filled with anomie. Then man finds himself in a world which he does not recognize; and perhaps even more terrible, man finds himself to have a self he does not recognize. Then he will need to create a new world, to express his sense of a new place. For man: “can adapt himself somehow to anything his imagination can cope with; but he cannot deal with Chaos . . . Therefore our most important assets are always the symbols of our general orientation in nature, on the earth, in society and in what we are doing: the symbols of our Weltanschauung and Lebenanschauung.”

47 S. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, 4 ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p. 287. This paper was first presented on April 30, 1970 at a colloquium, “Man and Symbol” sponsored by The Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BIRTH UPSIDE DOWN OR RIGHT SIDE UP?

All things have their place, knew we how to place them.

George Herbert.

Tout, dans les représentations humaines, ou du moins tout l’essentiel, est système.

Georges Dumézil.

One of the most exciting and profound developments in recent years in the study of archaic cultures, myths, and rituals has been the increased focus on structural elements, on systems of logic, order, and classification. This has been the outgrowth of the rejection of older theories of a primitive Urðumhnit, a repudiation of statements such as Frazer’s that “haziness is the characteristic of the mental vision of the savage. Like the blind man at Bethsaida, he sees men like trees and animals walking in a thick intellectual fog.”

The beginning of this new perspective might be dated from the early part of this century with the works of the French Sociological School, especially the essay by Durkheim and Mauss on primitive classification and Hertz’s study of symbolic forms of classification associated with the dualism left/right. More recently, one might point to the researches of Dumézil and his followers, the work of some of the contemporary British Social Anthropologists and studies by American Ethnoscientists. Research in this direction


has culminated, for the present, in the theoretical works of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, and Victor Turner.

Much of Lévi-Strauss's extremely provocative work may be understood as an attempt to lay bare the various taxonomies, typologies, and logical systems of archaic myths, rituals, and social structures. As he has noted in an important paragraph:

A native thinker makes the penetrating comment that “All sacred things must have their place.” It could even be said that being in their place is what makes them sacred if they were taken out of their place, even in thought, the entire order of the universe would be destroyed. Sacred objects therefore contribute to the maintenance of order in the universe by occupying the places allocated to them. Examined superficially and from the outside, the refinements of ritual can appear pointless. They are explicable by a concern for what one might call “micro-adjustment”—the concern to assign every single creature, object or feature to a place within a class.6

Mary Douglas in her already classic work, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, and Victor Turner in his on-going studies of liminality7 have examined precisely those persons, objects, creatures, and places which do not have a place, which are out of place, betwixt and between. Starting with an analysis of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 and using a wealth of comparative material, Douglas demonstrates, that “holiness is exemplified by completeness. Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different

5 Quoting A. C. Fletcher, “The Hako: A Pawnee Ceremony,” *Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (Washington, D.C.), 1904, Part II, p. 34. Although I am extremely appreciative of Lévi-Strauss’s interpretation (i.e., “it could even be said that being in their place is what makes them sacred”)—the actual context for this remark in Fletcher’s report gives a somewhat different implication: “The first act of a man must be to set apart a place that can be made sacred and holy, that can be consecrated to Tiraw…a place where a man can put his sacred articles, those objects which enable him to approach the powers…We are now to set aside a place where we shall put the sacred articles. The sacred fire must come in a place set aside for it. All sacred things must have their place. Katahara is the place set apart for the sacred fire, where it can come and bring good to man” (Fletcher, p. 338). It is not, in this account, being-in-their-place which confers sacrality as Lévi-Strauss suggests.


The farmer’s duty was to preserve the blessing. For one thing, he had to preserve the order of creation. So no hybrids…either in the fields, or in the herds, or in the clothes…Cloven hoofed, cud chewing ungulates are the model of the proper kind of food for a pastoralist. If they must eat wild game, they can eat wild game that shares these characteristics and is therefore of the same species…[That those that do not conform are held to be unclean, for example] animals which are cloven hoofed but not ruminant, the pig and the camel. Note that this failure to conform to the two necessary criteria for defining cattle is the only reason given in the Old Testament for avoiding the pig [Deut. 14:6-8; Lev. 11:3,7]; nothing whatever is said about its dirty scavenging habits… I suggest that originally the sole reason for its being counted as unclean is its failure as a wild boar to get into the antelope class. In general the underlying principle of cleanness in animals is that they shall conform fully to their class. Those species are unclean which are imperfect members of their class, or whose class itself confounds the general scheme of the world. To grasp this scheme we need go back to Genesis and the creation. Here a three-fold classification unfolds, divided between the earth, the waters and the firmament. Leviticus takes up this scheme and allot to each element its proper kind of animal life. In the firmament two-legged fowls fly with wings. In the water scaly fish swim with fins. On the earth four-legged animals hop, jump or walk. Any class of creatures which is not equipped for the right kind of locomotion in its element is contrary to holiness. Thus anything in the waters which has not fins or scales is unclean [Lev. 11:10-12]. Nothing is said about predatory habits or of scavenging. The only sure test for cleanness in a fish is its scales and its propulsion by means of fins. Four-footed creatures which fly [Lev. 11:20-26] are unclean. If penguins lived in the Near East I would expect them to be ruled unclean as wingless birds.8

Though the elements which are out of place are dangerous and unclean, they are also extremely potent and thus may be voluntarily crossed over into at significant moments in the life of an individual, culture, or the cosmos. In this connection, one may think of the well-known phenomenon of the suspension of taboos for initiates following initiation; the deliberate eating of unclean food (e.g., Isa. 65:3-5) or cultic transvestism by magicians, shamans, and practitioners of Tantra; the saturnalia and other periods of license

9 Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 54-56.
and chaos preceding or following New Years; or the punctuation of the liturgical year with cultic acts of obscenity or burlesque (e.g., the Feestum Asinorum or the Purimspiele). But in general, these interstructural activities and liminal situations (like other similar phenomena, e.g., ecstasy) are punctual, limited experiences which form part of a highly structured scenario of existence, of birth and rebirth, of creation, order and chaos.

That which gives shape to the whole, which provides the boundaries within which a person or thing obtains its class as well as providing a map for those who would venture outside their station, is, as Mary Douglas intimated with her reference to the opening chapter of Genesis, the cosmogonic myth. It has been the consistent emphasis of Mircea Eliade that the cosmogonic myth functions as an exemplary model, a paradigm which reveals and describes not only the structure of the cosmos as it was in the beginning but also its structure as it is experienced in the here and now. Eliade goes on to point out that the cosmos and its structures are understood to be "a living world—inhabited and used by creatures of flesh and blood, subject to the law of becoming, of old age and death. Hence it requires a periodical repairing, a renewing, a strengthening. But the only way to renew the World is to repeat what the Immortals did in illo tempore, is to reiterate the creation."10 If this repairing and repetition were not accomplished, the structures would dissolve and the cosmos would return, permanently, to primordial chaos.

That life is thus created through the cult means salvation from that distress and destruction which would befall, if life were not renewed. For existence is an everlasting war between the forces of life and death, of blessing and curse. "The World" is worn out if it is not regularly renewed. . . . Thus it is the "fact of salvation" which is actualized in the cult. . . . The fact that the cult is a repetition and a renewed creation leads to the view that the salvation which takes place is a repetition of a first salvation which took place in the dawn of time.11

One finds in many archaic cultures a profound faith in the cosmos as ordered in the beginning and a joyous celebration of the primordial act of ordering as well as a deep sense of responsibility for the maintenance of that order through repetition of the myth, through

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ritual, through norms of conduct, or through taxonomy. But it is equally apparent that in some cultures the structure of order, the gods that won or ordained it, creation itself, are discovered to be evil and oppressive. In such circumstances one will rebel against the paradigms and seek to reverse their power, frequently employing (with the effect of a Black Mass) the very same ritual techniques which had maintained the original order. Such a phenomenon may be seen in India where the yogi utilizes the structures of the archaic Brahmanic sacrifices—sacrifices designed to maintain and renew the order of the cosmos—in order to escape the cosmic restraints of order and destiny. A similar rebellion occurred in the Mediterranean world during the hellenistic period. Here the all-pervasive structure of gnosticism12 judged the cosmos, its gods, the human condition, and all structures of order to be evil and oppressive and sought to liberate man by annihilating or reversing these structures. It is with one particular example of this rebellion, the tradition of the upside-down crucifixion of the Apostle Peter as recorded in the *Acts of Peter* that the remainder of this paper is concerned.

**The Acts of Peter**

The apocryphal *Acts of Peter* is one of the earliest extant examples of this genre of literature, composed most probably between A.D. 180-190 in either Asia Minor or Rome. Originally in Greek (although only ninth- to eleventh-century manuscripts survive), our prime source is a Latin translation found at Vercelli. While this manuscript dates from the sixth or seventh century, it is dependent on a translation from Greek into Latin produced in the third, or, at the latest, fourth century.13

The *Acts of Peter* may be easily divided into two main sections: the first narrates the conflict between Simon Magus and Peter; the

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12 My understanding of gnosticism is that it is a structural possibility within a number of religious traditions in the hellenistic-Mediterranean world, that it is not a new religion, or a Christian heresy, but rather a structure analogous to mysticism or asceticism.
second, with which we are concerned, is a lengthy account of Peter’s martyrdom (chaps. 33-41 in Codex Vercellenses). This latter section was widely circulated as may be seen from surviving texts or fragments in Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Arabic, Ethiopic, and Old Slavonic.14

The earliest datable reference to the upside down motif is in Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History (III.i.2) where it is reported that Origen, in the third book of his commentary on Genesis, had written of Peter: “At the end he came to Rome and was crucified head downwards, for so he requested to suffer.”15 Usually this upside-down crucifixion has received a moralistic interpretation:

He [Peter] had the happiness to end his life on the cross. His Lord was pleased not only that he should die for his love, but in the same manner [he] himself had died for us, by expiring on the cross which was the throne of his love. Only the apostle’s humility made a difference in desiring to be crucified with his head downwards ... for he was not worthy to suffer in the same manner as his divine master. ... His master looked toward heaven ... [but Peter] judged that a sinner formed from dust, and going to return to dust, ought rather in confusion to look on the earth as [he was] unworthy to raise his eyes to heaven.16

This understanding of Peter’s reversed crucifixion has been the leading interpretation since the ninth century; but I would propose that it is a distortion, both of the explicit words of the narrative and of the meaning of the upside down motif. Rather than dealing with an exercise in humility, we have here an act of cosmic audacity consistent with and expressive of a Christian-gnostic understanding and evaluation of the structures of the cosmos and of the human condition. Thus, while Morton Scott Enslin declares of the description of the crucifixion of Peter in the Acts of Peter that “even this narrative is clogged by a lengthy explanation as to why he wished thus to be crucified,”17 I would insist, to the contrary, that in this explanation we have one of the more overt texts illustrating one type of Christian mystery.

Then when he had approached and stood by the cross, he began to say: “O name of the cross, mystery that is hidden, O inexpressible grace that is spoken in the name of the cross! O nature of man that cannot be separated from God! O love unspeakable and inseparable that cannot be revealed through unclean lips! I seize you now, having come to the end of my release from here. I will declare you, what you are; I will no longer conceal the mystery of the cross that has long been shut in and hidden from my soul. For you who hope in Christ, do not let the cross be this thing that is visible: for [my death] like the passion of Christ is something other than a visible thing. And now, above all, since you who are able to hear can hear from me who is at the last final hour of my life—pay attention! withdraw your souls from every outward sense, from all that appears but is not truly real; close your eyes shut your ears, cease actions outwardly seen, and you shall know that concerns Christ and the whole secret of your salvation. Let this much be said to you who hear—[but] remain as if it were unspoken. But now it is time for you, Peter, to surrender your body to those who are taking it. Take it then, you whose function it is, I request, O executioners, that you crucify me head downwards, in that position and in no other. And the reason [for this] I will tell to those who hear.”18

Thus far we have been given an exhortation by one-who-knows, who possesses gnomos, to an initiated circle of listeners. It is not, I think, to go beyond the meaning of the text to understand Peter here as speaking as one possessed, in ecstasy. It is the inner voice, the pneumatic voice of Peter that we are hearing; and we are invited to hear him with our inner, pneumatic ears. Peter can dissociate himself from his body and can address his fleshly, visible form: “It is time for you, Peter, to surrender your body”; for Peter is

14 For these traditions, see the superb edition of L. Vouaux, Les Actes de Pierre (Paris, 1922), pp. 1-22.
15 K. Lake, Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History (London, 1926), Vol. I, pp. 190 [text]–191 [translation]. I am not interested, within the limits of this paper, in the vexed question of the historicity of Peter’s residence and martyrdom in Rome. See the classic treatments of H. Lietzmann, Petrus et Paulus in Rom, 2d ed. (Berlin and Leipzig, 1927); O. Cullmann, Peter: Disciple, Apostle and Martyr (Cleveland, 1958 reprint) and the new archaeological researches summarised by M. Guarducci, The Tomb of Saint Peter (New York, 1960). The latter remain controversial (see the excellent bibliography prepared by A. A. de Marco, The Tomb of Saint Peter [Leiden, 1964]). On June 26, 1968 “the Vatican has conclusively determined that the mortal remains found under St. Peter’s Basilica are those of the Apostle” (Associated Press Dispatch—further details are not available to me at this writing). Both partisans and detractors of the Roman tradition agree that “Peter was crucified in Rome with his head downwards scarcely has historical value” (Cullmann, Peter, p. 117).
one at the threshold of death, at the moment of truth, about to experience the great initiation. He is at the “last final hour” of his life, at the moment when he is about to put off the old man and put on the new. At the moment when, what he declares will no longer be spoken with “unclean lips”; when what he utters will be supremely true for the impediments of his life-long earthly existence, impediments which have resulted heretofore in the “mystery of the cross” being “shut in and hidden from his soul,” are about to be stripped away. Peter is here speaking in the traditional language of the mystery cults and inviting a select audience to participate in the mystery with the classic formula: Let him who has ears, hear!

Peter’s discourse from the cross, as the text continues, is a revelation of the mystery of Christ, a mystery which repeats the most ancient mystery of all: creation.

And when they had hanged him in the way which he had requested, he began to speak again, declaring: “Men, whose right it is to hear pay attention to what I shall tell you at this moment that I am hanged! You must know the mystery of all nature and the beginning of all things, how it came about. For the first man, whose likeness I bear in my appearance, in falling head downwards displayed a manner of birth that was not once—for it was dead, without motion. He, being drawn down—he who also cast his first beginning down to the earth—established the whole of the cosmos system as an image of his creation [or, vocation]. Upside down as he was, he showed what is on the right hand as on the left, and those on the left as on the right, and changed the signs of all their nature so as to consider fair those things which were not beautiful and those things which were really evil to be good. Concerning this the Lord says in a mystery: Unless you make what is on the right hand as what is on the left and what is on the left hand as what is on the right and what is above as what is below and what is behind as what is before— you will not know knowledge [or recognize, or look upon] of the Kingdom.

This thought then I have declared to you; and the form in which you now see me hanging is the representation of that man who first came to birth. You then, my beloved, both those who hear me now and those that shall hear in time, must leave your former error and turn back again; for you should come up to the cross of Christ, who is the Word stretched out, the one and only, of whom the Spirit says: For what else is Christ but the World, the sound of God. So that Word is this upright tree on which I am crucified; but the sound is the cross-piece, the nature of man; and the nail which holds the cross-piece to the upright in the middle is the conversion and repentance of man.19


After giving this revelation of the mystery, Peter concludes his discourse with a lengthy doxology and dies.

The theme of Peter’s upside down crucifixion is common in the complex apocryphal Petrine corpus. At times it is found in a setting similar to that quoted above, with a lengthy mystagogic discourse by Peter on the significance of the Cross (e.g., Pseudo-Linus, Martyrium beati Petri apostoli, XII);20 more commonly as in the complex Acts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, which are widely diffused in medieval manuscripts and apparently cannot be dated earlier than the ninth century, the moralistic interpretation is given:

And Peter, having come to the cross said: “Since my Lord Jesus Christ, who came down from heaven to earth, was raised upright upon the cross, and since he has been gracious enough to call me to heaven who is from the earth—my cross ought to be set up head downwards so as to direct my feet towards heaven, for I am not worthy of being crucified like my Lord.”21

The motif of the upside-down crucifixion of Peter is widely disseminated in works of art as well, one of the earliest representations being found in a ninth-century manuscript of Gregory Nazianzus (Parisinus 510, fol. 32v), the most famous probably being the painting of Giotto in the Sala del Capitolo of St. Peter’s in the Vatican.22

There is only one other major tradition which narrates the upside down crucifixion of an apostle—that of Philip.23 The Acts of Philip were composed in the fourth or fifth century and are clearly dependent upon the Acts of Peter. Unfortunately this apocryphon has survived only in Greek and Syriac fragments. In these, Philip, like Peter, is crucified head downwards; unlike Peter, he does not


23 I have omitted from consideration the occurrence of upside-down crucifixion or hanging in martyrological traditions (e.g., St. Calliopius). In a recently published tenth-century Arabic manuscript, Paul is crucified in a horizontal position, see S. Pines, The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a New Source (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 28.
of spatial relationships from a nonhuman world. *To be upside down* is to be alien.

In Western tradition, the general symbolism of being upside down is most commonly associated with the *antipoder*, a continent in which men walk upside down in relation to the known Western world and which takes on the character of a “never-never land.” Such a world is totally alien to our own, as a third-century critic of the antipodal theory suggests in his scoffing inquiry:

> How is it with those who imagine that there are antipodes opposite to our footsteps?... Is there anyone so senseless as to believe that there are men whose footsteps are higher than their heads? or that things which with us are in a recumbent position, with them hang in an inverted direction? that crops and trees grow downwards? that the rains and snow and hail fall upwards to the earth?  

The notion of a reversed world is found in non-Western cultures as well and persists in science-fiction novels such as Austin Hall and Homer Flint’s, _The Blind Spot_.

This nonhuman, alien, or even antihuman characteristic of being upside down may be expressed in a variety of ways. It may symbolize a time when a man was not yet (or a time when man is no longer) a man. Thus in some Jewish traditions it is held that in Paradise men walked on their hands, Isaac being the only figure to retain this unique mode of locomotion after leaving Paradise. Alternatively, in a number of cultures, the dead are depicted as walking upside down. The hostile, antihuman, threatening aspect of being upside down...

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somewhat "tricksterish" figure of Father William in Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland:

“You are old, father William,” the young man said,

“And your hair has become very white;

And yet you incessantly stand on your head—

Do you think, at your age, it is right?”

As that which is unhuman, the upside-down posture is often associated with shame, that is, it is unnatural. While to be hung or crucified upside down has rarely been employed as a legal form of execution (it was a practice in Rome), to be hung by the heels is frequently an extralegal form of derision, usually after the individual has been slain (e.g., Mussolini). For Peter to request to be crucified upside down was to deliberately dehumanize himself, to reverse the natural order, and to make of his death an act of rebellion against his manhood and the cosmos. Paradoxically, it was also an act of birth. It was a commonplace in hellenistic scientific literature that birth takes place in an upside-down position: it is the due order of nature that men should enter the world with the head first and be carried to the tomb in a contrary fashion. It is within this context, so typical of the general mood of hellenistic religions, of a destruction of one’s humanity which is at the same time one’s birth, that the upside-down crucifixion of Peter must be interpreted.

what of a simpleton, in folk literature often functions as a trickster figure. Thus in one tale containing the widespread motif of transposed heads or resuscitation with misplaced head (Thompson, Motif-Index E34 cf. A1371.1), Peter attempts to create a man but places his head backwards (cited in A. Aarne and S. Thompson, The Types of the Folktale [Helsinki, 1964], 774A).


78 I have omitted from consideration hanging upside down as a form of torture, since the physiological consequences would be more to the fore; however in sadistic and bondage literature, hanging upside down is frequently featured—here the sense of shame and the unnatural is clearly present.

79 Pliny, Historia naturalis VII.6. It is noteworthy that it is only in archaic medical literature that the notion of being upside down has positive connotations. Thus in Jewish tradition, at birth a male child issues from the womb headfirst, a female, feetfirst (BT Sotah, 11b; Ber. R XVII; Sh. R I.13–14; J. Trachtenberg, Jewish Magic and Superstition [Cleveland, 1961 reprint], p. 188). Likewise the description of man found in a number of old Jewish and Christian manuals: hominem esse arborum inveniendum (see C.-M. Edman, “Arbor inversa,” Religion et Bibel, III [1944], esp. 32f.; C. G. Jung, Alchemische Studien [New York, 1967]), pp.

Tutuola, The Palm-Wine Drinkard and his Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Dead’s Town (New York, 1953), pp. 97, 100. Tutuola writes: “everything they [the dead] were doing there [in Dead’s Town] was incorrect to alive and everything that all alive were doing was incorrect to deads too” (p. 100). The same motif is utilized by Tutuola to describe ancestral time when men were not yet men (see above n. 30): “In the olden days when the eyes of all human-beings were on our knees, when we were bending down from the sky because of its gravinitness and when we were walking backwards and not forwards as nowadays” (p. 75). Greek: The same symbolism appears to lie behind the tradition that in consulting the oracle at Delphi—a procedure which clearly involves a descent to the Underworld and a return—one entered a hole in the ground right side up, but the return upward is the reverse of the descent . . . the feet being pushed out first” (Pausanias IX.39.1), i.e., one returned in the posture of a dead spirit.


32 S. Eitrem, Papiri Ochosnes (Oslo, 1925), Vol. I, p. 67 “even now-a-days we come around the belief that witches bend down and look at the landscape backwards between their legs.” Eitrem refers to an article by him on the subject in Kunst og kultur (1923), 78 (non vidi); R. Needham, “Introduction,” Durkheim and Mauss, Primitive Classification, p. xxix.


35 P. Radin, The Trickster, (New York, 1936), p. 98 (I am certain more convincing examples may be cited). Note that Peter, who in gospel traditions is some-

down may be seen in the widespread belief that witches walk upside down as well as in practices such as among the Lugbara who invert “hostile or suspect neighbours.”

In some traditions such as Yoga where, as Eliade has noted, “the yogin undertakes to ‘reverse’ normal behavior completely,” the upside-down posture (the Sirshāsana or the Urdhvaṇaḥāsana) is part of a complex repertory of ritual techniques to annihilate one’s manhood, to become nonhuman.

In certain transitional or liminal periods such as initiations or New Years, there is a deliberate dehumanizing of the novice or society through ritual activity. In some societies this includes juggling and other acrobatic stunts featuring, among other things, an upside-down position. Likewise in myth, the figure of the Trickster, himself a liminal figure, occasionally appears in an upside-down position. Perhaps a continuation of this motif may be seen in the
of tension (such as the myth of the theft of the tablets of destiny by the Zu bird, or the imprisonment of Marduk during the New Year festival) but the structures of destiny will ultimately win out. They will be victorious because they are real, having been established by the gods. They will be victorious because they have annually been renewed and strengthened in the great double ceremony of the fixing of the destinies which concluded the Akitu festival. Man’s responsibility is to accord with, to harmonize himself to, the great rhythms of cosmic destiny and order. If he does rebel (as in the case of Gilgamesh), he will learn that he “cannot rise above his human characteristics . . . and after a brief time of despair, he squares his shoulders and goes back to face reality.” Gilgamesh is one example of the widespread pattern of the hero-that-failed. Like Maui or Orpheus, he was not successful in overcoming death or his humanity; but rather through rebellion he was initiated into, discovered and assumed his humanity, and affirmed both the human and the cosmic structures of destiny. In sum, he became an upright man. I have focused on Babylonian materials, partly because they persisted into the hellenistic period. The same general pattern is to be found in nearly every Mediterranean and Near Eastern culture.

During the hellenistic period, there was a “radical revaluation” (Hans Jonas’s phrase) of this all-pervasive “cosmological conviction,” a revaluation which has led classicists such as Gilbert Murray to speak of a “failure of nerve,” E. R. Dodds to describe the period as “an age of anxiety,” and Eric Voegelin to formulate a shift from a “compact experience of the cosmos” to a “differentiated experience of existential tension.” Hellenistic man suffers from what might be termed cosmic paranoia. He experiences himself to be naked and helpless; he sees danger and threat everywhere. Looking up at the heavens, at the stars, and the motions of the heavenly bodies, he no

311f. This cannot be treated apart from the general symbol of the Inverted Tree (see M. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion [New York, 1958], pp. 273-276 and the literature cited).

42 I have followed the translation of A. Heidel, The Babylonian Genesis, 2d ed. (Chicago, 1951).
longer sees the guarantors of order, the guardians of a good cosmic and human destiny, the positive limits placed on the chaotic powers above and below and on the span of human existence; but rather a grim system of aggressors, an openly hostile army which seeks to chain him. He lives in a world surrounded and hemmed in by powers, powers one dares do no more than name in terrifying titles such as the following:

O mighty, majestic, glorious Splendors; holy, and earth-born, mighty arch-daimons; compers of the great god; denizens of Chaos, of Erebus and of the unfathomable Abyss; earth-dwellers, haunters of sky-depths, nook-infesting, muck-envrapped; scanning the mysteries, guardians of secrets, captains of the hosts of hell; kings of infinite space, terrestrial overlords, globe-shaking, firm-founding, ministering to earthquakes; terror-strangling, panic-striking, spindle-turning; snow-scatterers, rain-wafters, spirits of the air; fire-tongues of summer-sun, tempest-tossing lords of fate; dark-shapes of Erebus, senders of Necessity; flame-fanning fire-darters; snow-compelling, dew-compelling, gale-raising, abyss-plumbing, calm-bestriding air-spirits; dauntless in courage, heart-crushing despots; chasm-leaping, overburdening, iron-nerved daimons; wild-raging, unslaved watchers of Tartaros; delusive Fate-phantoms; all-seeing, all-hearing, all-conquering, sky wandering vagrants.46

The structures of order have become reversed; rather than the positive limits they were meant to be, they have become oppressive. Man is no longer defined by the degree to which he harmonizes himself and his society to the cosmic patterns of order; but rather by the degree to which he can escape the patterns. Rather than the archaic hero-that-failed, the savior, the paradigm of the hellenistic world is the hero-that-succeeded, succeeded in escaping a tyrannical order. Every man is called upon to be such a hero. To escape from the despotism of this world and its rulers, exemplified by the seven planetary spheres, and to ascend to another world of freedom, or of creative limits, becomes the aim of hellenistic man and the chief concern of his religion. Hellenistic man experiences himself to be an exile from his true home, the Beyond, and he constantly seeks for ways to return. He strives to return to the world—beyond-this-world which is his home, to the god-beyond-the-god—of-this-world which is the true god, to awaken that part of himself which is from the beyond and to strip off his body which belongs to this world.

I no longer have trust in anything in the world
In father and mother;
I have no trust in the world
In brothers or sisters;
I have no trust in the world...
In what is made and created,
In the whole world and its works;
I have no trust in the world.
After my soul alone I go searching about
which is worth more to me than generations and worlds.
I went and found my soul...
I went and found Truth where she stands,
at the outermost rim of the world [beyond the seven planetary spheres].47

Many attempts have been made to account for this shift in world view, most persuasively H. Jonas’s argument that man felt rootless after the conquest of Alexander because the old structure of the polis was broken down and man was understood to be a cosmopolitan, a citizen of the entire cosmos, and this was too big. Man was “no longer a part of anything except the universe.”48 I would rather eschew the quest for origins and insist that the world was seen by hellenistic man in this manner because this was the way he had discovered his world to be. The world was experienced as a prison, as a constellation of reversed values. It was experienced this way objectively; and this experience was reinforced by the testimony of those figures who, in this period, had ascended beyond the planetary spheres and had brought back a report of what they had seen and experienced. As Paul in Romans 7 was to discover about the Law of YHWH, that it was good once, but that it had been captured by the powers of Sin and turned upside down so that “the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me” (Rom. 7:10), so each culture was to discover that its cherished structures of Fate, the gods that ordained and maintained the structure of Fate, and the myths which described the establishment of the world according to these cosmic patterns were perverse, were upside down. And each culture rebelled against


these archaic traditions, developed a complex series of techniques for escaping destiny and for “righting” the world, and discovered a new set of myths which described the origins of the sort of world in which they now found themselves living.

It is in such a world, a world already seen by the Egyptian prophet Nefer-Rohu (c. 1850 B.C.) (“I show thee the land topsy-turvy ... I show thee the undermost on top”) that the motif of the reverse crucifixion of the apostle has its setting. It is a world which is “arsey-turvy” (to use a delightful idiomatic expression from John Barth’s Solwad Factor); “The World’s Turned Upside Down” (to use the title of the tune played by the British Army band when Cornwallis surrendered). In such a world, to be upside down is in fact to be rightside up; or, as Philip declared in explaining his reverse crucifixion: “Imitate me in this, for all the world is the wrong way and every soul that is in it.” Likewise, the Cynic, Diogenes, who requested to be buried face downwards “because in a little while, down will be converted into up” (Diogenes Laertius, VI.32).

The origin of this perverse world is the establishment of the astral and planetary archeons’ rule over the cosmos (e.g., Apocryphon of John 72:4):

They brought Fate into being and through measure, periods and seasons they imprisoned the gods of the heavens, the angles, the demons and men, so that all would come into its [Fate’s] fetters and it [Fate] would be lord of all—an evil and perverse plan.50

Salvation may be effected by a cosmic reversal enacted by a cosmic savior (e.g. Jesus in Pistis Sophia, XV-XVI):

And the Fates and the sphere over which they rule, I have changed and brought it to pass that they shall spend six months turned to the left and accomplish their influences and that six months they face to the right and accomplish their influences. [Previously, they had been] facing the left at every time and accomplishing their influences and deeds.51

It is this sort of cosmic reversal wrought by a savior such as Jesus which would give to circles of his devotees their mood of “freedom now” and the confidence to assert: “We are exalted above Fate and in place of the planetary daemons we know but one ruler of the cosmos”52; “Now there are no more horoscopes and there is no longer such a thing as Fate”,53 “the birth of the Savior released us from becoming and from Fate ... until baptism, they say, Fate is real, but after it the astrologists are no longer right.”54

This reversal of the cosmic-astrological pattern of destiny may be understood as an eschatological version of the myth of the cosmic cycles in Plato’s Statesman (269-274) where, after a period, God relinquishes his control over the revolution of the cosmos “and then Fate and innate desire reversed the motion of the world.” In the Hellenistic myth, unlike Plato, the deity or his representative once more reverses the revolution and frees the cosmos from Fate. In this tradition, what is usually taken as signs of cosmic disorder heralding the end of the world (e.g., the sun shining by day, the moon by night; the stars altering their orbits; the seasons disturbed) is taken as a positive sign that the astral powers have been dethroned, that the rulers of this world have been overthrown.

Through this cosmic reversal the world has been quite literally converted (epistrophein; convertere), that is, turned about, and by being so converted has been saved.55 In Pistis Sophia, Jesus’ power to reverse the astral spheres is one sign of his lordship over the cosmos. It is


51 Methodius, Symposium VIII,15, 16 (N. Bonwetsch, opera [Leipzig, 1917], p. 103).


a power analogous to the Egyptian magician who proclaimed: "I shall let the earth fall...so that the south becomes north and the earth turns around"; analogous to Isaiah's power to invoke YHWH to reverse the sun's course before the astonished eyes of Hezekiah; to Zeus' intervention on behalf of Atreus when: "Héllios, already in mid-career, wrested his chariot about and turned his horses' heads towards the dawn. The seven Pleiades, and all the other stars, retraced their courses in sympathy; and that evening, for the first and last time, the sun set in the East." By turning this perverse cosmos upside down, Jesus, according to this Christian-gnostic understanding, had, in fact, righted it. By his descent from on high (a reversal) when, in the words of the Odes of Solomon, "the head went down to the feet" or by his death on the cross which reversed death, turned it about, and brought forth life from it (1 Cor. 2:8; 15:12-57), Jesus had in birth and death been upside down; but in being thus reversed, he had converted the world and men to being right side up. By violating a false and perverse order, he established (or perhaps reestablished) a true and upright order where all present relationships will be inverted, where "the last will be first and the first, last" (Matt. 19:30; Matt. 20:16; Luke 13:30).

THE FIRST MAN

In interpreting the reverse crucifixion of the apostle in the Acts of Peter, much depends on how one interprets the mysterious figure of the First Man (ho prōtos anthrōpos; primus homo; prior homo—in the various recensions) whose downward fall Peter imitates in his upside

47 On this motif (Thompson, Motif-Index E758; Aarne and Thompson, Types of the Folktales, 802), see the illuminating comments of H. Schwarzbain, Studies in Jewish and World Folklore (Berlin, 1968), p. 157 who notes: "According to Talmudic legend [Baba Batra 10b and Pesahim 50a] Joseph, the son of Rabbi Joshua, who, during his sickness falls in a trance is asked by his father after his recovery: 'What vision did you have?' He replied: 'I saw a topsy-turvy world in which the upperclass or the rich were below, whereas the lower class or the poor were above'"

48 Among the major treatments of the text, J. Daniélou, Theology of Jewish Christianity (Chicago, 1964), p. 282) apparently despair of identifying the figure and speaks simply of "the fall of the first man." J. Dorese, Les livres secrets des gnostiques d'Égypte (Paris, 1959), Vol. II, p. 208 sees the figure as symbolic of Adam and his Fall into sin. W. Bouquet ("Platons Weltscheide und das Kreuz Christi," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, XIV (1933), 276) seeks to relate the figure to an inverted cosmic Chi-cross (see Timnas 36b—cf. E. Stommel, "Sāmēnon enkaitepsis," Römisch Quartschriften, XLVIII (1953), 21-42) and finds the figure of the inverted Urmenench and the inverted apostle a "grotöska Phantasia." R. Reitzenstein (Poimandres (Leipzig, 1904), p. 243 and n. 1) simply relates the figure to the First Man who was identified with Osiris, Hermes, and Korybas but fails to account for the upside-down motif. H. Rahner, Greek Myths and Christian Mystery (London, 1963), p. 55) combines all of these possibilities into a diffuse syncretistic portrait: the upside-down crucifixion of Peter is a symbol of the fall of the first man before the creation of the world, for he falls into sin headlong, which means, according to Gnostic belief, that he fell into physical existence. There is a mixture here of Platonic stuff with some of the myths of human origins we find in the Poimandres and Hippolytus' Nensasse sermen. Yet, through it all we catch a gleam of the Christian belief concerning the sin of Adam which was wiped out by the Cross." Father Antonio Orbe (in his chapter "El misterio de la cruz en los Acta Petri," in Los primeros berojes acta la perscanza (Rome, 1956), pp. 176-212 offers the most complex and radical interpretation. While the Primordial Man is a widespread figure in gnostic traditions, in the Acts of Peter he is the Christ (p. 181 n. 3). Rather than a description of Adam's Fall, the text describes the "crucifixion of the Primordial Man" which should be related to the Valentinian doctrine of the crucifixion of the Upper Christ (esp. pp. 187f.; 188 n. 29). However, there is no instance of primal inversion in the Valentinian texts, the closest being the myth of Sophia Achamoth in the system of Prolemaeus as reported by Irenaeus where, in response to the plight of the banished Sophia below: "The Christ above took pity on her and was extended through the Cross (Ispel) Christion hais dia ton Sinan epokathesthia = Superiorem Christum, et per cruces externum) to form her shape by his own power" (Ireneaus, Aduersus haereses liv.1; text: W. Völker, Quellen zur Geschichte der christlichen Gnosis (Tübingen, 1937), p. 102; translation: R. Grant, Gnosticism: An Anthology (London, 1961), p. 170; see further Orbe, Los primeros berojes, pp. 161-75, esp. pp. 168-70, and F. M.-M. Sagnard, La gnost valentinienne et la témoignage de saint Irénée (Paris, 1947), pp. 244-49).

Two further parallels have been noted. The first is in the Poimandres where the heavenly Anthropos "bent through the composite framework of the spheres, having torn off the covering, and showed to downward tending Nature the beautiful form of God" (text: A. D. Nock and A. J. Festugière, Corpus hermeticum 2d ed. (Paris, 1960), Vol. I, p. 11; translation: Grant, Gnosticism, p. 214). It is possible to see this act of looking down (paraughtein), followed by a fall of the primordial Man into the realm of Nature as a parallel to the First Man in the Acts of Peter: "being drawn down—he who also cast his first beginning down to earth." Parallel two of almost the same thought seems to me more compelling parallel than does its use in a Hermetic fragment (Cyril, Contra Julianum 552d in Nock and Festugière, Vol. IV, pp. 133f. [fragment 28]) cited by Reitzenstein, Poimandres, p. 243 n. 3.
Regardless of what final decision be made as to the origins and *Sitz im Leben* of the portrait of the fall of the Primal Man head downwards in the *Acts of Peter*, it is clear that his action effected a cosmic reversal so that "upside down as he was showed what is on the left hand as on the right, and changed the signs of all their nature so as to consider fair those things which were not fair and take those things which were really evil to be good." Depending upon how one interprets this reversal (and this is where a determination of the original setting of the myth would be a priceless aid), either this inversion has a positive value (i.e., the Primal Man reversed the influence of the astral powers on his descent much as did Jesus in *Pistis Sophia*) or it had negative value (i.e., through his fall the First Man reversed the good order of the god creator deity and is responsible for the world's present evil condition). In either case, man is called upon to imitate the upside-down posture if he has *gnosis*; but the effect of this imitation will differ according to the interpretation of the myth. If the inversion be seen as positive, man by standing upside down, by reversing all values, will liberate himself from Fate and from astral determinism and will gain freedom. If the inversion be understood as negative, man, by standing on his head, is actually standing on his feet since the world has been reversed following the Fall of the First Man. In either case, to be upside down is to be upright, to be converted.

The second is from the Naassene commentary on the Attis Hymn preserved by Hippolytus: "This man is called Korybant by the Thracians ... and the Phrygians give him a similar name, because from the top of the head [korybnt] and from the unimprinted brain he begins his descent and passes through all the elements of the lower parts. We do not know how or in what way he comes down" (text: Hippolytus, *Refutatio* V.viii.13 in Völker, *Quellen*, p. 19; translation: Grant, *Gnosticism*, p. 108). The parallel was first suggested by Reitzenstein, *Palæomand.,* p. 243 n. 1; cf. Reitzenstein and H. Schaeder, *Studien zum antiken Synkretismus aus Iran und Griechenland* (Berlin, 1926), pp. 168 n. 1, 191 f. A number of the other motifs present in the description of the Primal Man in the *Acts of Peter* are likewise present in the Naassene text (e.g., the First Man was "dead without motion" in the former parallels the Naassene text where Adam after his creation "lay without breath and motionless and immovable, like a statue"); and the motif of reversal is perhaps implied in one description of the Anthropos in the Naassene text: "The Phrygians also call him Goatherd [Aipolo], not because he feeds goats ... but because he is the turning [ast-polos], i.e., always turning and circulating and impressing the whole universe with turning motion. For to turn [polis] is to circulate and alter matters ... he turns about and goes around. ... Thus the Phrygians call *Aipolo* the one who always turns things in every direction and transfers them to his own domain" (Refutatio V.vii.44 in Völker, *Quellen*, p. 22; translation: Grant, *Gnosticism*, pp. 111 f).

The call of Philip to "imitate me in this, for all the world is turned the wrong way and everything that is in it" is thus a gospel of rebellion and liberation (though the object of this rebellion and liberation must, unfortunately, remain ambiguous). To those on the outside it might appear, as it did to the Jews of Thessalonica, that such a movement of rebellion and liberation was destructive, that the members of such a movement were "men who have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6); to those on the inside, to those who possessed the saving knowledge, the rebellion restored the world to an upright posture.

In this paper I have attempted to reflect on certain structures of order and chaos from the perspective of the discipline of History of Religions. I began with the notion current in contemporary anthropological circles that order consists primarily in keeping one's place, a place that is appropriate to one's species. This place is given in the cosmogonic myth, established by the gods in the beginning. Within this place which serves as a "strategic hamlet" against the incursions of chaos, each thing finds its home. The walls, the boundaries of one's place, must be periodically renewed or chaos will win out. Thus, in a tribe of California Indians studied by A. L. Kroeber and E. W. Gifford in their important monograph, *World Renewal: A Cult System of Native Northwest California*, the celebrant, at the end of the year, performs a complex set of rituals repeating the actions of the Immortals in primeval times, employing formulas such as, "This world is cracked, but when I pick up and drag the stick, all the cracks will fill up and the earth will become solid again"; and, approaching a sacred stone and setting it carefully upright: "the earth which has been tipped will be straight again"; and, sitting on the stone: "When I sit on the stone the earth will never get up and tip again." In such an archaic culture employing such structures, there are liminal periods, but these are only the symbolization and ritual expression of chaos which will be overcome through the repetition of the cosmogony.

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62 A full interpretation of this tradition would need to take account of the ritual dimension of rebellion in this tradition, especially the baptismal interpretation of the dominical sayings in the *Acts of Peter* and *Acts of Philip*. An investigation of this problem will be reserved for a later date.

Within some cultures, however, the faith in the good order of the cosmos and its ability to confer reality—in short, a culture’s "cosmological conviction"—is shattered. Rather than renewing the creation, reestablishing the patterns of destiny, the patterns are seen to be fundamentally perverse. It is the chaotic, demonic powers themselves which control the structures of order. Against this mésalliance man is challenged to rebel, to "tip over" the world. Reality is discovered to lie not within the cosmos as ordered through creation but above the world, beyond it, and the aim of existence is seen to be to escape the constricted confines of one's place. In an Indian metaphor elucidated by Eliade, one seeks to break through the roof: "The image of breaking through the roof means that one has now abolished every 'situation' and has chosen not installation in the world but the absolute freedom which implies ... the annihilation of every conditioned world." In a world experienced in this way, liminality becomes the supreme goal rather than a moment in a rite of passage.

I have intended this paper to be a contribution to the theme of order and chaos by focusing on one dimension of both cosmic and human rebellion. The phenomenology of rebellion has not yet been fully studied (although one might point to works as diverse as Camus's, The Rebel and Sartre's, Saint Genet on the one hand, E. J. Hobsbawm's, Social Bandits and Primitive Rebels and Cunha's, Os Seriôs on the other, as providing a starting point for such an endeavor). It is my conviction that such a study is long overdue and, in our present situation, might be of more than strictly academic relevance. Perhaps we shall someday clarify the structures which lie behind the refrain in William Butler Yeats's poem of the Irish Rebellion ("Easter 1916"):  

All changed, changed utterly
A terrible beauty is born.

..............................

He too has been changed in his turn
Transformed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.