural explanations, not to say avoid and ignore them, in order to have recourse to the most far-fetched, and, by the most eccentric methods, to drag out analogies which, to the unsophisticated eye, are absolutely invisible.<sup>17</sup>

Latourette, in a rather sweeping statement says there is no conclusive proof of conscious or unconscious copying of the Mysteries by Christianity, and in the final summation the difference between the Mysteries and Christianity is greater than the similarity.<sup>18</sup>

### Conclusion

In the opinion of the writer, being conditioned by the material presented in the current paper, there seems to be a high degree of possibility that the Christian church in the

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<sup>15</sup>Franz Cumont, Die Mysterien des Mithra, autorisierte Deutsche Ausgabe von Georg Gehrich (Leipzig und Berlin: Verlag von B. G. Teubner, 1923), p. 184.

<sup>16</sup>Albert Schweitzer, op. cit., p. 194.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 259.

early centuries did borrow from the Mysteries. This appears to be indicated by the many areas of similarity that do exist. By this statement, however, it is not the writer's intention to convey the impression that all the areas of similarity have to be based on the idea of influence. But the wealth of similarity does give one pause for thought and suggests that it is indeed probable that Christianity and the Mysteries did not exist side by side without influencing one another in any degree.

At the same time as the writer accepts the possibility of the Mystery's influence, there seems to be insufficient proof to definitely point to any given area and say that here, without the shadow of a doubt, one can see the influence of the Mysteries on Christianity. There always seems to exist an alternative explanation for any author's evidence of actual influence.

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