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# Religion, Art and Myth-Making: The Halo as an Aesthetic Expression of Ultimate Reality

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# Religion, Art and Myth-Making: The Halo as an Aesthetic Expression of Ultimate Reality

## **Abstract**

In recent years there has been an increased interest in questions concerning religion and faith. There have been bestselling books by authors of the so called new-atheist movement, Dawkins, Dennette, Harris and Hitchens, as well as numerous responses given attempting to refute the attacks made on traditional views of religion and faith. Moreover, since September 11th 2001 there has been a heightened awareness of the gulf separating believers and non-believers. Yet, the problem at the heart of this debate often seems to become an inquiry into whether or not religion is good for society rather than a question of the existence of God. This indicates that there may be a new way to look at the question, what is religion? Perhaps we should begin to think of religion as a social thus natural phenomenon; in doing so religion can be understood in aesthetic terms. If it is the case that religion is essentially born from shared relations within a social framework, much in the same mode as aesthetics, then the gulf between believers and non-believers is illusory. Better understanding the dualistic quality of human relationships will likely serve to find common ground within religious dialogues; this involves seeing how both religion and art are modes of myth-making. Historically the aesthetic symbol of the halo has been used by many religions and aesthetic traditions as an expression of enlightenment or reason. Therefore, the halo serves as a fossil of human experience. The intent of this paper is to examine this position through the symbol of the halo and how it has evolved in the Mithraic, Christian and Buddhist traditions.

## **Religion, Art and Myth-making: The Halo as an Aesthetic Expression of Ultimate Reality**

In recent years there has been an increase within the halls of academia and the taverns of the public forum debating religious questions. From best selling authors such as the four horsemen of the so called new-atheist movement of Dawkins, Dennite, Haris and Hitchens, to the pulpits of multi-media evangelism, the debate over deeply held religious ideals is becoming to many, a question of the most sincere devotion and respect. This dialogue invokes an interesting situation; the problem at the heart of this important debate seems to become an inquiry into whether or not religion is good for society rather than a question of the existence of God. This is peculiar for it indicates that there may be a new way to look at the question, “what is religion and how does it impact our world today?” This essay is an attempt to define religion as a social thus natural phenomenon. In doing so religion can be understood in anthropological terms as well as philosophical, sociological, psychological, biological and indeed aesthetic. It is the latter of these which I will examine in this paper. It is my current belief that religion is essentially a commutative experience resulting from a shared relation in a particular culture. It is in this way that both religion and art share a common necessity via relation amongst individuals. In very general terms this relation is that which defines human experience; I will refer to this relation as Ultimate Reality. If it is the case, as I believe it is, that religion is a social thus natural phenomena similar to art, then religion is essentially a mode of aesthetic expression by means of myth-making and therefore the two are united.

The intent of this paper is to examine this position through the symbol of the halo and how it has evolved in the Mithraic, Christian and Buddhist traditions.

What do we mean by religion and art? What do we mean when we speak about ethics, morality, meaning and purpose? These questions have often been at the forefront of the debate emerging from the new-atheist movement. The question of whether or not we can actually speak objectively about such issues without cultural biases is even more complex; countless minds through the corridors of time have attempted to unravel such thoughts without any absolute solutions to offer. Nevertheless, such questions are profoundly important. While the debate as to whether or not there are absolute or logically positivistic answers will likely continue, it seems to be utterly pessimistic to remain skeptical—such a position would be demoralizing. That being the case, there does seem to be an alternative, a possibility of a different approach to these questions which, as I will argue, is neither demoralizing nor naive. If we refrain from defining either religion or art as anything other than, in general terms, an expression of experience founded on relationships, then we might be able to see this debate in a new light.

In an insightful, and concise essay entitled, “When Is Religion Art? When It Is a Jar”, T.R. Martland puts forth an interesting argument illustrating a channel into the relationship between religion and art. He suggests that both religion and art function as a means of pushing us from one position or point of view toward another. He cleverly suggests:

To say that religion is art is to play with the slight openness of a jar, the slight openness from that in which we were previously enclosed, the unsettling dimension of a jar, and all of the time to include a back-and-forth pun like switch to the wide-mouthed container...religion is art when it opens us up to new ways of seeing things that are upsetting from the perspective of the old way of seeing things (Martland 251,252).

Again, he states, “Religion and art are activities that move followers from an inherited way of seeing things, from an inherited structure of reality, and ‘gets’ them into a new way of seeing things ... Religion does not deal with what is, it creates what is” (260). What a curious notion; Martland seems to want to account for the role art plays in connection with religion while at the same time explaining how religion and art are united. That is to say, religion and art have the ability to move us from one position toward another, from a world of tangible realities into a dimension of unsettling and ambiguous duality. Perhaps it is possible to think of both religion and art as shocking but are we actually in the position to *define* religion and art as essentially one and the same *when they express a movement from an old to a new worldview?*

Religion in one way or another, by its very nature, does seem to moves us in just such a way—eternally shifting and struggling to finding balance, searching for something meaningful—toward some new phenomenon. Moreover, it seems reasonable to make a similar argument concerning art. Is this not, at least in general terms, how many have interpreted Kant’s idea of disinterestedness, in his third critique, as meaning an *aesthetic experience* (Neville)? And is it not what Schopenhauer thought of, in relation to the will and longing for a release from suffering, as *the feeling of the infinite* (Parker)? And is this what modern philosophers, in the spirit of the dialogue between Freud and his antagonist Rolland, so often seem to be implying when they speak of the *oceanic experience* (Parsons)?

To begin from this perspective is beneficial but incomplete; what I want to know is if there is anything else to the relation between religion and art. As wonderful a study as it might be, I want to find out if there is something more, something other than simply

an expression of cognitive movement. Though such expressions, are essential in understanding the unification of religion and art, what I am really interested in is trying to discover the deeper element of what is actually happening during such experiences. What is it about Ultimate Reality which seems to define all human phenomenon? Perhaps the means by which this deeper understanding may be found is wrapped in what we mean by religion and art; certainly it will be of assistance to clarify these fundamental terms.

One can hardly speak honestly about either religion or art without admitting that much debate has taken place over what is meant by these terms. Indeed, modern art almost exclusively has focused its attention on the question of *what is art* and *how does the way we view art interact with society at large?* Meanwhile, the problem of *what is religion* isn't a merely a theological question; there is a numerous dimensions to it and like art, each is a human phenomenon even if we add to it a supernatural aspect. Therefore, it will undoubtedly be useful to begin by describing what I do not mean when I use these terms.

In our society it may be common to think of religion as faith in god, or more specifically, a faith—relationship with *one* god. Others might extend this view to include the importance of traditions, rituals, morality and even the institutions which have over the centuries given birth to our religious notions. This is certainly the case if we include non-western religions. And it rightly seems common for us to want to avoid reducing religion to data. Why is it that we tend to describe religion as something akin to what I mentioned above while at the same time we are very skeptical about any attempt to define religion in terms of objective data? David Eller describes what I think is an

important and sensible answer to this perplexing situation in an essay title “Why Society Does Not Depend on Christian Faith” where he states:

In reality, all of these are *aspects* of religion, but none of them is the essence or *sine qua non* of religion...Rather, all these are potential elements or building blocks of religions, in what many contemporary theorists have suggested as a ‘modular’ approach to religion. In other words...religion is not a ‘thing’ at all but a composite of basic elements which, most critically, are not fundamentally ‘religious’ in and of themselves...All of these are *human* phenomena, not specifically or exclusively *religious* phenomena (Loftus 349).

It seems to me that religion, at least what I intend by the use of the term, is not merely some objective data based description; rather it a phenomena birthed from something beyond itself—something beautiful, which seems to transcends language. It is this transcendent quality of religion, whether it is factually based or not, which finds its rightful home in our uniquely human ability to attribute agency to non-agency. This is distinctively clear when we consider the notion of divine or supernatural agency. Such an understanding, as you might expect, makes religion incredibly difficult to define.

Let me attempt to define or suggest that religion can be thought of, in very general terms, as a *shared empathetic experience in a relationship*. We might think of this as a complex meme, for those who are familiar with Dawkins’ idea of meme theory. Or it might be a complex myth for those who are enamored with Joseph Campbell’s notion of the “rapture of being alive.” Therefore, my ontological view of religion, and how I have chosen here to define it, limits the potential for reduction while remaining true to a human-centered phenomenon as described above by Eller. That is to say that we *can* reduce religion to a human phenomenon—and it is in this way that we can begin to see a deeper union between religion and art.

Early on in my investigation into possible new ways of understanding religion I was confronted with the concept of reductionism. With regard to religion I now realize

that this particular problem only refers to the living expression of religion and nothing more. Nevertheless, this framed an obvious problem to me; to state that religion cannot be reduced to data seemed to indicate that teaching a world religions course in an academic environment, would be meaningless if such a proposition were indeed the case.

So I made it a task to investigate whether it is possible to reduce religion, along with art, to a pure ethic, a unified theory, a measurable distance, data and theory. One of the first clues to this puzzle was that theology was a different field of inquiry with its own limitations and methods of investigation. While it is almost always the case that theology requires a context which is thoroughly religious, it is not the case that religion requires any theological context at all. This view of how we define religion is perhaps the most basic source for misunderstandings of both religion and art in our modern scientifically driven world. That is to say, other than a particular field of study within the philosophy of religion dealing with deistic arguments of design, theological language is best understood as symbolic, expressing human experiences rather than objective data. Therefore, language concerning the divine is essentially a human projection of these experiences onto objects which, without the cognitive delights and concerns of thinking beings, would remain simply objects. But when these objects take on a life of their own a symbolic gesture indicating something beyond the object itself; something very interesting happens. The language which we use to speak of god in all its forms creates a world that is not actually there. Nevertheless, within the realm of religion and art, this symbolism of human experiences is fertile and seems to rise up within the essence of our being. Why is this? How can language and inorganic objects express something so

essential to human experience yet cause so much ambiguity? The answer is perhaps hidden within the question.

In order to answer this we must begin by stating that neither religion nor art can be defined in absolute terms. This does not suppose, however, that no means exist by which we can understand or talk about such phenomena. Rather than making a generalized proposition stating “religion is” or “art is”, we should appreciate religion and art in terms of their functional purpose.

What is this functional purpose? It is two fold. In a broad sense we can say that both religion and art serve as guides showing us what it means to be human and at the same time pushing us beyond our humanity. This may be true even if it is the case that error theory is correct and there is nothing behind human experience. This functionality is one way of seeing how or why religion and art are essentially one and the same when they are involved in mythmaking. If we define either religion or art merely as being this or that “thing”, then they would simply be objects in the midst of other objects—“things” amongst other “things”. This would surrender them to the same subjective projections by which all of our human experiences are consumed. It is therefore reasonable to ask the question, “what happens when either religion or art are reduced to their fundamental necessary attributes?” By doing this it is not my intent to degrade religion or art; rather it is my opinion that we must begin to move beyond a view which fails to understand either as anything other than the living embodiment of the human phenomenon—the living witness and testimony of collective persuasion. In doing so, it is my hope that it will become obvious that the question primarily focuses on relationships not data; though the data is contained within the functionality of such relationships.

Throughout the history of our species some things seem to be explicitly clear. Coming from within the cultural framework vital for the survival of our assumed rational superiority, religion and art, that which gives us meaning and purpose, rise up from the depths of the solitude of the self, flourishing and giving birth to the new and the next in a line of infinite this and that. This much is fairly undisputed but the question still remains: is there anything more? I often feel, as I'm sure most people generally do, that there is. Nevertheless, when we examine the reality of things, the facts of the matter often seems to be quite the opposite. Why is this?

Religion is a word we have given to a category of human behavior and/or beliefs. On the other hand, could it be that such categorical expressions indicate a movement from the previous to the coming, as well as a common necessity? Could it be that this common necessity is the very thing which evokes the meaning of purpose and the purpose of meaning—human projection and the existential anguish of being alive? All of this would make complete sense coming from a point of view which interprets both religion and art as being essentially balanced, a perspective which understands religion and art as social, thus natural, phenomena. The role of the individual is not without its value and participation in the phenomenon of social transaction. If the individual dies the religion will likely live on but if the religion dies the individual may still be alive but in such a state as to be void of the very humanity expressed by the religion.

From this perspective one might wonder what a common necessity might be. It is my view that the answer is intimately intertwined in the fabric of what it means to be human; to think, to reason, to imagine, to create, to make myths. If one were to attempt to argue that either religion or art is necessary for human existence, which seems to be

the case in many of the debates which have recently taken place in the new-atheist movement, such a position would likely be obligated to address the cultural relevance underlying the vast majority of human religions and aesthetic experiences. Again it is helpful to think of these concepts in terms of social, thus natural significance. This is the driving force behind what I call *Ultimate Reality* and the expressive quality and significance of myth-making. In other words, the fundamental human characteristic of thinking, reasoning, imaginative exploration, creation and obligation, is coupled with our dependence on cultural, psychological, anthropological, and philosophical relations. The result is born in the form of a story—mythmaking, the embodiment of the truth as experienced in a particular environment and in a particular social setting. This method of mythmaking, I believe, is vital to the exploration of what we mean by religion and art.

By mythmaking I do not mean a falsehood or the antithesis of reality; quite the opposite. I think that it is a very interesting investigation to ponder the philosophical questions of causality. I do not believe that all things are relative, save perhaps the obvious case of Einstein's theory of space-time, nor do I flirt with the notion that all is simply an illusion. Such speculations all too often become useless in the face of real life and are without any plausible means by which one argue fruitfully. What I mean by myth is not illusory; what I mean by myth is akin to a guide or a tool which facilitates meaning by expression and functions as a shared purpose within a social thus natural context.

Myths are complex expressions of social thus natural experiences; therefore, religion and art are participants in the act of mythmaking and are thus united. In a very real way, myths are the tangible evidence of ancient cultural acuity and provide a

foundation upon which we can establish new insights into our own culture. If it was the case that myths were merely made-up stories by ignorant people, or that they somehow provide evidence for a relativistic worldview, it would seem that we would have no rational justification for our own so-called enlightened worldview. This requires seeing beyond the initial symbolic gesture, an active empathetic participation in the myth itself; if one can thus see the truth within a myth, one is transported into a virtual world. It is in this mythic realm or virtual space that meaning is born out of meaninglessness. As Joseph Campbell brilliantly puts it:

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive...There's no meaning. What's the meaning of the universe? What's the meaning of a flea? It's just there. That's it. And your own meaning is that you're there. We're so engaged in doing things to achieve purpose of outer value that we forget that the inner value, the rapture that is associated with being alive, is what it's all about (Campbell 4-5).

This association with the experience of being alive on which Campbell focuses is the key to understanding true myth, not as a made up story but as the thing which shows us who we are, where we come from and where we're going. Therefore, when I speak of mythmaking I am addressing the functionality of both religion and art, though we must be cautious not to place a priority on functionality over beauty. Otherwise meaninglessness will trump the "rapture of being alive" which Campbell speaks of so elegantly.

A myth, as I am using the term, is a gestural metaphor of experience and life endowed with a distinctive power to show us what it is like to be human at a certain time and in a certain place. Yet myths are not functional in a way which applies to religion and art. Myths push us beyond our humanness toward something which is impossible to

define—it is through religion as an aesthetic expression of our experience of being alive that we are shown our humanity. Whether it is to show us the power of knowledge or the corruption of sin, the strength of individuality, the weakness of justice or the harmony of collectivism, mythmaking is an essentially aesthetic semblance of religious experience. This explanation is why I have chosen to consider myth-making categorically as an aesthetical expression of *Ultimate Reality*. Still, in order to get a better understanding of this aesthetic expression, the question of what exactly unifies religion and art is in need of further explanation.

We now turn our attention toward a discussion of the actual relation between religion and art. Art in all its forms, it seems to me, can be reduced or equated to image making. Again, we can relate religion to art on this level, in that they do not represent what is, rather they create what is. Moreover, this relation must be understood from the perspective of a social framework involving some form of obligation. In other words it requires submission to the social environment (this aspect will be dealt with in greater detail momentarily) which provides the necessary conditions for either religion or art to exist.

Yet art is something more immediate to us than religion and seems to precede religion culturally and therefore, socially. While it is surely the case that both religion and art are natural phenomena; most people are likely to deny that this is the case for religion and openly accept it for art. This presents a rather peculiar problem. If it is true that art precedes religion within the context of human events then one might ask; what is the difference between art and reality? Are we somehow living art? Without this clarification it will be difficult to resolve the problem that seems to be presented when we

think about aesthetic values preceding religious ones, at least from a perspective that endorses the notion that both are essentially natural thus sociological phenomena. A good place to begin analysis is with the opening statement in *The Philosophy of Art History* by Arnold Hauser; who examines the scope and limitations of sociology of art:

A work of art is a challenge; we do not explain it, we adjust ourselves to it. In interpreting it we draw upon our own aims and endeavors, inform it with a meaning that has its origin in our own ways of life and thought...Works of art however are like unattainable heights. We do not go straight toward them, but circle around them. Each generation sees them from a different point of view with a fresh eye; nor is it to be assumed that a later point of view is more apt than an earlier one. Each aspect comes into sight in its own time, which cannot be anticipated or prolonged; and yet its significance is not lost, for the meaning that a work assumes for a later generation is the result of the whole range of previous interpretations. (Hauser 3).

This is an elegant declaration and will serve our discussion well. The most basic and clearly the most important concepts put forth here are two-fold. The first is that like religion, art involves a surrendering to social influences; though with regard to an aesthetic tradition this idea of surrender is primarily related to the act of allowing the work of art to affect one's perception. Only then does a submission to the social framework which interprets the work of art begin to take shape. The second is the idea that a work of art, being a product of a social environment, as is the case with religious experience, is subject to change through a process of cultural evolution. New interpretations are formed building upon previous ones. Change is determined by the degree of evolution experienced by the social environment from which the work of art originated.

While it is undoubtedly the case, according to Hauser, that we must immerse ourselves in a work of art—similar to the prostration experienced in a religious context, it is

not yet clear how this indicates art precedes religious experience. To elaborate on this concept it will be useful to again turn to Hauser's description of how this happens:

Even if it be true that we have to loosen our hold upon reality to a certain extent in order to fall under the spell of art, it is no less true that all genuine art leads us by a detour, which may be longer or shorter, back to reality in the end. Great art gives us an interpretation of life which enables us to cope more successfully with the chaotic state of things and to wring from life a better, that is, a more convincing and reliable, meaning (Hauser 5).

From this point of view, which suggests that art has the power to move us from the ambiguities of life toward a place of cognitive rest, we can ascertain how aesthetics is, from within a social context, prior to any religious experience. It does this by equipping us with that which is necessary to *cope* with the chaos of life, namely creating meaning and purpose from meaninglessness and purposelessness. But how does art do this? Hauser explains this by comparing art to a window:

Now, a window can claim the whole of our attention or none. One may, it is said, contemplate the view without concerning oneself in the very least with the quality, structure, or color of the window-pane. By this analogy, the work of art can be described as a mere vehicle for experiences, a transparent window-pane, or a sort of eye-glasses not noticed by the wearer and employed simply as means to an end (Hauser 5).

This analogy of art as a window is precisely what is needed to better understand how aesthetics provides meaning and purpose in an otherwise chaotic world. When we look through the window pane of art, we are forced into a realm that is not ours, yet is entirely dependent upon ours for its existence. Because this realm is not ours, but is created by us, it is both dependent on us and it gives meaning to our experiences by virtue of its dependence upon what Hauser describes as reality—our reality. Therefore, the window pane, that is the aesthetic, is essentially an inverted version of reality which has been created by us and by the social forces which define who we are. It becomes independent of any individual meaning because it provides meaning to the whole social

framework. In this way, when we speak of art preceding religion, what is meant is that art is the vehicle of meaning, whereas religion is the social experience of the expressive nature of art itself. Therefore religion can be thought of as that which receives meaning in a particular social context.

Another way to think about how art precedes religion is to compare it to the existentialist doctrine, *existence precedes essence*. We do not mean that art precedes religion in a historical manner. What is meant by the statement is that art is the vehicle which provides meaning and purpose, and religion is the social context which receives and interprets the meaning and purpose which has been provided by the aesthetic. We should consider this a purely metaphysical statement, not a historical or scientific statement. The analogy of a window pane pushes us in a direction to understand how this happens but what is really needed is a better understanding of what is perceived when we look through the window into the realm of art, the mystic realm. Could it be that what we really are saying is that art is simply symbolic?

What is a symbol? Much debate has taken place concerning the meaning and purpose of symbolic language and expression. In modern philosophy, it can be argued that the entire focus of the discipline has been reshaped by new perspectives on linguistics or language games. What is undeniable is the fact that any attempt to understand religion or art will inevitably be faced with the problem of language: how we use language symbolically as a place holder or sign standing in for something beyond mere words.

To begin, we ought to make a distinction between what we mean by symbol and sign. In the most general terms a sign, while representing something other than itself,

does not participate in any way with that which it represents. On the other hand, a symbol does. But what does this mean? Surely a symbol cannot be a participant in the same way which a cognitive being participates. This, I believe is a point which needs clarifying. Perhaps we should think of a symbol as a sort of metaphorical expression. Metaphorical gestures require symbolic expression. Without them, metaphors are far too vague and lose all its power of conviction. Yet at times metaphorical gestures are exactly the mode by which profoundly difficult concepts need to be expressed in a comprehensible manner. This is the case with both religion and art, especially as these issues become more complex and thereby the possibility for more projection is involved. All the while, a metaphor itself is at best, a complex arrangement of symbolic expressions.

Perhaps then we might turn to the concept of illusion to provide meaning to our use of the term ‘symbolic expression’. We could do this save for the fact that illusion is a loaded concept. All too often we speak of illusion as delusion, which is not what is meant; rather it has become common to associate the two as if illusion somehow infers a non-scientific or non-modern precept. For this reason we would be wise to resist the use of the term ‘illusion’ though it does seem to indicate what is meant by ‘symbolic expression’, especially with regards to projection. A \ better explanation of symbolic expression, the question of how a symbol can participate with that which it represents, will likely be found in the meaning of symbolic *tension*. It is in the *tension* which is created that symbolic expression arises. This tension-causing expression is the direct result of that which is being represented becoming something comprehensible and thus symbolic.

So then in very general terms we will define a symbol as, “any device whereby we are enabled to make an abstraction”, as described by Susanne K. Langer in the introduction to her treatment of the philosophy of art in *Feeling and Form* (Langer xi). At the same time, because symbols are devices used to make abstraction, when we think about this in terms of projection and participation, we can rightly push this definition even further. In abstraction something very interesting happens; we who create the symbol, we who use the symbol, we who live and die with the symbol, become aware of a realm of myth. This mythic realm fractures the realm of reality. We therefore call this fractured reality *virtual-space*. When a symbol, through abstraction and projection, participates in this virtual space we call this “tension-space” and this is what is meant by the expressiveness of a symbol. Langer explains, “plastic art, like all other art, exhibits an interplay of what artists in every realm call ‘tensions.’ The relation of masses, the distribution of accents, direction of lines, indeed all elements of composition set up *space-tensions* in the primary virtual space” (370).

Aspects which make up the composition of any piece of art work, from a child’s finger paintings to Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, are arrangements of symbolic expression, which by the tension created in the relation between each fundamental device of abstraction, creates a mythic realm. This realm mirrors our own by virtue of being created by us. Yet, because it reflects, through projection, that which created it, it becomes a fractured version of space-time itself. This is virtual-space and the relationship between the devices of abstraction, the symbols which organize the composition and create tension among its members, is what is meant by “tension-space”. According to Langer:

This detachment from actuality, the ‘otherness’ that gives even a bona fide product like a building or a vase some aura of illusion, is a crucial factor, indicative of the very nature of art. It is neither chance nor caprice that has led

aestheticians again and again to take account of it...In the element of 'unreality', which has alternately troubled and delighted them, lies the clue to a very deep and essential problem: the problem of creativity (Langer 46).

From here we can further elaborate on the nature of symbolic expression by introducing another concept: created-duality. This created-duality, which *is* the tension described above, is perhaps the single most important concept to understand concerning symbolic expression. Reflecting on one painting in particular, Langer notes:

Something arises from the process of arranging colors on a surface, something that is created, not just gathered and set in a new order: that is the image. It emerges suddenly from the disposition of the pigments, and with its advent the very existence of the canvas and of the paint 'arranged' on it seems to be abrogated; those actual objects become difficult to perceive in their own light. A new appearance has superseded their natural aspect (Langer 47, 48).

This is what has from time to time been referred to as "schein" or "semblance". In other words, the significance is not that a symbolic expression creates a lie, though we can think of it in terms of something that can be deceptive if we explore the nature of propaganda and its relation to religion and art. The expressive nature of a symbol is powerfully driven by the fact that it is not what it represents and yet it participates in what it represents.

Until now we have been discussing symbolic expression in terms of the tension which arises from within the abstractions. I have alluded to the fact that this creates a duality which seems to fracture our reality bringing forth a strange world, a mythic realm. Yet it might seem eccentric to leave this mythic realm of fractured space-time, or virtual-space and gloss over the problematic nature buried within the depths of symbolic expression.

The tendency to equate delusion with illusion rather than treating artistic illusion in a manner which clearly differentiates itself from delusion, implies falsification and

illusion. This suggests a sense of ineffability and is a source of confusion and discord within a philosophy of aesthetics.

The function of artistic illusion is not ‘make-believe’, as many philosophers and psychologist assume, but the very opposite, disengagement from belief...the knowledge that what is before us has no significance in the world is what enables us to give attention to its appearance (Langer 49).

As mentioned earlier, a work of art, once we surrender to it, moves us from one place, a place of ambiguity, toward a place of meaning and purpose. This is what is meant by artistic illusion. Rather than that which must be proven or unproven, art is that which guides, teaches, impresses upon the senses what it means to be alive. Likewise this is what is meant by “shein” or “semblance.”

Now we are in a position to resolve the problem of how a symbol can participate in that which it represents. In addition, we are in a position to make some judgments concerning the dualistic nature of both religion and aesthetics with regard to symbolic expression. The resolution is described by the relation between feelings and the idea of feelings; that is to say, experience and the interpretation of experience. I agree with Langer when she states, “what art expresses is *not* actual feelings, but ideas of feelings; as language does not express actual things and events but ideas of them. Art is expressive through and through—every line, every sound, every gesture; and therefore it is a hundred per cent symbolic” (Langer 59).

What has been discussed concerning art in this paper has allowed a clear voice to be heard, and is without a doubt true of religious experience as well. Namely, religious experience creates within the structure of a social framework, *not* the experience of this or that religious tradition, rather an idea of experience and in this way a dualistic mirror of human experience is projected onto the cosmos.

Often times duality has been thought of in terms of the “sacred” and the “profane”. Indeed there is a plethora of ways to describe this fracturing of time and space. As we have seen above, both religion and art seem to create a dualistic perspective of the cosmos. Consequently everything symbolic suffers from a dualistic structure. This is because symbols, whether they are religious or secular, sacred or profane, open up complex layers of reality which otherwise are hidden within the depths of our being. This primary function of symbolic expression, is that which describes to us an *Ultimate Reality*, the incomprehensible mythic realm. Some may refer to Ultimate Reality as “Holy” or as the “Other” or simply as “God”. Regardless of what word we use, what must be made absolutely clear is that this Ultimate Reality is *not*, nor could it ever be, a being such as ourselves. If it were we could never be in awe of its duality or its incomprehensibility. Perhaps Paul Tillich describes it best in a stimulating essay entitled “Religious Language as Symbolic”, where he writes:

Everything in time and space has become at some time in the history of religion a symbol from the Holy. And this is naturally so, because everything that is in the world we encounter rest on the ultimate ground of being. This is the key to the otherwise extremely confusing history of religion...The key which makes order out of this chaos is comparatively simple. It is that everything in reality can impress itself as a symbol for a special relationship on the human mind to its own ultimate ground and meaning. So in order to open up the seemingly closed door to this chaos of religious symbols, one simply has to ask, ‘What is the relationship to the ultimate which is symbolized in these symbols?’ And then they cease to be meaningless; and they become, on the contrary, the most revealing creations of the human mind, the most genuine ones, the most powerful ones, those who control the human consciousness, and perhaps even more the unconsciousness, and have therefore this tremendous tenacity which is characteristic of all religious symbols in the history of religion. (Tillich, Art 438).

Therefore in order to understand religion and art from a view which incorporates an underlying gestural expression, we must be able to recognize the duality provided by Ultimate Reality which is at the same time veiled by it. All of nature, including religion and art, is an expression of itself. Nature, or Ultimate Reality, is that which expresses

itself through itself to itself and as a means of becoming a continually evolving logical constant. In other words, Nature cannot help but express herself; she is logically bound to this law. Therefore, a duality arises from this expressive quality of Nature and we see this in both religion and art. This is why religion as a natural phenomenon is essentially a mode of aesthetic expression by means of mythmaking illustrating how religion and art are indeed united.

Modernity owes much of what has been understood about dualism to René Descartes, who famously compared the human mind to a “ghost in a machine”. Yet this modern understanding of the dual nature of mind and matter was long ago described by a perhaps even more influential and ancient school of thought. Socrates’ contribution to the question of the dualistic nature of reality or perceived dualism is rooted in refuting what is often referred to as Pre-Socratic thought. Bertrand Russell, in his “A History of Western Philosophy” details this build up to Socrates; “First comes skepticism, with the Sophist, leading to a study of *how* we know rather than to the attempt to acquire fresh knowledge. Then comes, with Socrates, the emphasis on ethics; with Plato, the rejection of the world of sense in favor of the self-created world of pure concept in science” (Russell 73).

Socrates, who was accused of being an atheist by his peers, never professed this conviction; rather, he assumed that he was ignorant to any realities beyond this reality. In this way he claimed to be wise. His Claim to ignorance was his wisdom and he thus introduced a paradigm shift. This shift was primarily a move from the common notion of Mythos toward a new concept of Logos. What’s important here is that Logos, the light of reason, was to be the new foundation of Mythos (or the vehicle of expression). This was

a revolutionary accomplishment and it would serve to set the foundation for much of the philosophical inquiry that has established Western thought.

Once the seeds of a new method of interpreting the cosmos by means of Logos or reason were crystallized, an even more influential tradition was established. This tradition has been referred to as Plato's theory of forms; I will refer to it as Platonic dualism and it will be the principal variety of dualistic expression on which I will focus. This principle of Platonic dualism is an important key to understanding the relation between religion and art as being an aesthetic mode of mythmaking. From the semblance of mere appearance to the vision of experience founded within the environment of a social framework which guides and pushes us toward cognitive rest, space-time is fractured into a duality of experience. This is again, key to understanding religion as art and thus as mythmaking. Again Russell shines a light on this notion of reality:

Here Plato explains that, whenever a number of individuals have a common name, they have also a common 'idea' or 'form.' For instance, though there are many beds, there is only one 'idea' or 'form' of a bed. Just as a reflection of a bed in a mirror is only apparent and not 'real,' So other various particular beds are unreal, being only copies of the 'idea,' which is the one real bed, and is made by God. Of this one bed, made by God, there can be knowledge, but in respect of the many beds made by carpenters there can be only *opinion*. The philosopher, as such, will be interested only in the one ideal bed, not in the many beds found in the sensible world. He will have a certain indifference to ordinary mundane affairs: 'how can he who has magnificence of mind and is the spectator of all time and all existence, think much of human life?' The youth who is capable of becoming a philosopher will be distinguished among his fellows as just and gentle, fond of learning, possessed of a good memory and a naturally harmonious mind. Such a one shall be educated into a philosopher and a guardian (Russell 122).

As Russell explains, for Plato there is the real, which is the natural world of this and that thing, the mundane existence of natural phenomenon; and there is the really real, of which the mundane is merely a reflection, a corruption of the pure. Everyday life is like mirror images of purity never uncontaminated by change. This is where we will

begin our focus on Platonic dualism. As we continue it will become clear why this is so important. For Plato, the mind which understands this dualism is the mind freed from it and thus open to the really real. Such a mind, for Plato, is the glory of the really real.

Russell describes for us this notion of how the really real is a liberating force which allows the mind to comprehend Plato's analogy of the cave. The significance of the analogy is vital; the use of light as a metaphor for reason will be further established as we proceed:

Plato seeks to explain the difference between clear intellectual vision and the confused vision of sense-perception by an analogy from the sense of sight. Sight, he says, differs from the other senses, since it requires not only the eye and the object, but also light. We see clearly objects on which the sun shines; in twilight we see confusedly, and in pitch-darkness not at all. Now the world of ideas is what we see when the object is illumined by the sun, while the world of passing things is a confused twilight world. The eye is compared to the soul, and the sun, as the source of light, to truth and goodness... This leads up to the famous simile of the cave... (Russell 125).

Plato's analogy of the cave serves as an example of how the intelligent mind is liberated from the deception of shadows by the eternal truth of light, that is, reason. The compelling concept here which further pushes the notion of dualism is that the philosopher who has been liberated by the light of reason must reenter the depths of deception as one sent by the presence of eternal truth and beauty—the really real. However, upon his return he sees not the shadows as he did before because his mind has become illuminated; thus the prisoners in the cave, who are yet to be liberated as is the philosopher, mock and ridicule the man of reason for they themselves know not the liberating force of truth.

This analogy is an excellent example of the power of Platonic dualism. For the most part the modern world, from Immanuel Kant to Bertrand Russell, has exhausted itself trying to reinterpret or simply refute this theory. This has led to the post-modern

world we know today. The analogy remains an impressive one and will likely continue to be so.

Prior to leaving this notion of Platonic dualism it seems fitting to return to what was discussed earlier concerning Ultimate Reality as it relates to Platonic dualism. We saw that the key to understanding the relationship between symbolic expression and what has been described as Ultimate Reality was that everything in nature, that is Ultimate Reality itself, impresses upon us its own existence. This is the ground of being itself which was described by Tillich. To reinforce the fact that this Ultimate Reality must not be confused with a supreme being or a divine “Other” capable of thinking, doing, acting, behaving etc; I shall return to another essay written by Tillich, entitled “Art and Ultimate Reality.” There he states:

The term ‘ultimate reality’ in *not* another name for God in the religious sense of the word. But the God of religion would not be God if he were not first of all ultimate reality. On the one hand, the God of religion is more than ultimate reality. Yet religion can speak of the divinity of the divine only if God *is* ultimate reality. If he were anything less, namely, *a* being—even the highest—he would be on the level of all other beings. He would be conditioned by the structure of being like everything that is. He would cease to be God...From this follows a decisive consequence. If the idea of God includes ultimate reality, everything that expresses ultimate reality expresses God whether it intends to do so or not. And there is nothing that could be excluded from this possibility because everything that has being is an expression, however preliminary and transitory it may be, of being-itself, of ultimate reality (Tillich, Religious 220).

Now, I am not in a position to completely concur with Tillich concerning his understanding of god; that god is more than Ultimate Reality. Nevertheless, I think it is quite a reasonable position to hold that Ultimate Reality as he describes it, expresses being itself. This is, once again, why Ultimate Reality—even if it assumes a divine character—cannot be reduced to a cognitive being likened to mankind. The best and likely the most honest thing we can say at this point is that all symbolic expressions as they are the grounds upon which Ultimate Reality exists are, whether purely religious or

purely aesthetic or both, essentially an expression of the mythic realm. Therefore, the mythic realm, due to the fact that it inherently fractures space-time by abstraction, is by comparison to Platonic dualism, a projection of the Ultimate Reality as experienced by humanity as a whole. In this way, all religious and aesthetic experience is a natural phenomenon.

Until this point I have been arguing that both religion and art are natural phenomena and religion is an aesthetic mode of mythmaking. However, if this argument is to be accepted there must be clear evidence suggesting this is the case. If such evidence cannot be found, my argument is of no factual use. What will be discussed from this point on is that there *is* indeed ample amount of evidence, specifically within the aesthetic tradition of the halo. The anthropomorphism involved will clearly establish the factual truth behind the naturalistic expression of religion and art via mythmaking. I will discuss this evidence as it is found in early Mediterranean, Christian, and Buddhist art.

Perhaps the most obvious indication that all religious experience is essentially a natural phenomenon presents itself in the form of anthropomorphic symbolism. From the earliest prehistoric times humans have attributed to natural phenomena such as the wind, storms, the moon and stars, certain human characteristics. It might be correct to consider this as an early attempt to understand that which seems beyond our ability to comprehend. Yet it ought to be remembered that many of these ancient peoples were by no means ignorant of a scientific understanding of the natural world. The Greeks were aware of atoms well before modern times and much of what we now think of as primitive speculation has been discovered to be entirely rational given a view of the world limited

by primitive technologies. Therefore, it would seem unreasonable to simply conclude ancient anthropomorphism was nothing more than a very early attempt to make sense of the world. Rather than such a dismissive conclusion, I suggest that the reason for numerous forms of anthropomorphic concepts is better explained by the cultural realities which governed particular ways of life. From this view we can see how attributing human characteristics to natural phenomenon would be necessary to sustain a culture which not only flourishes but progresses to triumph over nature itself.

The most universal anthropomorphic symbol, for reasons which can be cultivated from even a general understanding of nomadic and agrarian societies in the early Mediterranean world, is the sun. The tendency to attribute to the sun human characteristics is what I will refer to as Helio-anthropomorphism. There are literally thousands of examples provided by the fossils of humanity which clearly indicate the power of this solar symbolic expression of divinity.

For early agrarian society the one of most important anthropomorphic symbols was the Earth. The Earth was seen as the womb of all life, the life-giving force which brought forth a new harvest and sustained and *resurrected* that which had been lost during the winter months. Over time the symbol of the earth and the power of resurrection (often associated with the serpent because it sheds its skin every year) was replaced by a more dominant solar symbol. In an interesting and concise essay entitled “Sexism and God-Talk” Rosemary Radford Ruether explains:

Male monotheism becomes the vehicle of a psychocultural revolution of the male ruling class in its relationship to surrounding reality. Whereas ancient myth had seen the Gods and Goddesses as within the matrix of one physical spiritual reality, male monotheism begins to split reality into a dualism of transcendent Spirit...and inferior and dependent physical nature. Bodiless ego or spirit is seen as primary, existing before the cosmos. The physical world is ‘made’ as an artifact by transcendent, disembodied mind or generated through some process of

devolution from spirit to matter...Both the Hebrew Genesis story and the Platonic creation story of *Timaeus* retain reminiscence of the idea of primal matter as something already existing that is ordered or shaped by the Creator God...Gender becomes a primary symbol for the dualism of transcendence and immanence, spirit and matter (Ruether 442).

By reshaping the paradigm of anthropomorphic symbolism from a female earth-centered mode toward a male-oriented solar expression of divine realities, the sun became that which is pure, holy and good, while all material representations of life, such as the serpent and women became demonized.

Helio-anthropomorphism can be located in almost every society which has ever risen to a point of dominance beyond local limits. Egypt is perhaps one of the oldest and most elaborate examples of solar symbolism [see image 2]. Ra, who was believed to be a self-created father of the gods, wore a halo above his head. Any deity which was seen as being of supreme importance or divine in origin was traditionally depicted in this way. The Greeks were likewise noted for associating the divine with the sun. Helios, the Greek sun god, [see image 3] is depicted with a halo as he drives his chariot across the sky. For thousands of years the halo has been a universal symbol for the divine.

Etymological surveys of Indo-European words for god suggest a very close link between the divine and the sun. We have already seen how the Greek sun god, Helios was often represented with a halo, representing his divine authority. But what about Zeus who was by far the most influential god among the Greeks? The word "Zeus" which is actually the Greek word for 'go' or 'supreme go' comes from the root *dyeu*, which means "to gleam or to shine." It is also the root of words for the sky and day. The sense in which it was originally meant to pertain to the supreme god Zeus was "shining." Therefore, the word for 'sun', or 'shining' was literally the same as the word for god (online etymology dictionary). This fact seems to point toward the concept of a divine

realm or a divine being which is closely connected to the sun. The unity provided by Helio-anthropomorphism projects the human mind onto natural phenomena; thus it is a projection of social unification. The sun as divine becomes the unity of the social framework of early Mediterranean peoples and culture.

To better understand this it will help to see what impact the Hellenistic world might have had with regard to the halo as a symbol of a divine reality. We have already considered how Platonic thought viewed light as symbolizing the divine Logos and pure, holy good. We notice from this Platonic, dualistic view of the world, that which is material is merely a reflection or a shadow of the really real, which is the divine reality. This is the ultimate reality which I discussed earlier and it is this fracturing of reality which is crystallized in Platonic dualism as the mythic realm. Now we shall venture to further understand the solar dimensions of this phenomenon.

Generally speaking the Hellenistic age can be described as “the time period that began with the conquests of Alexander the Great in the late fourth century B.C.E.” (Ulansey, Mithras 1). According to a revealing essay by David Ulansey entitled “Cultural Transition and Spiritual Transformation: From Alexander The Great to Cyberspace:”

The defining quality of Hellenistic culture was the unification and intermingling of previously separate and autonomous political and cultural entities—city-states, nations, tribes—in a single new imperial system. This unification was the result of the conquests of Alexander the Great, the outcome was that what had formerly been a vast collection of diverse societies in the Mediterranean and Near East were absorbed into a single Greek (and subsequently Roman) imperial order (Ulansey, Cultural 2).

A result of this unification among previously autonomous societies and cultures was a loss of cultural identity. With this loss of identity came a paradigm shift which Ulansey describes as being “unable to provide a sense of collective identity for their members”

(4). For thousands of years early Mediterranean societies, their religious experiences, traditions, and aesthetic expressions were a result of the cultural environment of which the society was a part. The symbol of the sun as the light of the divine reality provided a universal iconography born from the Platonic dualistic notion of the divine Logos of light, its purity and ultimate reality. This symbol could easily incorporate any previous cultural understanding of the mythic realm.

Another Platonic idea which emerged simultaneously and was equally important in Hellenistic thought was the shift from a view of the cosmos where the earth was a flat disc and the heavens a dome, toward a concept which resembles our current post-Copernican understanding. In this cosmology, Plato suggested that the earth is a sphere. This meant that the stars were attached to the sphere which rotated around the earth on a fixed and determined pattern which could be predicted and empirically examined. Through the process of Hellenizing and the significance of Platoism “we find the emergence of imagery in which the gods come to be seen as dwelling in the realm of the stars, no longer nearby and accessible but now reachable only through extraordinary means” (Ulansey, *Cultural* 7). It should likewise be mentioned that the idea of a human soul became something identified primarily with the individual and immaterial, thus immortal. “For if the soul was immortal and separate from the body, then it had no inherent connection with the social group into which one was born...” (8).

Through the expansion of the Greek-speaking world, which is now referred to as the Hellenistic age, both a loss of cultural identity and a loss of divine accessibility occurred. This two-fold loss was answered by new perspectives concerning culture and the cosmos, as well as new symbols. Whereas the imagery of the sun previously would

have represented simply the glory, authority, or immortality of the gods, or a god amidst a pantheon of gods, it came to be seen as a symbol of an eternal truth or an everlasting absolute in the midst of perpetual change and fluctuating realities. As Ulansey again demonstrates:

This loss of connection with the realm of the divine set in motion a pattern of religious questioning, as individuals began to search for new sources of ultimate meaning: new gods better able to supply the missing sense of contact with the foundations of life. One obvious requirement of such new forms of divinity was that they no longer be tied to a particular locality, and so we find during the Hellenistic age the emergence of new trans-imperial symbolic systems that could be transported and established anywhere in the empire. One of the most successful of such systems was that of ‘astral religion,’ in which the divine forces came to be seen as residing in the realm of the stars. Since the heavens look the same wherever one travels, the stars provided ideal raw material for a portable religious sensibility no longer grounded in a local community. Another common response to the weakening of the old local gods was the phenomenon of ‘syncretism,’ which refers to the process of creating composite divinities out of many local gods; where syncretism took place each local god came to be seen as merely one manifestation of a much larger divine force whose true dominion embraced the entire empire (Ulansey, Cultural 5).

While the need for a new mode of religious expression was essential, a further expression of the ‘astral religion’ raised questions concerning authority, justice and morality. New ways of thinking about the ultimate meaning of life were the result of new ways of thinking about the gods. Once religious experience was no longer absolutely tied to a social group, but rather to an ambiguous realm of disillusionment created by the loss of cultural identity, people needed to explore new ways of establishing a social reality. This was essentially a mode of mythmaking which involved the individual entering into a social unity by initiation rather than being born into a cultural environment, and new symbolic gestures were necessary for this to happen. Yet they were not new; rather the interpretations were new, a response to the changing environment which prevailed in the Hellenistic Age. Ulansey explains:

It was in this context that we can understand the flourishing in Hellenistic culture of the so-called ‘mystery religions,’ which were characterized by the requirement that their members undergo a process of initiation aimed at producing a direct experience of personal transformation. Often the mystery religions invoked a symbolism involving the image of death and rebirth, an age-old representation of the process of transformation (Ulansey, Mithraism 6).

The importance of a social environment was not totally eradicated with the rise of the Hellenistic age. Rather than a shift toward a spiritual significance being focused on the individual alone, the individual would become a part of a new community which saw itself as a vehicle of divine grace blessed with the power to overcome the challenges involved with this new age.

Another great example of how the solar symbol of the halo was in use as a means of communicating this divine dimension can be seen in the Greek god Apollo [see image 4]. He, like many of the gods and goddesses of this period, underwent many changes, evolving with the culture and becoming more and more complex. As described earlier, this functionality and complexity indicates that a social framework was being molded through a projection of itself, a new understanding which could be associated with the changing times. Apollo serves as a wonderful example of how this happened. Once the cult of Christ became a popular motif for worship, the symbolic figure of Apollo was simply changed into that of Christ. This could only have happened if both figures represented the divine Logos, the brilliance of the sun and the shining gesture of the mythic realm [see image 5].

Perhaps the most interesting symbol of the Hellenistic age and the religions which make up the spiritual obligations of these people is that of Mithras. Though there is still much mystery involved with this particular tradition, more scholarly attention has been given to the cult of Mithras in recent years. With regard to the halo and the symbolism of

divine light—Logos and Platonic dualism, Mithras offers a compelling case study of Helio-anthropomorphism. The following study will provide good evidence suggesting that religion is indeed a natural phenomenon and is therefore an aesthetic mode of mythmaking. Moreover, this study will provide an evaluation of the halo as it relates to other influential religious and aesthetic movements, namely the Christian and Buddhist traditions.

### ***The Halo and the Cult of Mithras***

If we understand the halo as being more than just a decorative way to express a particular individual's elevated level of importance, enlightenment or holiness, though the halo certainly does represent these characteristics, we will be able to see more than the simple disc-shaped aurora. We are able to glean a much more powerful symbolic expression. The cult of Mithras is shrouded in obscurity. This is primarily because much of what we know about this mystery religion comes to us second-hand and is provided, for the most part, by rival religious sects. To some extent it is possible to relate the symbolic gesture of the sun, as it pertains to the cult of Mithras, to the fire-worshippers of the East. This can be better described as Zoroastrian, "in which case the symbol in question might be reasonably identified with the Persian *Hvareno* or glory" (Ramsden 124). This being the case we might easily make a further connection with the Persian word for the sun itself. "The word *Hvareno* itself is derived from the same root as the Persian word for sun, namely *Hvare*, from which it becomes apparent that the basis of the whole connection is light, the distinguishing characteristic of the Mazdian religion...Now, according to the tenth Yast of the Zend-Avesta, 'the god with whom the awful kingly glory proceeds is Mithra, the god of light'" (124).

Originally Mithra likely would have been worshiped as a separate deity and from the little archeological evidence we have, this religious tradition was located in Persia. Later in the west, Mithra became associated with the Sun as ‘Sol Invictus’ or the unconquerable sun. There is no really good answer as to why there seem to be at least two distinct forms of the Mithraic cult. However, evidence suggests that the halo as a symbol of glory, specifically divine or kingly authority, was in use on many of the coins discovered in these regions [see image 6]. As is presented in an article by E. H. Ramsden, “it was used in particular as a mark of distinction by the Kushan kings (A.D 50-225), who depicted among their coins types both Mithras and Buddha, the one being shown sometimes with the radiant and sometimes with the simple halo” (Ramsden 124). He continues elaborating on the association between the halo and Mithras, “the connection between Mithras and the halo is, moreover, further corroborated by the fact that the halo is extensively used in Gandharan sculpture, on which Mithraic figures in the Phrygian cap are a common decorative feature” (125). [See image 7, 8]

While there are many distinctions to be made between the cult of Mithras as it originated and the one which eventually found itself a significant influence in Rome, the symbol of the halo expressed a divine illumination which elevated Mithras far above other solar deities of the time. The motif of a Platonic dualism and the Hellenistic principles of unification are clearly established within the Mithraic tradition.

Again Ramsden explains this connection while indicating that the relationship between the halo as a symbol of divine authority and a symbol of Mithras as a supreme solar deity was particularly influential among the ruling class in Rome.

It may...be contended that its appearance in painting and sculpture...coincides with the rise of a solar henotheism that spread from the Near East throughout the Roman Empire. Yet, even so, the sun-god par excellence at this time was

Mithras, the Persian god ‘with whom proceeds the awful kingly glory,’ who became identified with Sol Invictus and whose cult was for three centuries the most powerful rival to Christianity. It is known also from various sources that Mithras was favored by the Roman Emperors because of his function of dispensing the ‘glory,’ which was a mark of ‘true king,’ and idea which was probably fused with the conception of the divinity of kings, a conception which had spread through the Hellenistic world after the Alexandrian conquests, until in time an actual identification was recognized (Ramsen 126).

It has been mentioned that the Sol Invictus was attributed to Mithras as a means of elevating this Sun God above all others who might share the attributes. But what exactly does this title indicate? To better understand this we will again turn to David Ulansey whose treatment of the emergence and importance of the cult of Mithras is a fascinating and influential approach which has helped to reshape our thinking about this mystery religion.

In the December 1989 issue of *Scientific America* Ulansey published an article called “The Mithraic Mysteries,” subtitled, “The icons of this ancient Mediterranean cult can be deciphered only in terms of a worldview that placed the powers controlling human destiny not on earth but in the stars.” He began in much in the same way as his previous article, by illustrating the impact of the Hellenistic world between the time of Alexander the Great and Constantine and suggesting that this age provided fertile ground for new religions which would emerge out of a loss of cultural identity. “Older forms of religious expression, which had generally been the product of smaller, close-knit societies, were losing their ability to furnish a sense of meaning for individuals adrift in a vastly expanded and increasingly impersonal empire” (Ulansey Mithras). He continued, “any philosophy or religion that could offer people a sense of understanding or control exercised a strong attraction” (2). This was primary due to the fact that for these people

their loss of cultural identity resulted in a fatalistic worldview. The name typically given to this fatalism was stoicism. Ulansey explains:

The general fatalism of the time prepared the way for the success of the more specific fatalism of astrology. Astrology, which first began to gain popular acceptance during the Hellenistic period...claimed, with a persuasive aura of mathematical accuracy, that all events were pre-determined by powers residing in the stars. The growth of fatalism and astrology in this period makes it plausible that a religion based on the stars should have arisen (Ulansey Mithras).

It is important to note why this was significant. What we know about the cult of Mithras is severely limited, which makes it difficult to gain an understanding of its relevance during this time period, specifically with regard to the halo and the worship of a Sun god. We know that it came into existence in the first century B.C.E. approximately at the same time that seeds were being sown for the rise of the cult of Christ. We know that it reached its pinnacle at some point in the third century before falling victim to the development of a universal Christian Empire and “about the time the Western Roman Empire was falling” (Ulansey Mithraism). We know that the cult was mostly made up of pirates, soldiers, bureaucrats, merchants, and women were strictly forbidden. This was a stark difference from the members of the cult of Christ who were mostly Jewish, and who allowed women as members. As was the case with nearly every mystery religion, including the cult of Christ, its members were required to go through an initiation process which was symbolic of purification. There were seven levels of initiation in Mithras which were, “distinct grades of initiation, forming a hierarchical structure through which members gradually ascended” (2).

While the cult of Christ had many secret rituals, the doctrines which describe exactly what its members believed remain relatively intact through second hand recitation

and the eventual legalization of this religious tradition. On the other hand, the Mithraic cult is completely veiled in secrecy. Ulansey describes the importance of this fact:

The cult's secrecy meant that no written record of Mithraic doctrines survives. As a result, the only information available to scholars attempting to reconstruct the cult's teachings is the elaborate iconography that decorates the temples. Most of it depicts various activities involving the cult's god, Mithras; the crucial scene is the so-called tauroctony, or bull slaying, in which Mithras, accompanied by various figures, is shown in the act of killing a bull. A tauroctony is found in the most prominent location in virtually every Mithraic temple, and it is clear that this icon holds the key to the central secret of the Mithraic mysteries (Ulansey 2).

For most scholars prior to the 1970's the cult of Mithras as it was practiced in Rome was merely an expansion of the Mithraic symbols and traditions of an older version based on Iranian myths. Although there is certainly a connection to be made between the Sol Invictus, there are "no known Iranian myths in which Mithra has anything to do with killing a bull" (Ulansey, *Mithraism* 3). This so-called Iranian connection was debated during the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies in 1971 (3). There many scholars began to visualize the cult of Mithras in Rome as being "created as a completely new religion somewhere in the Greco-Roman world and that it had merely adopted the name of the Iranian god" (3). This would have presumably been due to the significance of the solar connection which has already been described in relation to the halo. But what about the tauroctony? If this image of Mithras killing a bull and other symbolic expression did not originate from an Iranian myth then where would it have come from and why did it gain symbolic significance? These are important questions and if we are to understand the significance of the halo as it pertains to the cult of Mithras we must look into the symbolic expression found in the tauroctony. Moreover, discovering the symbolic significance, will provide further support for the concept of religion and art as natural phenomenon.

It has already been noted that, “astrological beliefs permeated Mediterranean religious and intellectual life at the time Mithraism originated. In part this was the result of the fatalism of the age...astrology filled the need for new symbols that could make sense of everyday life but were not tied to a particular locality or community” (Ulansey 3). Moreover, this new way of seeing religious symbols, meanings and heavenly realities gave way to what Ulansey describes as a new afterlife with dangerous connotations:

Astrology also encouraged a new conception of life after death, according to which the soul did not go to the underworld, as had earlier been believed, but rather rose through the planetary spheres to the sphere of the fixed stars and then to the paradise that lay beyond the outermost sphere. In time this journey came to be imagined as difficult and dangerous, with secret passwords required to cross each planetary threshold (Ulansey, Mithraism).

Given the fact that astronomical symbols frequently appear in Mithraic iconography, they must have had vital importance. This is presented clearly with the 12 signs of the zodiac, the sun, the moon, and the planets which often appear together. Most often this was also the case within the tauroctony, though it is found elsewhere within the Mithraic tradition [see image 9]. Within the tauroctony the common symbols besides Mithras and the bull, are a dog, a snake, a raven, a scorpion and occasionally a cup and lion. Surely it unreasonable to think that this symbolic imagery is meaningless, As Ulansey puts it, “it cannot be coincidence that each has a parallel among the constellations: Canis Minor, Hydra Corvus, Scorpio, Leo and Crater; the bull is paralleled by Tarurus” (Ulansey, Mithraism). He state that, “my work has been directed toward explaining how these constellations could come from the central icon of a powerful religious movement” (4). The slaying of the bull seems to be the most important symbolic expression found within the later Mithraic traditions in Rome.

For the past few decades considerable scholarly work has been conducted to better understand the cult of Mithras and iconography relating to the slaying of the bull. David Ulansey has been one of the most prolific authors concerning this subject and explains the mysterious symbolism in such a way as to be comprehensible and compelling to the lay reader. Continuing, he writes:

These several constellations, I have found, are linked in the sky as well as in the tauroctony...they lie along a path defined by an ancient position of the celestial equator...The celestial equator crosses the zodiac at the equinoxes—the points on the celestial sphere where the sun appears to be on the first day of spring and the first day of autumn. In antiquity the celestial equator was far more than merely an imaginary circle. Ancient astronomers believed that the earth was located in the center of the universe and was absolutely immovable; the fixed stars were attached to a great sphere that rotated around the earth once a day on an axis running between the sphere's north and south poles (Ulansey, Mithras).

The importance of all this will be made explicit as we begin to imagine how these ancient people might have viewed their relationship to the stars, to the gods who lived among the stars, and to the Sun and halo as symbolic expressions of a dualistic reality. We must remember that for all these ancient people who lived at a time prior to electricity and light pollution, the night sky would have seemed like a dream of absolute purity: immovable, stellar surrealism. Ulansey continues:

For most of antiquity it was believed that the axis of the celestial sphere was like the earth, immovable. In fact, the earth's rotational axis...is not fixed; it has a wobbling movement. As it wobbles, the celestial equator wobbles with it, and the relative positions of the equator and the ecliptic change. This so-called precession of the equinoxes means that the position of the sun in the sky at the equinox moves backward along the ecliptic...the sun moves through one constellation every 2,160 years. Today the spring equinox is in the constellation of Pisces; in about the year 2200 it will enter Aquarius. During Greco Roman times the spring equinox was in Aries (Ulansey, Mithras).

Around 2000 B.C.E. the constellation in which the Sun resided had begun to show that it was changing from Taurus to Aries. As 100 C.E. approached it showed this relative change of position in the sky even more. We know that the symbolic images of the

constellations within the tauroctony reflect “the arrangement of constellations...matches an astronomical situation that prevailed 2,000 years before the origins of Mithraism. This indicates that those responsible for the symbols found within the tauroctony would have known about the arrangement and the perceived movements or the so-called precession of that era. Yet, how could this have been? According to Ulansey:

The precession of the equinoxes was unknown for most of ancient times. It was discovered in about 125 B.C. by the Greek astronomer Hipparchus, only a few decades before the initial rise of Mithraism. His careful observations showed the celestial equator was in fact gradually shifting backward through the zodiac. His calculations also made clear which constellations would have lain along the celestial equator when the equinox was in Taurus (Ulansey, Mithras).

Clearly from this we can gain some understanding of what these symbolic expressions, especially Mithras killing a bull, might have meant to ancient peoples; “the death of the bull aptly symbolized the end of the reign of Taurus as the constellation of the spring equinox” (Ulansey, Mithraism).

For these people who believed in an earth-centered, or a geocentric worldview and who felt that the stars and the gods who lived among them controlled their fates and life after death, the shift would have been seen as a transition of the entire Universe. This discovery would have been accurately described as a monumental cosmos-shaking; “the stable sphere of the fixed stars was being unseated by some force apparently larger than the cosmos itself” (Ulansey). Moreover, “ancient intellectuals, accustomed as they were to seeing the work of the gods reflected in the works of nature, could easily have taken this great movement as evidence for the existence of a powerful, hitherto unsuspected deity” (Ulansey). In other words, with the rise of this Astra-religion, a new and more powerful concept of a deity was beginning to take shape. Such a deity with so much

power must reside beyond the cosmos if he can move the cosmos, and he must be absolutely pure as Platonic dualism suggests he must.

David Ulansey sees this interpretation of the symbolic expressions relating to the cult of Mithras and the imagery found within the tauroctony as the best explanation of its mysterious nature. This would have resulted in unification among these ancient people:

By killing the bull—causing the precession of the equinoxes—Mithras was in effect moving the entire universe. A god capable of performing such a tremendous deed would be eminently deserving of worship. Furthermore, the ability to move the cosmos would be seen as endowing Mithras with other powers as well, such as the ability to overcome the forces of fate residing in the stars and to guarantee the soul a safe passage through the planetary spheres after death (Ulansey, Mithraism).

If we understand the cult of Mithras as being essentially an astra-religion whose members saw themselves as intellectually minded we might be able to discover the symbolic meanings of other common symbolic expressions within the Mithraic tradition; namely the iconographical motif of being born from a rock [see image 10]. To further understand the connection here we must look deeper into the tauroctonies. A tauroctony was the place of worship for followers of this mystery religion; a temple dedicated to the adoration of the supreme deity. It was a cave or a dugout dwelling which had an apse and places to recline along the sides of the wall. There were many images carved out in the caves or painted directly on the wall. Of these images, the ones which seem to be most common, other than the sacramental ritualistic zodiac bull killing were Mithras holding a cosmic sphere surrounded by the zodiac and Mithras as Atlas, a common motif in Greco Roman mythological aesthetics (Ulansey, Mithraism). [See image 11].

If we interpret Mithras as having the power to control the universe and therefore the astrological forces which were believed to determine one's life on earth, as well as a guaranteed safe passage of the soul through the mystical real following death, it follows

that he would have been depicted in ways which evoke a Greco Roman conception of Atlas. Yet, what about the images that involve Mithras being born from a rock? In another of Ulansey's articles titled "The Cosmic Mysteries of Mithras" he states that this depiction of Mithras meant that Mithras was completely outside the universe:

If Mithras was in fact believed to be capable of moving the entire universe, then he must have been understood as in some sense residing outside of the cosmos...the tauroctony depicts the bull-slaying as taking place inside a cave, and the Mithraic temples were built in imitation of caves. But caves are precisely hollows within the rocky earth, which suggest that the rock from which Mithras is born is meant to represent the Mithraic cave as seen from the outside (Ulansey Cosmic Mysteries).

Ulansey goes on to state concerning the rock birth of Mithras, that he "is in some sense greater than the cosmos...he cannot be contained within the cosmic sphere, and is therefore depicted...as bursting out of the enclosing cave of the universe, and establishing his presence in the transcendent space beyond the cosmos" (Ulansey Cosmic Mysteries). This is vital to recognize for it will help us understand the connection between the cult of Mithras and Platonic dualism and specifically the significance of the halo as it relates to Mithras himself. Ulansey notes:

This imaginary 'place beyond the universe' had been described vividly by Plato several centuries before the origins of Mithraism...I would suggest that the awe-inspiring quality of Plato's vision of what is beyond the outermost boundary of the cosmos also lies behind the appeal of Mithras as a divine being whose proper domain is outside of the universe (Ulansey Cosmic Mysteries).

But what exactly can be said about Mithras being a Sun god and how can he be thought of as a solar deity when he is so clearly described as existing beyond space and time and the cosmos which would include the Sun?

This might at first seem rather puzzling; without an understanding of Platonic dualism it would be impossible to understand how the Mithras who exists beyond the universe could be associated to the Sun as a solar deity. The connection can only be

made if we interpret the halo, which is the aesthetic symbolism used to describe Mithras as a solar deity from a perspective which is entirely dualistic. In other words, a duality exists which means that the Sun must be merely a reflection of the true Sun, who is Mithras. Quite literally there are two Suns. In an essay titled “Mithras and the Hypercosmic Sun” David Ulansey comments on this mystifying reality:

One of the most perplexing aspects of the Mithras mysteries consist in the fact that Mithraic iconography always portrays Mithras and the sun god as separate beings, while—in stark contradiction...Mithraic inscriptions Mithras is...identified with the sun by being called ‘sol invictus,’ the ‘unconquered sun (Ulansey, Mithras).

This would seem to indicate that the followers of this mysterious religion for some reason believed in the existence of two suns. One was the visible sun often represented as another sun god and the second was a dualistic sun which Mithras represents in the mythic realm outside of the cosmic sphere. Ulansey states his solution to this otherwise apparent contradiction by stating;

I have argued that the god Mithras originated as the personification of the force responsible for the newly discovered cosmic phenomenon of the precession of the equinoxes. Since from the geocentric perspective the precession appears to be a movement of the entire cosmic sphere, the force responsible for it most likely would have been understood as being ‘hypercosmic,’ beyond or outside of the cosmos...Mithras, as a result of his being imagined as a hypercosmic entity, became identified with the Platonic ‘hypercosmic sun,’ thus opening up the way for the puzzling existence of two ‘suns’ in Mithraic ideology (Ulansey Cosmic Mysteries).

After Ulansey discussed several compelling sources which point toward a mythical duality relating to the nature of Mithras; he continues this line of reasoning to conclude:

If my theory about Mithras is correct it follows that Mithras—as an entity capable of moving the entire cosmic sphere and therefore of necessity being outside that sphere—must have been understood as a being whose proper location was in precisely that same ‘hypercosmic realm’ where the Platonists imagined their ‘hypercosmic sun’ to exist. A Platonizing Mithraist, therefore, would almost automatically have been led to identify Mithras with the Platonic ‘hypercosmic sun,’ in which case Mithras would become a second sun besides the normal, visible sun. Therefore, the puzzling presence in Mithraic ideology of

two suns becomes immediately understandable on the basis of my theory about the nature of Mithras (Ulansey Cosmic Mysteries).

From what has been discussed above and in light of the profound impact that both the Hellenistic age and Platonic dualism had on ancient people, we can adequately say that the cult of Mithras is an important part of the history of Western religion and illustrates how both religion and art are essentially natural phenomenon. Everything about the cult of Mithras seems to indicate that what has happened in this particular community was a direct response to a plethora of natural and social phenomena. Furthermore, the aesthetic symbolism, in which the halo has a prominent place is essentially a mode of mythmaking. Mithras was likely a sort of dualistic Ultimate Reality which was projected onto the cosmos by people who were in awe of the perceived power of this mythical hero and the dimension of that which exists beyond the heavens and the universe as it was known to them. Moreover, the slaying of the bull, which is the central theme of Mithraic iconography, because it takes place beyond the universe in the mythic realm of Platonic dualistic truth and purity is essentially, according to the mythical dimension, an act of supernatural reality occurring before the foundations of the earth. This element involved will be profoundly important once we examine the halo as it relates to both the Christian and the Buddhist traditions.

### ***The Halo and the Logos of Christ***

While so much of the scholarly work done in recent years concerning the cult of Mithras has lead to a new perspective of this divine being, the question of how this would have impacted the Christian religion, which was in competition with the cult of Mithras,

seems reasonable. In other words, can we draw any conclusions about the Christian religion from this new perspective on the cult of Mithras?

One question which comes to mind is how the Christian religion came to be the most dominant religion in the Roman Empire and came to shape the social context of the Western world for centuries to come. It is wise to acknowledge that this is a very complex issue. Due to the nature of the early Christian church, which was anything but unified, any endeavor to answer this question must be met with caution. It's reasonable to begin by stating a few facts. First of all, though the Christian religion was in many ways just another mystery religion born from the context of Judaic-Hellenistic thought and culture, it eventually took on an ecumenical perspective. That is to say, it was not entirely secretive or exclusive, rather, it had embedded within it a universal calling which was open to every person. This is likely the most attractive reason for the eventual rise of Christianity to a dominant position as well as one of the most important reasons for many of the doctrinal disputes which were to follow.

In Christianity, like all of the mystery religions, there were secretive rituals and ceremonial purifications which functioned as means of identification and social involvement. Circumcision was perhaps the earliest of these rituals and is a good example of how the secretiveness and ritualistic elements of Christianity came to be seen as secondary. A characteristic of the religion, which would serve to shape and mold how Christians in later generations came to think of the divine realm, was its conception as superior to all other religious issues. This was the doctrine of the Logos of Christ; the doctrine of the preexistence of the Son of God.

This doctrine is a Greek-Platonic concept and as we have already seen it was perhaps the most influential worldview during the rise of the Christian religion. Yet the doctrine of the Logos of Christ is far more than a simple debate over the nature of the Son of God. It was a debate concerning the Ultimate Reality itself. Therefore, in the iconography of the Christian religion we see a deliberate reflection of the evolution of Christianity. Perhaps this doctrine, more than any other, was the cause of the eventual fracturing of the cosmos, creating a mythic realm which differed from the Platonic view of Logos. It established a uniquely Christian version of the divine Logos which is still a part of Western religion today. In the specific example of the halo as a representation of the Logos, space and time became projected as a *pure-myth*.

Let's examine some common assumptions about the Christian religion. Two things are almost always thought of as givens: that the early church was a pure form of Christianity—an unchanging and unified faith; and that the early church being born from a Judaic worldview, was essentially a Jewish response to the changing environment of Greco-Roman Hellenistic elements. The first of these assumptions is entirely false. Though it may be popular to preach from the pulpit a return to “original Christianity” this is simply an ideological position which fails to take into consideration the vast complexities inherent in the first and second century Christian Church. The second of these assumptions, held by a more scholarly number and less important to the common layperson, is only part of the story. While it is certainly the case that Plato's doctrine of Logos had a major impact on the Hellenistic worldview and therefore would have been equally influential in the early Christian church, what is commonly overlooked is the

major difference between Platonic dualism as expressed by the Logos doctrine and the Logos of Christ as the preexisting Son of God.

In the Jewish tradition, which is often associated with revelation above reason, a distinction must be made concerning the Logos doctrine in the Hellenistic age. The tradition from which Jewish people glean their identity was both anthropomorphically metaphysical—that is entirely mythical, and legalistically aniconicistic. What is meant by this? Juxtaposed to the reason-based understanding of a dualistic worldview which dominated the Hellenistic world, the Jewish tradition drew from this paradigm shift (Mythos to Logos) a symbolic identity crisis. The very fact that such an identity crisis was present established a system of religious expression which would, in due course, become essential in establishing a doctrine of the Logos of Christ which would usurp Platonism. This aniconicism, which is an overarching theme within the Jewish tradition, sets the stage for the Logos doctrine of Christianity while simultaneously enacting schisms which would shape the evolution of Western religion in general.

In an interesting book entitled “The Art of God Incarnate” Aiden Nichols O.P. attempts to make the argument that for the Jews, the image of God was a metaphor for what would later be seen as the true image of divine Logos. Israel, having no visual aesthetic symbolizing the image of God, became the embodiment of the image and therefore Israel is a metaphor of the divine Logos. Nichols states:

Two notable facets of Old Testament faith should attract our attention. Firstly there is what may be called the negative presupposition of the metaphor which can be found in the aniconicism of classical Yahwism. Images are conspicuous by their absence in the normative form of the religion of Yahweh, God of Israel. Since God may not be directly imaged in the cult there are no obvious candidates for the title ‘image of God’. The second and positive presupposition of the metaphor consists in a second pertinent aspect of Hebrew culture, the theomorphism of the Israelite view of man. Yahweh can in some sense be seen in Israel, by means of the ‘form of the existence of his servants the prophets,

whom he moulds by his gracious had. Both of these facets lie present in the implicit structure of the Priestly work. It outlines a cult where Yahweh is nowhere iconically represented, and it teaches the imagehood of God in man...(Nichols 13, 14).

It may rightfully asked, what exactly does any of this have to do with the Logos doctrine of Christianity and the aesthetic tradition of the halo as it relates to the Christian tradition? To explore this connection we must turn our attention to the relation between Jewish and Greek influences upon the early Christian church.

The argument I want to present at this point is basically the same as what was presented in the quote above - that the metaphor of Israel is itself the image of God embodied by the Jewish people, their traditions, rituals and religious experience. By the time of the Hellenistic age, cultural identity and the religious traditions which make up individual groups were being compromised. This was the case for Jewish people as well. Indeed the strict monotheism associated with Israel would likely have been reinforced by pagan Hellenistic concepts of divine realities which were everywhere present.

It is unclear whether this strict monotheism was entirely Jewish in origin. The question remains and is a part of the scholarly work being done concerning the effect and influence of Eastern religious tradition in the Mediterranean. R. M. Price in an impressively detailed essay entitled "Hellenization and Logos Doctrine in Justin Martyr" writes:

We should certainly acknowledge that...a Hellenizing process had so long been proceeding within Judaism itself that Judaism no longer presented a sharply contrasting culture...The Greeks knew that their own cult and philosophy were deeply indebted to ancient Near Eastern cultures, especially those of Egypt and Babylon; modern study of the ancient civilizations of the Near East has revealed that they exerted an equal influence on Old Testament Judaism (Price).

The question which seems appropriate is how can such antithetical positions as the strict monotheism of Israel and the polytheistic pantheon of gods in the Greco-Roman world, become united in what would become the Christian church? It is my belief that these apparently diametrically opposed views of the world are more modern ideological than historically valid. In other words, the uniquely monotheistic tradition within Judaism may not be so intrinsically Jewish after all. Though there is no room to state that the Greek traditions were void of polytheistic elements what can be clearly stated is that there were specific cases (i.e., the cult of Dionysus) where those who worshiped the older Olympian gods felt threatened by the mysterious new religions based on Hellenistic principles. If this is the case, then perhaps the monotheism associated with the Jewish people leading up to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem finds its origin not in the divine revelation of God, but in the traditions, rituals and culture of the Hellenistic age.

Even if it is the case that Judaic monotheism is a response to the loss of cultural identity caused by the Hellenistic age, we must consider the possibility that many of these religious expressions were in one way or another essentially rooted in the loss of identity brought about by Hellenism. What's even more important is how this monotheistic principle would impact the rise of the Logos doctrine within the Christian tradition.

So let's take a moment to consider what has been said thus far concerning the Logos of Christ as it relates to the Hellenistic age and to the aesthetic symbol of the halo. We have seen how the rise of the Christian religion over other mystery religions such as the cult of Mithras is a complex issue. Yet we have some assurance that the universal characteristic of Platonic dualism and the Logos doctrine would have usurped the divisive

nature of individual traditions and customs. We have seen how the Logos doctrine is essentially a Platonic concept and therefore the early Christian church is, to some extent, a creation of the Hellenistic age. Furthermore, we have seen how even the Jewish people who were legalistically aniconic had their own version of a Logos doctrine embodied by the metaphor of the image of God in the image of man. And we have seen how there is no clear way to distance the Jewish understanding of God from a Hellenistic influence. Now it seems fitting to turn to New Testament writings to further explore the Logos doctrine of Christ and the aesthetic representation of the Logos in the halo.

Perhaps the most compelling examples of Platonic dualism in early Christian writings are the Pauline Epistles. These are not merely apparitions of no real importance. Rather, because they are the earliest canonical scriptures of the New Testament they give us the best information about these people and what they believed. Dating to sometime between 50 C.E. and 80 C.E., these early Christian writings are reminiscent of a dualism which seems to be born directly from the heart of Hellenistic thought. Yet, the dualistic writings we associate with the Apostle Paul are steeped in Jewish heritage. This leads to the conclusion that in the Pauline Epistles, when speaking about the Logos and introducing this powerful doctrine as the essence of the Christian message, what we find is a sort of Judaic dualism. As we have seen above, there is no clear cut way to discover to what extent the relationship between Jewish tradition and Hellenistic principles influenced each other, just that they did influence each other. Furthermore, it has previously been discussed that even though there is no Judaic iconography, this does not mean that the religion was void of an Image of God. Such an image was an extreme form of anthropomorphism—the image of God in the activity of Israel. What can now be said

concerning Paul's Epistles is that the image of God, which was Israel, now is seen as the church, which is the physical body of Christ.

This Judaic dualism, sharing much of that which is commonly associated with Platonic dualism, needs further explanation. For example, it seems that Paul's entire message was centered on preaching Christ crucified and his swift coming to be revealed in the glory of the resurrection. Yet, he clearly indicates that the physical body of Christ is the church in the here and now (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:27). One might wonder how is it possible for Christ to be both in heaven and be here now as the church? Is this simple metaphorical language? There is another problem which is often overlooked. Paul's Epistles, which are generally agreed to be the earliest Christian writings, not only speak of Christ in a dualistic-spiritual sense, but there is no good indication that Paul knows anything about an actual real man who was recently put to death and then rose from the dead. Every time Paul speaks of Christ as crucified and resurrected he does so in terms which would indicate that this event was an eternal one not within the realm of the material world. This would make sense from a Platonic dualistic view. At the same time Paul makes no mention of an earthly ministry or a virgin birth or of the miracles which would have certainly been important points.

The Pauline Epistles assume certain things to be true. They presuppose the teachings of Christ without giving reference to Christ as being the one who instituted them; the Eucharistic meal being a good example. They presuppose the preexistence of Christ far before it became an issue which led to one of the most important schisms in the early church. They presuppose Christ being revealed for the first time in his glory at the end times—the resurrection. This is completely different from a “second coming”

doctrine which developed much later. To be clear, Paul's Epistles describe a sort of hope in Christ as a savior and as the eternal reality of God; but whenever Paul speaks of Christ coming he does so in such a way as to indicate that Christ has not yet come.

If it is the case that Christ will come in glory at the end of the age, at the resurrection, and if this coming is equal to his being revealed in his glory, which I believe it is (it should be remembered that being revealed can only happen once not a second time), it would seem that when Paul speaks of Christ being crucified and the church being resurrected in his body, he is doing so in terms which invoke Plato's theory of forms. In other words, the really real is the realm where Christ died for the sins of humanity. If he had lived a life on earth his death and resurrection would be an imperfect sacrifice. If his death and resurrection are a reality which belongs to the mythic realm, the realm of Platonic dualism—the really real realm – then it is a perfect sacrifice and one which is able to purify the sins of the world. This is perhaps why Paul continually speaks of the resurrection as the hope which is to come. This is also a good explanation of why Paul admonishes his followers concerning the resurrection of the dead saying, “if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Corinthians 15: 12-14).

The interesting point here is that Christ is seen as a savior—mediator between man and God. This is a common motif within the Hellenistic mystery religions. Salvation in Christ, which is the resurrection and that which provides hope for the followers of Paul's ministry, is described in dualistic terms. If there is no resurrection

then Christ has not been raised and faith is futile; if there is a resurrection then faith is the key to salvation. What must be understood is that the resurrection to which Paul refers must take place in the mythic realm of Ultimate Reality. Otherwise it could not provide a spiritual basis for corruptible reality. The death and resurrection of Christ, if it is to provide a purification of sin and salvation from the rulers of this age, must take place where corruption and sin are without merit. The only place where this is possible is in the truth of the divine Logos.

Listen to the way Paul describes the resurrection in terms of the mortal corruptible needing to take on the immortal incorruptible: changing into a spiritual reality which establishes the victory of Logos over death:

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality (1Corinthians 15: 50-53).

Clearly the way Paul describes the resurrection indicates an influence of Platonic dualism which is difficult to avoid, save completely ignoring it.

While it may be the case that this sort of dualism is inherently Platonic, it is likewise uniquely Judaic. This Judaic dualism, I believe, is the best indication that from the very earliest Christian communities, the ones which can be associated with Paul's ministry, the Christ which was preached as a savior and as having been crucified and raised to life before the foundations of the world, was essentially the Logos doctrine taking the form of the image of God. Recall that within the aniconism of the Jewish tradition the image of God was an extreme anthropomorphizing of God in the image of Israel. Moreover, this image of God as Israel had become the image of God within the

body of Christ which, according to Paul's ministry, is the Christian community—the early church itself. It seems quite reasonable to yoke the earliest Christian witness of the Christ with a sort of Judaic dualism which is easily associated with Plato's theory of forms.

There are some particular difficulties in too closely associating the Logos doctrine of Christianity to that of Platonism. As we shall see, the Logos doctrine which became the essence of Christian thought for over a thousand years, did not simple arrive with the ministry of Paul. What can be said is that the Pauline Epistles were heavily influenced by Plato's theory of forms but his vision of the Logos was more an anthropomorphic mediator that actually exists in a mythical reality. This reality of course is the source of all knowledge and is that which gives substance to the material world of here and now. Yet, for Paul the Logos doctrine seems to be more a Judaic doctrine emphasizing revelation over reason and salvation through purification of the corruptible realm than any particular religious tradition or ritual. The importance of this slight divergence of the Logos doctrine within the Pauline epistles from Plato's more abstract version of Logos will be discussed momentarily. At this point it is important to address some of the difficulties Plato's Logos caused in the early Christian church and how, as Christianity became more and more dominant, the doctrine of the Logos of Christ took on a more symbolic form.

Prior to the conversion of the Roman empire to the Christian religion by the Roman Emperor Constantine around the middle of the forth century C.E., two brilliant minds now considered early church fathers put forth a new understanding of the Logos doctrine taught by Paul. These Christian intellectuals were Justin Martyr and Origen.

Justin Martyr is an important figure because we can glean from his position some of the difficulties inherent in Plato's theory of forms as it relates to the Logos doctrine. On the other hand the paradigm shift which would eventually result in a new understanding of the Logos can be traced back to Origen and his contributions to the early Christian understanding of Christ as the Son of God.

By the time Justin Martyr comes onto the scene around the first century C.E. early Christian thought had already undergone a splintering. If we recognize that the concept of Christ as Logos presented within the Pauline Epistles was likely used in some fashion long before Paul himself employed it, we might be able to see how the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem around the year 70 C.E. could have drastically changed the understanding of Christ as Logos. Justin Martyr presents a version of Christ which is often associated by scholars with Plato's Logos. While this is to some extent true it is not entirely the case that Justin Hellenized the Christian concept of Christ as Logos.

The primary problem with presenting Christ as being the equivalent of Plato's Logos is the fact that for Platonist the concept of the Logos, which is far more abstract than either a Judaic or Pauline understanding, is a hierarchical structure which would directly contradict the developing concept of the trinity. To employ the Platonist view of Logos to the Christian understanding of the Christ as the Son of God would be to subordinate the Son to the Father. This question would later become a vital issue. At this time it simply reflects many of the ongoing transitions within the early Christian community. R.M. Price writes concerning common trends of attributing to Justin Martyr an unmerited notion of Hellenizing the Christian message. He states:

In all, we must beware of exaggerating the extent to which Justin and the Apologists imported into Christian theology Hellenic notions in general and Platonic ones in particular. This is not to deny that Justin both knew and

employed more Greek philosophy than the Christian writers of the first century, and that he was concerned to present the Gospel in terms as appealing as possible to pagan intellectuals. But the point to be made is that in describing and assessing the influence of Hellenism on Justin the notions of a 'hellenization' of Christianity and of an appropriation of a Platonic Logos doctrine are both inapplicable. The former presupposes a contrast between Judaic and Hellenic modes of thought that in fact had never been clear cut and had by the second diminished to vanishing point; the second depends on overstating the similarity between Middle Platonism and the theology of the Apologists (Price).

While it may be the case that the preserved divide between Judaism and Hellenistic concepts such as Plato's theory of forms may not be as wide as once thought by some, it is not the case that as the Christian church became more organized it was successful at preserving a religious experience which was unique among the pagan cults of the Hellenistic age.

What about Origen? Is there anything which can be said with regard to his theology which could shed light on the significance of the Logos doctrine as it relates to Christ as the Son of God? While Price makes it clear that we cannot simply assume that early Christian intellectuals such as Justin Martyr simply borrowed Greek principles and introduced them into a Christian worldview, we have already seen how such concepts were a central part of the development of Paul's ministry. What we know is that as the early church grew it relied more heavily on Hellenistic concepts evolving into a systematic theological enterprise.

In the works of Origen we have a completion of what Paul's ministry focused on; Christ as Logos. Up to this point in the early church much of the doctrinal emphasis was apocalyptic in nature. Clearly the synoptic gospels were written in response to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. With Origen we see a deliberate shift taking place which moved from an apocalyptic message toward the message Paul had spent his life proclaiming. The kingdom of God was available not only for the Jew but for the

Gentile as well. This message of salvation would have been entirely impossible if it were void of the Logos doctrine. Hans Kung writes concerning Origen in his massive work “Christianity” that:

He aimed at a definitive reconciliation between Christianity and the Greek world, or, better, at a sublation of the Greek world into Christianity. But this Christianizing of Hellenism inevitably resulted in a Hellenization of Christianity. So while Origen’s theology does not represent a paradigm shift, it does represent the theological completion of the Gentile Christian Hellenistic paradigm initiated by Paul (Kung 163).

It is interesting to note that the rise of a thoroughly systematic theology as presented by Origen was taking place at around the same time that doctrine of the Trinity was being developed. It is likewise interesting to see how these developments were both in response to criticism or preserved perversion, heretical doctrines.

Heretical doctrines are not heretical until they have been pronounced so by ruling authorities. Orthodox doctrines, which tend to be developed over lengthy periods of time and are the standard by which heretical doctrines are deemed heretical, are almost always in response to disputes within the church. This bizarre circularity is how the doctrine of the Trinity was developed. However, the Logos doctrine is strangely assumed by most of the early Christian church. The opening passage of the Gospel of John spends no time explaining the nature of the Word of God, save a presupposed understanding of the Logos. Neither do any of the early church fathers care to teach the Logos doctrine in a way that would be seen as responding to critics or a heretical teaching. Christ as Logos is simply assumed. This is the case with Origen as well. From this assumed doctrine of the Logos which Origen uses to create the first truly systematic theology of the Christian church, he introduces the Greek principle of allegorical language to unify the division

everywhere present in the early Church. This allegorical language which makes the Christian message universal is explained by Kung when he writes:

The allegorical understanding of scripture is the instrument for caring through this systematic conception. As Greek philosophers before him explained the myths...and around the beginning of our era in Alexandria the Jew Philo explained the five Books of Moses, so now Origen explains the Old and New Testaments in essentials no historically but allegorically, in other words symbolically, metaphorically, spiritually (Kung 165).

Why is this information about how the Hellenistic world influenced and shaped the early Christian church important? The importance of the Logos as it relates to the early Christian church is to understand how the concept of Platonic dualism shifts from an abstract and hierarchical concept of Logos to an extreme anthropomorphic Logos found within the Pauline epistles and the allegorical Logos which Origen used to create a universal and systematic theological approach to the Christian message. This shift of the Logos doctrine can be found in the opening passage of John's gospel to the Gentiles:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world (John 1: 1-9).

This passage from the later gospel tradition of John is an example of the shift in the early Christian concept of Logos. This shift equates the Word of God, which is the Christ of Paul's epistles, to the "true light" which enlightens and brings salvation to mankind. Already in the gospel of John there emerges a Logos doctrine which equates knowledge to light; true knowledge—saving knowledge comes from the divine logos of Christ who is the light of the world. Again Kung expresses this when he states:

The paradigm shift becomes unmistakable the moment when already in the second century Justin and the early Christian apologist connected the Johannine

concept of the Logos, which had a Jewish Hellenistic stamp, with the Greek metaphysics of the Logos, and at the same time sought to emphasize belief in one God and the universal significance of Jesus Christ. Why? Because the starting point of Christianity had been shifted: from the earthly and exalted Christ to the preexistent Christ...Instead of an apocalyptic temporal scheme of salvation directed forwards, theologians now think principally from above downwards in a cosmic-spatial scheme...Instead of being explained in concrete biblical language the relationship of Jesus to God is now explained in the essential-ontological concepts of contemporary Hellenistic metaphysics (Kung 172).

At this point I can state my argument clearly. The paradigm shift which took place between 100 and 200 C.E. was in large part a return to earlier Greek conceptions of reality. The Logos doctrine which would come to dominate the Christian church from Constantine until the present is a doctrine of light. Light is that natural phenomenon absolute in the universality it gives to Platonic dualistic thought. By providing an excellent example of how both religion and art are a natural phenomenon, the Logos doctrine of light as it is symbolically represented in the halo is the new paradigm of the Logos of Christ. In other words, from Constantine onward the primary doctrinal issue within the Christian church is focused on the Logos of Christ, as he relates to mankind, the father, the spirit, etc. Thus the most important aesthetic representation of Christ as Logos and light is the halo. We can now examine some of the ways in which the halo has been used to depict this mythical hero the Logos of light.

While it is certainly true that Christian art has a history of deeply complex issues, social, political, and environmental, it is challenging to undertake analysis without having some kind of prior methodological approach. In the earliest Christian art, which incorporates these complexities; what can be said with some confidence is that Christ is presented almost as a ghost. He is not given any authenticity other than the authentication provided by Platonic dualism and the purity of his essence. Yet, without question he is represented in one way or another as being located at the center of a reality

that exists in the mythic realm. In some cases, as it has already been shown, he simply replaced Apollo as the Greek God—Mediator between man and God [see image 5]. This is not to surprising given the heavy influence of Greek thought on the developing ideas of Christian thought. It is interesting to note in the depiction of Apollo, selected from a plethora of choices, that the one which was chosen has a halo. This suggests that the Logos of Christ was likely understood symbolically as light. Can this be thought of as just a coincidence? I don't think so. It is likely that the halo was seen as a necessary symbol iconographically, giving rise to some of the most wonderful examples of the halo throughout the rich history of Christian art.

Another clear example of the Logos of Christ as Logos of light can be seen in the floor and ceiling mosaics of the Last Judgment scene or when Jesus is shown as Christ enthroned in glory [see images 11 and 12]. Images such as these all share a dominant common feature, the halo. This tradition which plays a major part of the evolution of Christian aesthetics gives rise to thousands of examples where the halo is a symbolic gesture of Logos. Even when the halo is used to depict other figures, such as Mary, the Apostles or the saints [see images 13 and 14], these images clearly indicate a mythical enlightened reality, a Hegelian synthesis which is born essentially from within Platonic dualistic thought and enshrined by church tradition. If one were to make an image of Christ the halo was used to place this mythical hero in the realm of Ultimate Reality, the really real. It was not until much later that the halo began to change in noticeable ways.

As a result of this long unfolding of Platonic thought within Christian theology and aesthetics, the halo became an edifyingly unified symbol within a mosaic of life. In a

compelling book titled “Art and Physics” Leonard Shlain describes this mosaic semblance within the early Christian church:

The subtle message contained within the form of the mosaic permeated every aspect of the early Christians’ conception of space. The feudal system, which represented the cracked remains of the centralized bureaucracy of Imperial Rome, created a jigsaw puzzle mosaic of the entire map of Europe. The smooth, reassuring universality of Latin tattered into thousands of local dialects and vernaculars. Early Gothic scripts was crabbed and difficult to read: A page resembled nothing so much as wall mosaic, mor perhaps to be looked at than read. The word ‘text’ derives from the Teutonic *textura*, which really meant ‘tapestry.’ Each Gothic letter in this tapestry was like a glittering glass piece of a wall mosaic (Shlain 43).

The consequences of the Hellenistic age, Platonic dualism and the Logos doctrine, were a fractured understanding of space and time. It would not be until the enlightenment that a more scientific analysis of the cosmos would become dominant view of reality.

Shlain’s treatment of this issue is marvelous. Because the fracturing of space and time is a fundamental part of my argument that religion and art are essentially natural phenomena and thus modes of mythmaking, I will continue to quote Shlain’s work at considerable length. He states concerning the fracturing of space and time:

At its inception, Christian art also reflected an alternative conception of time. By effectively effacing the rules of causality, prophecy gained dominion over reason and mysticism shared the stage with ignorance and superstitions. As early Christian artists disregarded conventions of linear causality and sequence, so important to the earlier Greek paradigm, so time frames within their art assumed a similar nonlinear elasticity...Time was no longer perceived as a straight geometrical arrow. Instead it meandered into different zones, profane and divine. Consequently, the incisive edge of analytic logic became blunted, and reason could no longer be relied upon to sort out events in their proper order. If events did not have a correct sequence, logic was useless (Shlain 43, 44).

Through the aesthetic traditions of early to medieval Christianity, space and time not only became fractured, but light took on a significance which can only be found in mythical reality. This mythical reality was actually more real than the fractured reality of the here

and now. This mythical symbol originated as the halo—the Logos of Christ—Logos of light. Again Shlain makes this argument clear:

Just as the notions of space and time that prevailed in the medieval mind were different from the Greek ones, light in early Christian thinking ceased to belong to the external world alone. According to these religious beliefs, light did not travel from source through space and time. It was instead an ectoplasmic manifestation of the Spirit; a bridge between this world and another. Light originated from within the soul and its rays were the vehicle a soul could use to get from one space to another, as well as from one kind of time to another. The artist depicted light as a spiritual essence: either as a luminous halo or as inner radiance (Shlain 44).

One of the most obvious examples of how the halo as an expression of divine light evolved over time can be seen in the adoration of light in stained glass windows [see image 15]. Once it is understood that within the Christian tradition light is aesthetically recognized as the Logos of Christ, divine light coming in through the walls of a church would easily have been associated with the halo. In a discussion on the word ‘gloss’ Shlain makes an intriguing argument in favor of explaining light as the divine Logos of Christ. Here he puts forth an idea which will be helpful in understanding how the transforms into the pure manifestation of the illuminating presence of light itself; he writes:

The dual meaning of the word ‘gloss’ reveals the idea of a spiritual luminosity backlighting the letters of the words in the Bible. Originally derived from the Latin word for ‘tongue,’ ‘gloss’ took on a new meaning. Something that had a gloss began to shine. This shine was the Word of God coming through the letters. The *gloss* released the light from within the text. Books were ‘illuminated’ so that light could come *through* rather than flow *on the* page. Thus, both our present English words ‘glossary’ and ‘glossy’ derive from this earlier confusion regarding the true meaning of the white background upon which words are written...The idea that light was an essence that could pierce substances was a fundamental belief of the age of faith. Light not only connected souls and backlit the message of the Bible, it could also pass through solid matter (Shlain 44, 45).

It now becomes clear that light was understood as having mythical realities. One was in the presence of the eternal divine realm when in the presence of the halo—now

manifested as pure light. To better explain this, Shlain discusses light and the way it was used in the stained glass windows which dominated many Christian houses of worship during this time:

Though light had a mysterious quality that allowed it to shine through matter, the rediscovery of glass by medieval craftsmen did not principally lead to the construction of windows that worshipers could see *through*. No windows were placed for a congregation anywhere near eye level. Rather, craftsmen placed colored-glass windows high in the walls of cathedrals, permitting only light from above to enter. The effect of rippling chromatic rays playing upon the thin interior pillars enhanced the idea that matter was insubstantial and of no real concern. Light was of the Spirit. A church was not a place where ordinary mortals needed to be reminded of or distracted by the mundane and severe existence of a 'real' world outside...The Christian Worldview of space, time and light dominated Western thought for a thousand years. In this time of faith, science was replaced by an original, complex, theological system of belief. The artist, beginning from near ignorance, produced the metaphors to express the spirit of this era. The mosaic spoke directly to a new conception of space, time and light...During this millennial period this radical reaction to the classical worldview pulled the string so taut in the opposite direction that when the rebound did occur it would carry Western civilization far past the mark set by the ancient Greeks (Shlain 45, 46).

This is a thought-provoking insight to the relationship between physical natural light and the light of the world which enlightens the minds of the faithful—the Logos of Christ. Now that we have a better understanding of how these early Christian communities thought of light and Logos we can examine how the aesthetic tradition of the halo evolved.

There are two wonderful examples of the halo which illustrate the evolving nature of its influence in the art of Christian iconography. The first [see images 16] is an example of how light symbolized by the halo wasn't as static as we might assume it to be. Rather the halo as a representation of light and therefore the Logos, was elastic and thus capable of taking on new forms of expression which were better suited for new environments. This example is the full consummation of light as Logos, entirely anthropomorphized—a shrine to Platonic dualism.

In the first of these examples we can see how the halo has taken on a more delicate form. Every aspect of the image suggests a more deliberate approach to detail and realism. It is as if the artist is projecting onto the image a certain amount of this world. Perhaps this was in response to a new way of viewing reality in general. What is clear is that the halo has changed. While it attributes a measure of divine or enlightened symbolism by identifying the figures with a halo, this halo has a more ghostly presence, glistening in the light. It would not be unreasonable to wonder where this other light is illuminating this identifier. If the halo itself is a symbol of light and there is a natural light which illuminates the halo, what exactly is this halo doing floating above the figure? It seems to me that the only good explanation is that what we are beginning to see emerge is a much more helio-anthropomorphic version of light within this representation of the halo. In the case of this particular image the halo is an extension of the figure itself. One must ask themselves how likely it is that the Christian religion and the halo as a representation of the Logos of Christ would have gone through such extreme changes if it were not a natural phenomenon.

It is important to understand the impact the European Renaissance had, not just within the art world, but specifically in the religious world. If we think of Christian aesthetics as it unfolded during the Renaissance as a vehicle of expression used by the church to promote certain ideological presuppositions, it becomes easy to see how the halo was changed from an image which resembled the sun as if it were a dinner plate behind the figure's head, into one which was embedded with an atmospheric richness typical of this period in Art History. This particular image provides a clear example of

the halo's evolution and a wonderful example of how religion as a natural phenomenon uses aesthetics as a resourceful mode of mythmaking.

This same function of the halo and the obvious changes it experienced are also demonstrated by the flying buttresses of gothic cathedrals. We have already seen how stained glass was seen as an expression of the mythical realm by the way in which it fractured the light creating a new reality. With the rise of the Renaissance and the renewal of Greco Roman antiquity, there was room to develop the concept of the Logos of Christ as depicted in the halo even further. With the advancements in architecture which employed the arch to allow for large windows, architects were able to incorporate stained glass windows with elaborate images describing with accurate brilliance the Christian message.

It was no accident that the most fundamental aspect of a community during this time was the Gothic Cathedral. If a town did not have one it would have been thought of as irrelevant. These Cathedrals housed relics, and relics brought in tourists, or more specifically Christian pilgrims, who supplemented the local economies of these Christian communities.

By the time of the High Renaissance the Protestant Reformation had already begun. In response to the protest which had ignited and fueled a cultural revolution within the body of Christendom; the Catholic Church in Rome used the brilliance of a rebellious artist who is among the most significant figures in the artistic movement known as the Baroque period. This was the Counter Reformation and by far the most influential tool used by authorities in Rome was the minds of such artists as Caravaggio.

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, working in Italy during the early part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, would come to embody the full consummation of the divine light of the halo with the metaphysical or mythological Logos of Christ. In the Masterpiece of Roman aesthetic propaganda, “Martha and Mary Magdalene,” are no longer depicted as peasants living at the dawn of the first century C.E. nor are they enthroned in heaven looking down on the world from above. Rather, these figures are contemporary [see image 17]. The clear indication is the authorities in Rome, the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, were attempting an aesthetic vehicle of counter-reform. By placing the figures in a contemporary setting with contemporary attire, habits and manners, Caravaggio, with the help of the authoritative Rome, created a mythic realm accessible to the common person living in Europe at that time. This is blatant evidence that religion and art are essentially natural phenomenon.

An even deeper understanding of this particular image can be explored. While the halo has been pushed and pulled in every direction and adapted to changing environments to the point where it is equated with the presence of physical light itself, in this extraordinary example Caravaggio’s use of light lays bare the principle of Platonic dualism which is impossible to ignore.

Martha, hidden in the Baroque shadows of Caravaggio’s ingénues skill, appears to be pleading with Mary—you can almost here the rationalistic tone in her voice as she insists, “come to your senses.” All the while Mary, who is blanketed by the illumination of an unknown source of light, gently caresses a mirror. What is the significance of this? Within the mirror Caravaggio sneaks in a clue. He establishes an unambiguous link between the mythic realm of Martha and Mary Magdalene, and the realm of helio-

anthropomorphic light—the Logos of Christ which is intended to both illuminates the mythic realm and the viewer who is the participant in this duality.

Again I must mention Paul’s Platonic understanding of Christ as the Logos. In the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the epistle to the Corinthians he states, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13: 12). This passage in Paul’s letter, reflects on Christian community in the physical body of Christ as the church—the presupposed moral belief in the power of love and the triumph of resurrection over death—the recognition of seeing things from a mythical point of view – these are the core of the aesthetic tradition evolving in the Christian paradigm. Moreover, the mirror which Mary Magdalene so elegantly embraces is the same mythic mirror which Paul unambiguously establishes as our window into the really real realm of the Logos of Christ. In this way both religion and art are modes of mythmaking. This characteristic which has been examined at length is another clear indication that religion and art are in fact natural thus social phenomenon.

As we continue our exploration of the halo as a helio-anthropomorphic expression of social and cultural environments the focus of the remaining portion of this paper will be on the Buddhist tradition; specifically the Buddhist doctrine of enlightenment and the No-Self, as embodied by the halo.

### ***The Halo and Buddhist Enlightenment***

There exists an aesthetic tradition of depicting the Buddha with a halo. One of the most compelling facts about the Buddhist tradition is its involvement in the Hellenistic

world. Being born out of the Hindu religion in India, much like the Christian religion being born out of Judaism; the aesthetic tradition of the Buddhist religion is rich with symbolic language indicating that the Buddha is a spiritual heavenly being. This was not always the case. We can think of the Buddhist aesthetic tradition, similarly to its teachings, as being a very complex evolution of Hellenistic principles and cultural awareness.

The Buddhist religion is filled with symbolic images such as the wheel and physical gestures indicating spiritual lessons. One of the most prominent of these symbolic images is the halo. This mode of representing the Buddha is likely a Hellenistic influence, yet, there is some debate as to the extent in which Hellenism influenced the images of the East. Or perhaps the East more profoundly influenced the images of the West. Either way there is certainly an exchange of ideas and mutual influence relating to the period leading up to the first century CE.

To better understand the evolution of the aesthetic tradition of Buddhism we can begin by looking at how these images likely began. According to Marilyn Stokstad, in a book titled *Art History a View of the World* she states:

Around the first century CE, the regions of present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, and North India came under control of the Kushans...Exact dates are uncertain, but they ruled from the first to the third century CE. The beginning of the long reign of their most illustrious king, Kanishka, is variously dated from 78 to 143 CE. Kanishka's patronage supported the building of many stupas and Buddhist monasteries...Buddhism during this period underwent a profound evolution that resulted in the form known as Mahayana, or Great Vehicle. This vital new movement, which was to sweep most of northern India and eastern Asia, probably inspired the first depictions of the Buddha himself in art (Stokstad 322, 323).

Questions of the influence of the Hellenistic age and the origins of the first artistic depictions of the Buddha are difficult to answer. A more complete understanding of the

relation between the influence of Hellenism and the origins of Buddhist aesthetics would certainly be helpful in discovering the complex meaning of the halo within the Buddhist tradition. Such a study is not needed at this point. Further research concerning these questions may be useful at a later point but for now we shall accept the common notion that the first images of the Buddha were likely brought into the religion through the Hellenistic advancements and resulted in the Mahayana tradition.

Stokstad suggests that the three schools which rise from within the Mahayana tradition, the earliest schools Gandhara and Mathrura and the later school Amaravati, share very basic aesthetic symbols. She writes: “While all three schools cultivated distinct styles, they shared a basic visual language, or iconography, in which the Buddha is readily recognized by certain characteristics” (Stokstad 323). All of these visual symbols, the monk’s robe, long arms, a wheel on his hands and feet, the urna—a patch of hair between his eyes and an ushnisha—a bun on his head, are symbolic of his enlightenment. The image of the wheel, also called Chakra, is a very important symbol in Buddhist aesthetics; it suggests a primordial sun which is an expression of “both the various states of existence (the Wheel of Life) and the Buddhist doctrine (the Wheel of the Law; 381). This seems to indicate that within the symbolic language of Buddhism, similar to both the Mithras and Christian traditions, helio-anthropomorphism becomes a vital mode of expression. Tthis is strong evidence that both religion and art are essentially natural phenomena.

The three major Buddhist aesthetic schools, though they share many iconographical similarities, have distinct characteristics. Stokstad explains this symbolic evolution:

Gandharan art combines elements of Hellenistic, Persian, and native styles. A typical image from the Gandhara school portrays the Buddha as a superhuman figure, more powerful and heroic than an ordinary human...complex fold pattern resembles the treatment of togas on certain Roman statues, and it exerted a strong influence on portrayals of the Buddha in Central East Asia. The Gandhara region's relations with the Hellenistic world may have led to this strongly Western style in its art...The second major school of Buddhist art in the Kushan period—that found at Mathura—was not allied with the Hellenistic-Roman tradition. Instead, the Mathura style evolved from representations of *yakshas*, the indigenous male nature deities. Images produced at Mathura during the early days of the school may be the first representations of the Buddha to appear in art (Stokstad 323, 324).

While the Gandhara Buddha [see image 18] clearly expresses Greco-Roman styles in the monk's robe and the realistic detail in the fold, the face and the hair, a unique quality of peace—supernatural calm and tranquility—radiates from this meditative being. On the other hand, the Mathura Buddha [see image 19] “gives a powerful impression of the Buddha. This Buddha's riveting outward gaze and alert posture impart a more intense, concentrated energy” (Stokstad 324). This is a common characteristic of the Mathura school. It is often associated with a powerful abstraction which makes this Buddha a much more spiritual being than a human teacher. Stokstad states, “This characteristic Mathura tendency to abstraction also appears in the face, whose features take on geometric shapes, as in the rounded forms of the widely opened eyes. Nevertheless, the torso with its subtle and soft modeling is strongly naturalistic” (324). Both the Gandhara and the Amaravati schools eventually declined. “However, the schools of central India, including the school of Mathura, continued to develop, and from them came the next major development in Indian Buddhist art” (325). This next development is known as the Gupta period.

During the time of the Gupta period Buddhism had reached its peak of influence on the people of India. Dominating in the northern regions of India, Buddhist sculpture began to reflect the idea of perfection. This was most common in the Sarnath School [see

image 20]. Stokstad's remarks on the sculpture of this period are insightfully accurate: "The body is graceful and slight, with broad shoulders and a well-proportioned torso. Only a few lines of the garment at the neck, waist, and hems interrupt the purity of its subtly shaped surface; the face, smooth and ovoid, has the same refined elegance. The downcast eyes suggest otherworldly introspection, yet the gentle, open posture maintains a human link" (Stokstad 326). This idea of purity of the human and the divine elegance of aesthetic spirituality is unambiguously present in the Buddhist sculptures of this time. Perhaps this is why the halo, as a symbol of purity or perfection, is a common symbol in Buddhist traditions regardless of the period or school. If this is the case, as I believe it is, then it would clearly indicate that religion is a natural thus social phenomenon.

In an intriguing perspective on Eastern religions and aesthetic tradition titled *Foundations of Oriental Art and Symbolism*, Titus Burckhardt discusses the relation between Hindu and Buddhist aesthetic symbolism. Concerning the Hindu symbol of the golden man and how Buddhism reflects its iconography and doctrine, he states:

Buddhist art has perpetuated the symbol of the golden man, though it appears nevertheless to deny that which Hinduism affirms through this same symbol. The Hindu doctrine affirms above all an infinite Essence, of which all things are but a reflection—it is of *Purusha* that all things are made, says the Veda—whereas the Buddhist doctrine has nothing to say about the Being or the Essence of things; it appears to deny all divinity. Instead of starting its exposition from a supreme principle, which could be likened to the apex of a pyramid made up of all states of existence—and this is what the universe looks like from a theocentric point of view—it proceeds only by way of negation, as if it were taking man and his nothingness as starting point, and building thereon a pyramid with its apex downwards and expanding indefinitely upwards, towards the void (Burckhardt 49, 50).

This perspective on the relationship between Hindu and Buddhist worldviews and doctrine leads one to understand how, within the Buddhist tradition, the question of projection becomes apparent. Burckhardt continues:

The difference between their respective points of view is this: Hinduism envisages divine Realities in an 'objective' manner, by virtue of their reflection in the mind, such a reflection being possible, outside and independently of their immediate spiritual realization, because of the universal nature of the Intellect. Buddhism on the other hand lays hold on the Essence of man—or the Essence of things—only by way of 'subjective' path, that is to say, by the spiritual realization of that Essence and by that alone; it rejects as false or illusory every purely speculative affirmation of supra-formal Reality. This attitude is justified by the fact that the mental objectivation of Divine Reality may often constitute an obstacle to its realization because every reflection involves an inversion with respect to that which it reflects...symbol of the principle—and because thought limits consciousness and in a sense congeals it; at the same time thought directed to God appears to be situated outside its object, whereas God is infinite and nothing can really be situated outside Him; all thought about the Absolute is therefore vitiated by a false perspective (Burchhardt 50).

So in a certain way we can see how the aesthetic tradition of the Buddhist religion reflects the evolution of particular symbolic images which both reveal the origins of doctrine and departure from previous teachings.

It seems odd that the Buddhist religion began with a man who never claimed to be divine or a god yet within only a few generations after his death we begin to see a deification process beginning. The best explanation for this seems to be due to Hellenism, but more specifically the introduction of astra-religion and astra-theology. As was the case for both the cult of Mithras and the Christian church the symbolic images that were employed were essentially naturalistic. The helio-anthropomorphism expressed by the halo is explicitly clear in all three religious traditions. Within the Buddhist tradition the halo came to represent enlightenment or an enlightened being. As the aesthetic tradition continued to evolve it began to reflect a more astrological semblance. It can be again pointed out that this clearly indicates the Buddhist religion is a natural phenomenon and that it is involved aesthetically in a process of mythmaking. This Buddha would become a more universal symbol of enlightenment, the halo would become the expression of enlightenment and this would redefine physical space and the

realm of myth. Again Burckhardt explains concerning the mystical Buddha, the Mahayana Buddha:

By way of compensation a generalized type of Buddha makes its appearance, and it acquires a non-historical and universal significance, until it sets its mark, like a divine seal, on all aspects of the cosmos. For instance, the celestial Buddhas of the Mahayana...rule over the ten directions of space: the eight directions of the 'rose of the winds' and the two opposed directions of the vertical. Physical space is here the image of 'spiritual' space...For this reason the celestial Buddhas are spiritual projections of the single Buddha Shakyamuni (Burckhardt 53).

This is a deeper version of the Buddha which is made manifest by the essence of enlightenment. The idea of the Buddha dwells within the projection of the mind. Burckhardt seems to think that this version of the Buddha, which is a sort of universal cosmic Buddha, is essentially a consequence of doctrine without theory. He states that:

This galaxy of Buddhas is as it were a compensation for the absence of a 'theory' in the real sense of the world, that is to say, of a theocentric view of the world. It is not a question of an ontological principle differentiating itself through a descending hierarchy of reflections, but of the ascetic as a type...of one freed from the flux of existence, who makes an opening on to the void and diversifies himself in accordance with the possible modes of his deliverance (Burckhardt 55).

What can be gleaned from this is that the aesthetic expression of the Buddha has evolved through history. Within the evolution of the Buddha, the image of the halo as it represents enlightenment, is a constant symbolic vehicle of this expression. Therefore we can clearly see how the halo is evidence that both religion and art are modes of mythmaking; both are projections of the experience of being alive.

One of the most ornate and complex depictions of the halo within the Buddhist tradition that I have ever seen can be found at the Atkins Nelson Museum of Art in Kansas City Missouri. This is a very large early 14<sup>th</sup> century Chinese mural of a cosmic Buddha [see image 21] which can be viewed in the Southeastern Asian art gallery. It is a wonderful example of how the halo has evolved over time. This mural was originally

was in a monastery in Shanxi province called the Temple of Expansive Victory. The Tejabrabha, Buddha of Radiant Light was once thought to have complete control over the heavens and constellations. There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that it was originally commissioned after an earthquake did great damage to the monastery in 1303. It would have been developed to serve the purpose of protecting the community against any further calamity (Murphy). Moreover, it is interesting to note the similarities between this mural and the astrological images of Mithras killing the bull, Taurus. The “Paradise Tejabrabha Buddha...sits here on a lotus throne surrounded by a constellation of figures representing the Eleven Celestial Luminaries” (Murphy). Astra-symbolism and the helio-anthropomorphic expressions of the halo in this mural depicting the cosmic Buddha is undoubtedly evidence that religion as a natural phenomenon is an aesthetic mode of mythmaking.

### ***Conclusion***

We have seen how both religion and art are modes of mythmaking. We have seen that myths are far more than un-truths; indeed myths are vehicles of expression revealing the rapture of being alive and the essence or meaning which we must create for ourselves. We have seen how, because of this projection aspect of religion and art which is the actual act of mythmaking, it is extremely difficult to define either in such a way that it becomes clear what exactly is meant. Yet we are able to define art as the experience of a social context and because of this principle of religion arising from the experience of a social context, it must be a natural phenomenon. Moreover we established that the objection of religious realism is not applicable to this definition of religion because it fails to take into

consideration the nature of obligation or submission, which is such an essential part of religious experience. We discovered that both religion and art use symbolic language to discuss metaphysical principles. Yet, it seems that art precedes religion in the same way Sartre argued that existence precedes essence. That is to say, from a non-historical view, art is the vehicle for the transition across the threshold of reality or the window into a mythic realm where we project our essence and find meaning. Once we defined religion and art we were able to see how the doctrine of Platonic dualism or the doctrine of the Logos, along with the revolutionizing nature of the Hellenistic age, shaped the aesthetics of three similar yet unique religious traditions.

In order to truly represent religion and art as natural phenomena and thus as modes of mythmaking, it is vital to provide tangible examples of this argument. Otherwise the argument is severely weakened. Helio-anthropomorphism represented by the halo, was used as a case study to strengthen my argument. I examined the halo in the cult of Mithras. It was established that the image of the halo represents a duality between space and time which would have been understood to represent a god who exists outside of space and time. When I turned to the Christian tradition it was seen that the halo first represented a clear example of Platonic dualism through the symbol of the Logos. Yet, the Christian tradition molded the image of the halo to represent pure physical light. Finally, I examined the image of the halo as it relates to the Buddhist tradition. It was shown that the halo is symbolic of enlightenment and that this too was quite

plastic and able to be reshaped to better express the consciousness of different cultures and communities.

Though there remains a plethora of questions which would be vital in further exploring how the halo represents the union between religion and art, this discussion makes clear the authenticity of this thesis. Still, we may seek further information about the Hellenistic age and the influence and transition of ideas and aesthetic symbols. We may wonder what impact the halo might have had with regard to the aesthetic tradition of other religions such as Egyptian or Mediterranean religions. Perhaps other mystery religions of the Greco-Roman world give us even better insight into how the halo was used aesthetically within a social context. We might push the argument even further to see how our post-modern perspective coupled with massive globalization is a continuation of Hellenism—the loss of self and the existential affirmation of freedom. Every case which has been presented here has shown that the halo is a symbolic expression of natural phenomena. I am convinced that both religion and art are essentially natural phenomena. Moreover, because religion and art are natural phenomena, religion is an aesthetic mode of mythmaking. Thus religion and art are united as one—one mythic realm—the dualistic Ultimate Reality which is the experience and rapture of being alive.

## *Glossary of images:*

1.

[http://farm1.static.flickr.com/151/432855210\\_1f283f63af.jpg](http://farm1.static.flickr.com/151/432855210_1f283f63af.jpg)

Gandhara Buddha.

First century CE.

(Cover image)

<http://www.buddhachannel.tv>

2.

<http://www.virtual-egyptian-museum.org/Collection/Imgs/MET/MM/MET.MM.00892.01-ZL.jpg>

*Image of the Egyptian Sun God Ra.*

Bronze, Early Dynastic period Egypt.

2925 BCE-2700 BCE.

[www.virtual-egyptian-museum.org](http://www.virtual-egyptian-museum.org)

3.

<http://media-2.web.britannica.com/eb-media/27/11127-004-5F32353D.jpg>

“Helios in his chariot”

Relief sculpture, Troy: 1872.

Located in the State Museum of Berlin.

[www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)

4.

<http://historyhuntersinternational.org/wp-content/gallery/helios/apollo.jpg>

“Apollo the Greek God of Light” with radiant halo.

Roman Floor mosaic.

2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, El Djem, Tunisia.

<http://historyhuntersinternational.org>

5.

[http://www.knowledgerush.com/wiki\\_image/2/21/Christapollo.jpg](http://www.knowledgerush.com/wiki_image/2/21/Christapollo.jpg)

“Christ as Apollo”

Mosaic located beneath St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.

Estimated 2<sup>nd</sup> century christ movement.

<http://www.knowledgerush.com>

6.

[http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/0100\\_0199/huvishkacoins/huvishka7.jpg](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/0100_0199/huvishkacoins/huvishka7.jpg)

“Huvishka honoring Miiro: the Roman God Mithas”

<http://www.columbia.edu>

7.

<http://www.livius.org/a/iran/taqebostan/relief3.JPG>

On the left stands Mithras with raised *barsom*, sanctifying the investiture.  
Late Iranian Relief Sculpture.

[www.rambambashi.wordpress.com](http://www.rambambashi.wordpress.com)

8.

[http://www.well.com/~davidu/esquiline\\_jp40.jpg](http://www.well.com/~davidu/esquiline_jp40.jpg)

“Mithras slaing the bull”

[www.well.com/~davidu/mithras.html](http://www.well.com/~davidu/mithras.html)

9.

[http://www.well.com/~davidu/rockbirth\\_jp60.jpg](http://www.well.com/~davidu/rockbirth_jp60.jpg)

“Mithras being born from a rock”

[www.well.com/~davidu/mithras.html](http://www.well.com/~davidu/mithras.html)

10.

[http://www.well.com/~davidu/atlasmithras\\_jp40.jpg](http://www.well.com/~davidu/atlasmithras_jp40.jpg)

“Mithras as Atlas”

[www.well.com/~davidu/mithras.html](http://www.well.com/~davidu/mithras.html)

11.

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~matc/math5.geometry/unit9/0904.jpeg>

“Christ enthroned”

Florence Bptistry Ceiling.

[www.dartmouth.edu](http://www.dartmouth.edu)

12.

<http://www.alamo.edu/sac/vat/arthistory/arts1303/Byz11.jpg>

“Christ as Pantocrator”

Mosaic, a part of the central dome of the Dormition.

Daphne Greece.

[www.alamo.edu](http://www.alamo.edu)

13.

<http://www.wga.hu/art/s/simone/4altars/3pisa/1pisa.jpg>

“Polyptych of Santa Caterina” (Pisa Polyptych).

Dating to 1319: Tempera on wood paneling.

Located at the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa.

[www.wga.hu](http://www.wga.hu)

14.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/chrisjohnbeckett/363734799/>

“Jesus and disciples fishing”

Medieval stained glass detail.

Canterbury Cathedral.

Late 12<sup>th</sup> century.

[www.absoluteastronomy.com](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com)

15.

[http://www.gothicart.org.uk/gothic\\_art\\_pics/gothic\\_art\\_7.jpg](http://www.gothicart.org.uk/gothic_art_pics/gothic_art_7.jpg)

[www.gothicart.org.uk/characteristics\\_of\\_gothic\\_cathedrals.htm](http://www.gothicart.org.uk/characteristics_of_gothic_cathedrals.htm)

16.

<http://www.artsunlight.com/NN/N-R0008/N-R0008-047-madonna-and-child-the-small-cowper-madonna.jpg>

“Madonna and Child”

The Small Cowper Madonna: 1504-05

Raffaello, Italian, High Renaissance.

[www.artsunlight.com](http://www.artsunlight.com)

17.

[http://www.dia.org/user\\_area/comping/73.268-d1.jpg](http://www.dia.org/user_area/comping/73.268-d1.jpg)

“The Conversion of Mary Magdelene”  
Martha reasoning with Mary.  
Caravaggio Italian Late 16<sup>th</sup> century.  
Oil on Canvas.  
[www.dia.org](http://www.dia.org)

18.

<http://cla.calpoly.edu/~jwetzal/India/slides/slides-jpg/MathuraStanding.jpg>

Standing Buddha, Mathura, 4<sup>th</sup> century CE.  
<http://www.buddhachannel.tv>

19.

[http://www.buddhachannel.tv/portail/local/cache-vignettes/L300xH392/gupta\\_sarnath\\_buddha-4637a.jpg](http://www.buddhachannel.tv/portail/local/cache-vignettes/L300xH392/gupta_sarnath_buddha-4637a.jpg)

Gupta Buddha  
<http://www.buddhachannel.tv>

20.

[http://erez.nelson-atkins.org/erez4/cache/Nelson-Atkins%20Collection Chinese 32-91-1 Chinese-ParadiseTejaprabhaBuddha front tif 7f1b0b50088d1861.jpg](http://erez.nelson-atkins.org/erez4/cache/Nelson-Atkins%20Collection%20Chinese%2032-91-1%20Chinese-ParadiseTejaprabhaBuddha%20front%20tif%207f1b0b50088d1861.jpg)

Paradise of Tejaprabha Buddha.  
*The Assembly of Tejaprabha.*  
Early 14<sup>th</sup> century Chinese.  
Ink and mineral colors on clay.  
23 feet 5 inches x 48 feet 8 inches.  
Gallery Location: 230  
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.  
Kansas City Missouri.  
<http://www.nelson-atkins.org/desktopguide/script.cfm?id=14590&object=136&col=Chinese>

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Campbell, Joseph, and Bill D. Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Anchor, 1988. Print.

(Joseph Campbell seems to have a very good description of what a myth is. He describes it as “the rapture of being alive” which is basically what I am trying to say. This experience of being alive is the power of Mythology and it indicates that it is something far more than simply a story. We often times think of a myth as being something not true; when we do this we miss the point. I used this source to drive home the importance of a myth being so much more than a story. This is very important because I need the reader to understand what I mean by myth and mythmaking if I want him/her to understand that religion and art are essentially modes of mythmaking. This must come before any further defining of either religion or art and it will serve as a way to introduce the topics of human projection and Platonic dualism. Once I have done this, I will be in a position to describe religion and art by means of a case study: helio-anthropomorphism.)

Durkheim, Emile. "Religion As A Social Phenomenon." *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*. Peterson, Michael. 3 Ed. New York: Oxford UP, 2007. 8-11. Print.

(This essay is perhaps one of the most important sources I will use. Due to the nature of my thesis statement, suggesting that both religion and art are natural phenomenon—thus social phenomenon; what can be gleaned from Durkheim’s essay is quite essential. The basic argument will be presented in a way that anticipates objections. That is why this essay is vital in making the argument that religion and art are natural phenomenon, then moving toward a case study to further show evidence for this statement. Moreover, by understanding religion and art as natural—thus social phenomena, it is possible to make the argument that they are essentially modes of mythmaking. In this way human projection and Platonic Dualism are likewise essential aspects of this argument and will need to be discussed as well.)

Hauser, Arnold. *The Philosophy of Art History*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1985. Print.

(This book is a very good source, with a wide range of issues which future supports the argument made by Durkheim—religion as a sociological phenomenon. Here Hauser makes the same argument as it relates to art. What is perhaps most compelling is how topic seems to suggest that art, in a non historical—epistemological way, actually precedes meaning. In other words, if we think of meaning in a way that would equate it to religion, this is what I suggest we should do; than art precedes religion. To better clarify this point, art precedes religion by moving us to a point where we are able to find meaning in an otherwise meaningless situation. We project meaning. This can be considered like Sartre’s doctrine of existence preceding essence. In the same way the aesthetic precedes the meaning and art precedes religion. Art is therefore, the vehicle of human projection. Another important part of this source is the description of art as a widow pane. This will be helpful for relating how art creates what is and a discussion of Platonic dualism.)

“Holy Bible”. *1 Corinthians. English Standard Version*. Wheaton: Good News, 2007. Print.

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“Holy Bible”. *John. English Standard Version*. Wheaton: Good News, 2007. Print.

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Langer, Susanne Katherina Knauth. *Feeling and Form; a Theory of Art ....* New York: Scribner, 1953. Print.

(Langer’s “Feeling and Form” is an excellent book; it is a continuation of her earlier work titled “Philosophy in a New Key” which is a treatment of philosophy by understanding it in a musical manner. She is exceptionally strong when defining her terms, which is why I chose to use this as a source. Like mythology in general, there is often a lot of misunderstanding about what is meant by symbols—metaphorical language and human projection vs. intrinsically present meaning. Once again, because of the nature of my thesis statement, it is very important to explain well what I mean by religion and art. This source is very helpful in defining and understanding the symbolic nature of religion and art.)

Loftus, John W. *The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010. Print.

Martland, T.R. "Questin: When Is Religion Art? Answer: When It Is a Jar." *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred: an Anthology in Religion and Art*. Apostolos-Cappadona, Diane. New York: Crossroad, 1984. 251+. Print.

(This reading was assigned to me by my professor at the beginning of the semester. I wasn’t sure if I could use it at first; though I did find it to be a very interesting discussion of the nature of religion and art. I agree with the conclusion that both religion and art are a jar; that is to say they move you from one place to another. However, I felt that much more can be said about this and that essentially what such a perspective means is that religion and art are mythmaking. So I used the strength of this source, namely that religion and art do not describe what is, rather they create what is; I then moved the argument in a direction which would indicate the mythmaking element involved. The basic conclusion which I came to about this source and how it relates in my paper is that there are to aspects with religion and art as mythmaking: first there is the tangible reality of the expressive nature of both; second, there is an intangible—undefinable reality which it pushes us toward. Both religion and art are mythmaking because they show us our humanness and push us beyond our humanness. This will be helpful in a discussion of Platonic Dualism, which is

necessary to describe religion and art as natural phenomenon. Moreover, having this source as a sort of spring board into the rest of the paper will allow me to discuss an anticipated objection to the claim that religion and art are natural phenomenon—mythmaking and introduce a case study which examines the aesthetic tradition of the halo. Ultimately, this source will set the stage for the rest of the paper.)

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