Article

Meaning of Mystery as Process of Deification

George Thomas Kuzhippallil

Systematic Theology, Good Shepherd Institute of Theology Kunoth, Pontifical Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, Kottayam 670 706, Kerala, India; frgeorgekuzhi@gmail.com

Abstract: “Mystery” is a term with divergent meanings in the religious and secular worlds. This term bears history in the philosophical and theological worlds. The meaning of the term includes concepts of secrecy, mysteriousness, incomprehensibility, and transcendence on the one hand and its connection with religious rituals on the other hand. This nature of the term recommends that we re-read its original meaning. This article tries to understand the connection of this term with archaic religious rituals based on mimetic theory. This article finds that the mysteriousness behind the archaic religious rituals is related to the scapegoat mechanism. The hidden process of deification in primitive religions and cultures is the reason behind the meaning of the term mystery. Using mimetic theory as a tool, this article asserts that only “revealed mysteries” remain in human history following the Christ-event and defines mystery as a process of deification.

Keywords: mystery; mysterion; sacramentum; process of deification; mimetic theory; Rene Girard; new meaning of mystery; mystery in philosophy; mystery in theology; mystery and revelation

1. Introduction

“Mystery” is a term widely discussed for centuries in all religious and secular literature (Cf. K. Rahner 1975, p. 33). Many scholarly writings have been carried out on the concept of mystery that explain different meanings, connotations, and cultural and historical backgrounds in various spiritual and social contexts from antiquity to the present.1 Scholars give diverse meanings according to the use of the term in different contexts. The dictionary meaning of the term “mystery” denotes “something strange or not known that has not yet been explained or understood” or “anything that is kept secret or remains unexplained or unknown”.2 It can also mean “a religious truth that one can know only by revelation and cannot fully understand”, “a secret religious rite believed (as in the Eleusinian and Mithraic cults) to impart enduring bliss to the initiate”, or “a cult devoted to such rites”.3

Summarizing the views of different authors, Benedict J. Michal says that there are five meanings for the Greek word mysteria (Cf. Michal 2012, p. 72). (1) In its connection with the mystical cult, which bears four characteristics, (a) mysteries are cult celebrations in which a circle of cultic priests perform rituals to get the divine spirit in them; (b) the participants of a mystery cult do not know the secrets of these rituals; (c) salvation is obtained through the natural power of the celebration of these cultic rituals; and (d) to protect from secular profundity, mystical cults are carried out in extreme silence and awe. In this sense, mysteries are neither a secret doctrine nor a religious experience but refer exclusively to a ritual secret. (2) By the time of Plato, mysteries are mentioned in philosophy. In Greek philosophy, this term is used to view the divine transcendent realm. Gradually, the sacramental or ritual character of the term “mysteries” is changed and attained a meaning of secret teachings. Philosophy and theology do not use the term cult as a mystery, but cults contain mysteries. (3) The term is used in magic texts to explain magical actions, formulas, writings, and even as magic ointments. (4) The term “mystery” is used rarely or very late in secular language. There is a gradual development from a cultic–religious sense to a profane sense. (5) Gnostic understanding of mystery involves reinterpreting mystery cults and demythologizing myths. They explain myths of a prehistoric heavenly being who fell
into the chaotic cosmos and is redeemed again and brought to its original purpose. This understanding is related to “saviour myths” (Cf. Michal 2012, p. 73). Gnostics believe that mysteries are revealed through knowledge, and there is a connection between mystery and revelation.

The Latin term “sacramentum” is the literal translation of the Greek word *mysterium*. The etymological meaning comes from the verb *sacrare*, which means to sanctify, to consecrate, or to make something holy. The word *sacramentum* is related to things made sacred or things that make something sacred. *Sacramentum* was originally a secular word and a legal term. Daniel G. Van Slyke gives the changing meanings of *sacramentum* in history. He says that the classical authors used it as a military term analogously to indicate the oaths, loyalties, and commitments made by four other groups: philosophers, barbarians, gladiators, and thieves (Cf. Slyke 2007, p. 247). Van Slyke notices that the historian Livy, in his history of Rome *Ab urbe condita*, written between 27 B.C. and 17 A.D., describes the Bacchanalian oath as a ritual formula dictated first by the priest, then repeated by the initiate, bonding the initiates to commit all sorts of wicked acts: debauchery, murder, false testimony, forgery, dishonoring of wills, and other fraudulent activities (Slyke 2007, p. 248). Alexandre Ganoczy argues that *sacramentum* was used to describe aspects of ancient pagan religious engagements or initiation into mystery cults (Cf. Ganoczy 1984, pp. 8–9). Odo Casel also notes that the word *sacramentum* possesses a consecration to God, *devotio*, which was expressed particularly in oath-taking (Casel 2016, p. 56). For him, this term is related to the ancient rite of consecration (*ritusacramenti*) carried out by the initiates, like that of terrible oaths, oaths of silence, and secret dedication (*occultum sacrum*) (Casel 2016, p. 56).

The Syriac word for the concept of mystery is *raza*, which is a derivative of the Persian *raz*. In modern Persian, it contains various meanings, such as hidden, secret, agreement, conspiracy, anything having a secret or mystery meaning, etc. This term closely connects with the Sanskrit word *rahas* (Cf. Luke 1983, p. 114; Poovannikunnel 1989, p. 6). Thus, from classical languages to the modern cyber language, the term represents something related to archaic rituals that is incomprehensible to human reason. Because this term is used immensely with varied meanings in the religious, spiritual, philosophical, and theological arenas in the contemporary world, I am analyzing in this article the historical significance and the mysterious character of the term. I am attempting here to re-read the meaning of this term using the categories of mimetic theory. To find out the meaning of mystery, I try here an interdisciplinary method using historical, philosophical, anthropological, social, and theological elements.

2. Meaning of Mystery in Philosophy

While philosophy is a systematic study of fundamental questions regarding existence, reason, knowledge, time, space, language, forms, concepts, etc., the question of whether it has something to do with mystery arises. Most philosophers are reluctant to talk about mystery and believe that it is possible to find answers to all legitimate questions of reality either through scientific or philosophical analyses. However, the term and concept of mystery are related to philosophical thinking and have attained different meanings and connotations in the history of philosophy. From time immemorial, widely different things have been called mysterious in the philosophical arena, especially from the time of ancient Greco-Roman authors (Cf. Liccione 1988). The meaning of “mystery” can be understood according to its contextual appositeness.

There is a wide range of notions in philosophy connected with mysterious questions on transcendent reality, human and cosmic existence, epistemological and ontological knowledge, reason, explanation, triviality, and freedom, right up to questions regarding *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum* (Cf. Otto 1924, p. 6). Philosophers from ancient times until the post-truth era have tried to answer and explain questions related to such topics, which they recognize either as “mysteries” or problems.
2.1. Usage of Mystery Terminologies in Greek Philosophy

In the historical analysis of the use of the mystery terminology in philosophy, one encounters the first instance of its use in ancient Greek philosophy. There were occasional attempts to connect the mystery terminology even before Plato’s time. But Plato was the one who used the mystery terminology and motifs to elucidate his philosophical thinking for the attainment of knowledge (Cf. Farrell 1999, pp. 4–10). Authors like Christoph Riedweg and Bianca M. Dinkelaar find explicit purposes in the writings of Plato using the mystery terminology. Adkins argues that by using mystery terms, Plato himself acknowledges that they contain philosophical insight (Cf. Farrell 1999, p. 6). Christoph Riedweg, in his book Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon und Klemens von Alexandria, says that Plato uses the schematic organization of mysteries into stages to form the deep structure of Symposium about Eros (Riedweg 1987). Farrel refers to Michael Morgen, who points out that Plato modifies and replaces the emotional character of mystery motifs with cognitive content (Cf. Farrell 1999, p. 9).

Among different authors, the interpretations of Ann Mary Farrel, Bianca M. Dinkelaar (Dinkelaar 2020, p. 37), and Francis Casadesus are helpful to our understanding of the meaning of mystery in philosophy. Farrel explains the influence of Eleusinian mystery language, while Dinkelaar focuses on Orphic/Pythagorean and Eleusinian motifs in Plato’s writings. According to Farrel, Plato uses not only mystery terminologies but also motifs in a clearly deliberate manner and for a deliberate purpose in his philosophical thinking, especially in his theory of knowledge or epistemology (Cf. Farrell 1999, p. 65). For Dinkelaar, Plato uses mystery motifs to illuminate the theories propounded in his dialogues and to promote his philosophical positions. While analyzing the use of mystery language in the writings of Plato and the early Stoic philosophers, Casadesus says that these philosophers incorporated the characteristic language of cults to highlight the notion that philosophical knowledge results from a process, like a religious initiation.

These authors conclude that the significant purpose of Plato’s usage of mystery language and motifs is to present an individual’s journey from an ignorant stage to attain the perfect knowledge, bliss, enlightenment, or immortality of the soul. Plato believes that the common people in their current state are unable to attain knowledge because they do not desire to seek knowledge, they believe that they already possess it, or their desires focus on other things like wealth, status, or physical pleasures. Farrel says that Plato deliberately appropriates the language and motifs of the Eleusinian mysteries in the Ladder of Eros in the Symposium, the Myth of the Cave in the Republic, and the Myth of the Soul in the Phaedrus, which express certain aspects of his theory of knowledge. By using these motifs, Plato intended that students must go through certain preliminary changes or conditioning and stages of preparation before they can know the forms (Cf. Farrell 1999, p. 69).

When one further explores the history of the usage of the mystery terminology in philosophy, one finds that there were both Christian writers and pagan philosophers who made use of the terminology explicitly and implicitly. Most of these authors were aware of different mysteries of the ancient world, like Eleusinian, Bacchic–Orphic, Mithraic, Egyptian, Chaldean, Zoroastrian, and Samothracian mysteries. Jan N. Bremmer gives a summary description of the usage of mystery terms and motifs by philosophers after the Platonic era until the fourth century A.D. (Cf. Bremmer 2017). He evaluates the findings of Christoph Riedweg and Peter Van Nuffeln and concludes that the Greek philosophers had a great fascination with Eleusinian mysteries because they found wisdom and truth in them. The secrecy of the mystery rituals and the lack of much discursive content made them extremely difficult to understand (Bremmer 2017, p. 124).

Bremmer explores the writings of Plutarch and doubts the explicit usage or mention of Eleusinian mysteries in them. Even though Plutarch referred to other sources for ancient wisdom, he was aware of the mysteries that contain knowledge. In Plutarch’s work On Isis and Osiris, he equates the hieros logos with mysteries. Next to Plutarch, Numerius studied the mysteries of Mithras and the cult of Sarapis as mysteries and was generous with using the term mysteries in his writings. Dio Chrysostom and Apuleius also looked for truth
and knowledge in mystery cults (Cf. Bremmer 2017, p. 106). For Apuleius, mysteries are the locus of truth. Another philosopher, Celsus, a contemporary of Apuleius, enumerated Samothracian and Eleusinian mysteries and said that the wisest people are the Egyptians, Assyrians, Persians, Indians, Odrysians, and the inhabitants of Samothrace and Eleusis. In his enumeration, Celsus limits himself to the Samothracians and Eleusinian mysteries and disdains Mithras and Sabazius (Cf. Bremmer 2017, p. 109). Later, Porphyry and Iamblichus, the philosophers of the last decades of the third century, were also concerned with mysteries. But Bremmer says that the relationship of Porphyry with mysteries was never investigated. After analyzing the literature of Porphyry, he says that Porphyry was acquainted with Mithraic as well as Eleusinian mysteries, Orphic poetry, and the bullroarer in the Dionysiac mysteries. Porphyry considered mysteries as a significant part of the Greek religion because they were attached to prayers and worship of gods (Cf. Bremmer 2017, p. 111).

In his work Response to Porphyry, Iamblichus did not say much about mysteries and used the word “mystery” only once to refer to traditional Greek mysteries. He speaks about the sufferings of gods in the sacred rites. He also knows about Eleusinian, Pythagorean, and Orphic–Bacchic mysteries. Iamblichus maintained a positive idea of mysteries because he believed that mysteries contained knowledge and must be approached with reverence. According to him, because mysteries are the loci of truth, the philosopher possesses the fullest source of truth (Cf. Bremmer 2017, pp. 111–13). Another philosopher in the early fifth century was Eunapius, who was born toward the end of 340 A.D. He also knew Mithraic and Eleusinian mysteries and was initiated into the mystery by a prophesying hierophant, whose name could not be revealed at his time (Cf. Bremmer 2017, p. 115). He was attracted to and admired the descriptions made by the hierophant about those things that happened during the mysteries. According to him, one cannot fully grasp, or put into words, what happens in the mysteries that are handed down in philosophy and theurgy. For Eunapius, mysteries are significant because they contain superior wisdom.

The last pagan philosophers in the Platonic Academy in Athens were Syrianus and Proclus, who also knew mysteries from their own experiences. In these philosophers, Bremmer notices a shift of focus from Eleusinian mysteries to Orphic literature. Proclus knew the Mithraic mysteries, and he used the mystery language abundantly in his writings. As a representative of neo-Platonic writers, Proclus used metaphorical usages in his Platonic Theology. Proclus also insisted on the structural parallelism between mysteries and philosophy. He saw parallel goals of the process of purification and the ascending of the soul to one in both philosophy and mystery. Although Damascius shared Proclus’ interest in Orphica, he did not use any mystery language (Cf. Bremmer 2017, p. 122).

Summarizing the usage and meanings of the term “mystery” in early Greek philosophy, one can make certain conclusions. Firstly, the early Greek philosophy considered different mystery rites as sources of truth and knowledge. It significantly employed different mystery terminologies and motifs to explain the process of initiation and to describe the importance of the formation to attain philosophical knowledge. Secondly, the activities in Greek philosophy also function as religious activities to enter a realm of the supernatural experience of reality, like epopteia of knowledge and the immortal life of the soul. The mysteries used in philosophy make the initiate enter a similar ecstatic experience as an initiate in religious mysteries. There is only one difference: philosophy functions at the individual level and religion at the communitarian level. After analyzing the concept of initiation in mysteries and in the philosophy of Plato, Vishwa Adluri says that when employing the language of initiation, philosophy is using them neither as a mere metaphor nor as a literal invitation to a cult practice or a call to conversion to a religious institution; rather, it makes the individual enter a “sacred experience” of the reality in its wholeness (Cf. Adluri 2006, p. 421). “Socrates irrevocably recasts the experience of mysteries as a philosophical, transformative experience, which reaches its culmination in the visions embodied in the great myths. The content of the mysteries, such as the concerns of mortals and the redemptive “contemplation” (theorein) simultaneously implying “science” and “mystical viewing” of heavens, remains intact” (Cf. Adluri 2006, p. 421).
Thirdly, even though ancient and early-century philosophers made use of the mystery language and motifs abundantly to explain the sacred experience or the mystical viewing of the wholeness of the concepts and forms, there was no exact explanation about the content or the meaning of mysteries. They explain the procedures of the rites of purification, initiation, and *epopteia*. However, we find neither the meaning of the term “mystery” other than that of the rites nor the explanation of why they are mysterious in their writings. Instead, the use of mystery language continued in philosophy until the end of the fourth century.

Finally, one finds that there is a cycle of ordinary life, symbolic death, and the joyful life of the initiated in the mystery rites (Farrell 1999, p. 71). Parallel to this cycle of life–death–life in mysteries, there is also a cycle of knowledge–ignorance–knowledge in philosophy. For example, the structure of the Euthydemus functions as the philosophical reenactment of the Corybantic Rites, where we see this cycle evidently. Adluri explains the description made by Carl Levenson about the parallel ritual performance as follows: The first part of the performance is the “chairing” (*thronosis*) of Cleinias, the boy who plays the role of a neophyte. The brothers (the initiators) “dance” around Cleinias, shout strange things at him, and make him blush and feel disoriented. In the second part of the performance, which we will call “the harrowing transition”, the brothers invent a scenario in which Cleinias is to be murdered by the people who care most for him—Ctesippus, his lover, and Socrates, his friend (285a). In the third part of the performance, which we will call “the final revelation”, the brothers try to induce the intense ecstatic experience at which the rite aims. Socrates comments that this is the “serious” part of the rite (330e) (Adluri 2006, p. 422).

The rite of *thronosis* is the symbol of an ordinary or elevated joyful life, which is exhibited through the dance of the brothers. It ends with the feeling of disorientation and moves towards the symbolic death of the initiate. In the third part, he receives the final revelation or new life, which is the *epopteia*, both in mysteries and in philosophy.

2.2. Concept of Mystery in Medieval Philosophy

The transition from Greek to medieval philosophy witnessed a co-operation and conflict approach (Cf. Mehl and Kushner 2011; Fieser 2021). Christianity, with a cultural, intellectual, and faith tradition in a monotheistic God from Judaism, wanted to defend its doctrine and rites from the pagan cultures and rites on the one side and depended on philosophical arguments for rational certainty for its doctrines on the other side. Early Christian writers like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Lactantius, St. Jerome, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Tertullian, St. Basil, St. Ambrose, and St. Augustine heavily used philosophical terminologies to explain Christian doctrines rationally. Some of them made use of the mystery language to interpret the meanings of Christian mysteries, which are not in the sense of the mysteries of paganism.

Later, as medieval and modern philosophy developed as a blend of Greek philosophy and Christian views, there developed new terminologies, languages, motifs, and themes in Western philosophy. In other places, where Christianity did not expand widely, philosophical terminologies remained almost similar to those of ancient times with slight variations. For example, African, Chinese, and Indian philosophers tried to explain philosophical concepts mainly through their ancient terminologies related to the mystery rites (Cf. Sogolo 1993; Amodu 2021; Barua 2021; Cf. Sogolo 1993; Ankur Barua 2021; Herman 1971). Nonetheless, as Western philosophy developed, particularly with the establishment of medieval universities, unique philosophical approaches emerged. Through their acts of initiation and attainment of *epopteia* in their lives and in wisdom, ancient mystery cults and philosophy imparted several notions, which they explained with their own philosophical terminology and language. According to James Fieser, medieval philosophers mainly discussed four issues and concepts (Cf. Fieser 2021). Firstly, they engaged with the question of the relationship between faith and reason, in which they discussed whether important philosophical and religious beliefs were grounded in the authority of faith, reason, or some combination of both. Secondly, they discussed the question of the existence of God and tried to find out rational arguments in favor of their Christian belief. Thirdly, philosoph-
ical concern in medieval times was in connection with religious language. For them, if a transcendent and absolute God exists, how can a finite human being understand and explain God’s existence and nature in religious language? The last issue of concern was the problem of universals, which exist independently of human thought. According to Fieser, Christian authors like St. Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Boethius, St. Anselm, St. Thomas Aquinas, John Dun Scotus, and William Ockham were the representatives of medieval philosophy in the Western world.

Among them, the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius of Areopagite played a significant role in diverting the meaning of the term mystery from the ancient cultic implications into a world of new meanings in philosophical thinking. He is the one who introduced the term “mystical” to Christian thought when he joined it with the term *theologia* in his famous work *Peri Mystikes Theologias* (The Mystical Theology) (Rhodes 2014, p. 11). Dionysius gives a new understanding and interpretation of the concept of mystery. Taking the cultic and historical background of the usage of the term mystery into account, he gives new descriptions for those realities that were traditionally understood in pagan and ancient Greek philosophical mysteries. Rhodes says that Dionysius applies the term mystery in the sense of something that is irreducibly mysterious. Dionysius tries to present the concept and meaning of mystery as “something unconceivable to human reason” or “something beyond human comprehension”. It is in this sense of the term that mystery later influenced Ludwig Wittgenstein, Gabriel Marcel, Martin Heidegger, Martin Buber, Colin McGinn, Descartes, Merleau-Ponty, and David Cooper (Cf. Rhodes 2014, p. 2). Through his notions on being, divine names, evil, universal concepts of beauty, goodness, and hierarchy, Dionysius opened a new horizon of philosophical and theological notions and terminologies. Each of his ideas developed into a topic for later philosophical thought, giving rise to new ideas and terms like “transcendent or absolute reality”, “the mystery of knowing”, “the mystery of Being”, “the mystery of language and explanation”, “the mystery of reason and religious experience”, etc. These ideas and terminologies have dominated philosophical thought for the rest of history. For instance, René Descartes’ division of substance or being into material and spiritual categories created new avenues for philosophical discourse on the mystery of being.

As the “philosopher of being”, Martin Heidegger distinguished the words “being” (*Sein*) and beings (entities). “For Heidegger, Being is a mystery that you cannot grasp the full meaning but to contemplate in silent” (Alawa 2012). According to Heidegger, because of the ineffability of being, being must be thought of on the basis of beings in the world (Cf. Heidegger 1978, p. 240). It is in and through the language that we become attuned to the being. We hear the voice of being in language, but silence is the best language to understand the mystery of being. Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973) is another important philosopher who dealt with the concept of the mystery of being. He discusses being in diverse contexts in his books *Being and Having* (1949) and *The Mystery of Being* (1951), where he distinguished between being and having and problem and mystery. For him, mystery is that which our existence is involved. For him, it is a mystery that every person has a possibility and capacity for freely and participatively being with others and in the community (Cf. Pratt 1971, pp. 29–38).

Another significant development in understanding the meaning of mystery is the philosophical thinking of Rudolf Otto, who articulated the phrase “Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinas”. Influenced by Kant and Windelband, he analyzed the concept and reason behind the word “holy” and argued that this word conceives not only a moral value but “represents” a gradual shaping and filling in with ethical meaning in the minds of human beings (Cf. Otto 1924, p. 6). When this shaping emerges and begins its long development, it receives a new connotation of something quite other than moral “good”. Otto uses the Kantian term “Numen” to indicate “something” beyond and “numinous” to express the state of mind, which cannot be strictly defined when human beings attain deep religious experience like mysticism. What is “numinous” in mystical experience stirs to “to start into life and into consciousness” of the mystic. In explaining the nature of the “numinous”,
Otto proposes his famous concept of “Mysterium Tremendum” and says that this dreadful feeling of the numinous profoundly affects and occupies the human mind with bewildering strength. He says,

The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of most profound worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away, and the soul resumes its ‘profane’, non-religious mood of everyday experience. It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering. It has its crude barbaric antecedents and early manifestations, and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious. It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of—whom or what? In the presence of that which is a mystery inexpressible and above all creatures. (Otto 1924, pp. 12–13)

For Otto, this uncanny feeling of the numinous, which emerged in the minds of primeval man, was the starting point of religious consciousness in human history.

While taking this short look over the usage of the term and concept of mystery in philosophy, I notice that there was an imbroglio in the meaning of mystery in the history of philosophical thinking from the period of early Greek philosophers until recent time. The meaning related to primitive cultic context was entangled by Pseudo-Dionysius of Areopagite and afterwards acquired the meaning of incomprehensibility of human reason. The term “mystery” has lost its cultic connotations and instead refers to human cognition and reason. It lost its significance related to an objective reality in the cultic background and became a cynosure of the subjective skills of a human person. In my opinion, this drift in the meaning of mystery had drastic consequences in the religious and secular world thereafter.

3. Meaning of Mystery in the Theological World

In the theological arena, the term mysterion and the concept of mystery have been used in different ways and with different nuances. Because of the shortage of space, I am avoiding the biblical usage of the idea of mystery and concentrating on the theological thinking from the time of the early Fathers in the history of the Church. The concept of mystery became both rich and obscure through their usage (Cf. Van Roo 1992, p. 35; Dulles 2002, pp. 82–85). According to William Van Roo, the term “mystery” is rich because it contains the sense of mystery expressed in the Old Testament and Pauline letters and it adopts suitable elements of philosophic, gnostic, and cult mystery terminology. But its application ranges from the divine plan of man’s salvation in Christ through different stages of its manifestation and realization to the final consummation. It is used to express both hidden secrets and revealed truths. “Though both the hidden sacred reality and its manifestation are called a mystery, still formally mysterion almost always means hidden. Manifestations of the hidden sacred reality are called mysteries, not because they are manifestations, but because even the obscure revelation remains a mystery” (Van Roo 1992, p. 35).

An extensive adaptation of the mystery terminology is found in the works of the Alexandrian Fathers. Clement of Alexandria (Titus Flavius Clemens,) used the term mysterion 91 times, of which one-third were in the sense of cult mystery. But he used the term without the meaning of the cultural context and instead presented a Christian meaning. As he was born into a pagan family and converted to Christianity and was educated in and was familiar with classical Greek philosophy and literature, he had extensive knowledge of Greek mythology and mystery cults. He wanted to make an apologetic presentation of Christian mysteries (Prüm 1937, p. 398). He distinguished minor mysteries, which are revealed to all, from major mysteries, which are to be communicated only to the Gnostics. He condemned the cruder mysteries of mystery cults but acknowledged a likeness between
higher mystery forms in Christian rites. He mainly used the word *mysterion* in allegorical exegesis, which implied a divine knowledge concealed under the external form in which the truth is presented and is revealed only to a few (Cf. Van Roo 1992, p. 33).

Origen used the word *mysterion* as a part of fluid terminology, in which it is associated with symbolism, *ainigma, skia* (shadow), *semeion* (sign), *typos* (type), *eikon* (image, likeness), and Latin translations *species, forma, sacramentum, argumentum* (Cf. Van Roo 1992, p. 33). He distinguished mystery from mysteries. For him, the great mystery is the threefold manifestation of the word: in incarnation, in the Church, and in scripture. In his Neoplatonic conception, he used the word “mysteries” for baptism, Eucharist, and other rites of Christianity, which are derived from and somehow participate in the great generic–concrete mystery (Cf. Van Roo 1992, p. 33). For Origen, *mysterion* is always an epiphanic manifestation for all those who have the sense to perceive it. As it is hidden from normal human understanding, one cannot perceive it with normal human organs. It is something that, in connection with God’s salvific economy in the world, embodies a secret divine truth that is revealed to those who are open to receiving it and kept hidden from those who are not.

As the danger of contamination by mystery religions was slowly disappearing in the fourth and fifth centuries, the Fathers adopted a full terminology of *mysterion* to Christian worship. John Chrysostom was the best example. In his writings, there are 200 texts in which plural *mysteria* is used 160 times to deal with cult mysteries, baptism, and the Eucharist. In these texts, we find full cult mystery terminology. Van Roo summarizes the features of mystery in Chrysostom (Cf. Van Roo 1992, pp. 34–36). (1) The word *mysterion* indicates a divine knowledge that God alone possesses and reveals not to all but only to the chosen ones imperfectly. It has been known by angels and heavenly powers only since the incarnation. (2) Mysteries are God’s plan of salvation in Christ, Christ himself and all that he did and suffered, the Church, the Church dogmas, Christ in his faithful, and the Christian rites of baptism and the Eucharist. (3) Like everything in him, God’s plan is eternally unknown to others. Like every other mystery, it consists of two parts: the sensible (aistheton) and the intelligible (noeton). (4) The effectiveness of the Christian cult mysteries, moral expectations of the participants, the need for faith, and a deserving response are the aspects that relate to the doctrinal setting of *mysterion*. For Cappadocian Fathers, *mysterion* was mystical knowledge revealed to Moses and Paul in their ecstasies (Gregory of Nyssa) and a revealed truth that is obscured from even the faithful and educated Christians by reason of its sublimity.

3.1. *Mysterion as Sacramentum*

While the Greek Fathers used *mysterion* in different senses, considering no single Latin word bore the set of meanings, the Latin speakers simply transliterated it as *mysterium*. Then, the word *sacramentum* became the Latin translation of *mysterium*. The term *mysterium* designates pagan religious cults, while sacramentum does not (Cf. Slyke 2007, p. 251). Van Roo says that how the biblical *mysterion* came to be translated generally in Latin as *sacramentum* itself is a mystery (Cf. Van Roo 1992, p. 36). He supposes that the reason for this is probably because they wished to avoid words such as *mysteria, sacra, arcana, et intitia*, which were in use in the pagan mystery cults and which might have prejudiced the meaning of Christian texts (Cf. Van Roo 1992, p. 36). Tertullian was the earliest who applied *sacramentum* to the mysteries of Christian initiation. He used this word very often with various meanings and applied it to very many things. According to Van Roo, Tertullian first uses *sacramentum* with the meanings that it has in scripture. Secondly, the word appears with a closely related meaning in his statements concerning the Persons in God; the plan of salvation in the incarnation; life, death, and resurrection of Christ; and the obscure prediction and prefiguration of Christ in the Old Testament, the rule of faith, and the rites of Christian initiation (Cf. Van Roo 1992, p. 37). By using the word *sacramentum*, he compares Christian initiation with the Roman military oath. He sharply contrasts divine *sacramenta* with the *mysteria* of pagan rituals, which for him are demonic imitations of godly realities. “He [Tertullian] writes that the devil, who subverts the truth, ‘emulates
the very things of the divine sacraments (*sacraentorum*) with the mysteries (*mysteriis*) of idols. The earliest significant Latin Christian author then considers the words *mysterium* and *sacramentum* to have very different contexts and contents” (Slyke 2007, p. 251).

According to Van Slyke, along with Tertullian, several other Latin authors, like Commodian, the mid-third-century poet, Cyprian of Carthage (248/9-258), Arnobius the Elder, and Lactantius (ca. 325), before the Council of Nicea used the term *sacramentum* in their writings (Slyke 2007, p. 251). In the writings of Ambrose of Milan, there is a distinction of meaning between *sacramentum* and *mysterium*. For him, *mysterium* signifies historical realities that are in fact manifestations of the salvation given by God, and *sacramenta* indicates the sacred rites celebrated by the Church (Slyke 2007, p. 260). He identifies the *sacramentum* experienced by Christians in their worship with the Old Testament figure that precedes it. Considering Old Testament events and types, Ambrose gives the typological interpretation of the Christian mysteries and sacraments through which the invisible power of the passion of Christ is communicated. For him, *mysterium* is neither seen nor heard, but *sacramentum* is the way to experience this concretely. “The Christian community sensibly experiences the sacramentum in worship, whereas the *mysterium* is the hidden reality effected by divine power, the working out of God’s salvific plan in history and above all in the cross of Christ” (Slyke 2007, p. 264).

Coming to Augustine, even though there is a vast amount of research made on the use of *sacramentum*, authors have different opinions and find no full synthetic account of his thought (Cf. Van Roo 1992, p. 37). According to Van Roo, in the writings of Augustine, the distinction of meaning between sacramentum and *mysterium* is not clear. Both these words occur frequently: about 2279 times in his writings (Cf. Lienhard 2013, p. 178). According to Lienhard, Augustine uses *mysterium* generally to designate matters that are doctrinal and *sacramentum* to refer to what is ritual (Cf. Lienhard 2013, p. 178). *Sacramentum* is closely related to *figura, allegoria, prophetia, velamen*, and *symbolum*. *Sacramentum*, in a broader sense, means any sensible reality that points to spiritual reality. In a narrower sense, it designates the sacraments of the Church, which are the Christian mysteries of initiation. Among these sacraments, about one-third of Augustine’s *sacramentum* applies to baptism and the Eucharist (Cf. Lienhard 2013, p. 179). In using the term, he combines Neoplatonic dualism, the New Testament understanding of signs, and his basic understanding of salvation history and focuses on the symbolic aspect of sacraments.

For Augustine, sacraments are a distinctive kind of sign or sacred sign. In his *City of God*, he writes, “A sacrifice as commonly understood, therefore, is the visible sacrament of an invisible sacrifice, that is, it is a sacred symbol” (Augustine 1998, p. 397). He did not mention this invisible or hidden sacrifice as the sacrifice of Christ, which is considered *mysterion* by Greek Fathers. Van Roo says, “Whereas in the Greek patristic *mysterion* there is a play of hidden and manifest, but the emphasis is clearly on the hidden, in the Augustinian *sacramentum, mysterium, figura*, and related words there is an obscure meaning, and the emphasis is not on the obscurity but on the meaning: sacraments are signs, causing something else to come to thought; therefore, let us understand” (Van Roo 1992, p. 39). Thus, in general, we find it difficult to distinguish the definite meaning of *sacramentum* in the writings of Augustine. Even though it is difficult to differentiate kinds of *sacramentum* and the corresponding classes of things that are called sacraments in Augustine, Van Roo classifies three things: (1) rites or ceremonies of the Old Testament or of the New Testament or of any religion; (2) symbols or figures; and (3) mysteries in the sense of revealed dogmas of the Christian religion (Van Roo 1992, p. 39).

St. Isidore of Seville was another important Western Father to be referred to in the Christian understanding of the concept of mystery. He retained elements of both the *mysterion* of Greek Fathers and the Augustinian Sacramentum (Cf. Van Roo 1992, p. 43; Slyke 2007, p. 266). Van Roo says that when Isidore mentioned the Paschal cycle, he paraphrased the Augustinian text (Epistola 55) and spoke of both recalling to memory the death and resurrection of Christ and considering the meaning of the sacraments. For Isidore, the sacraments are called so because they cover the divine power under the bodily
things and effect salvation. It is the Holy Spirit working invisibly in the perceptible bodily things. Van Roo summarizes the concept of Isidore by saying, “The whole emphasis is on secret power: the Holy Spirit working under the cover of perceptible bodily things. These perceptible things are not signs, so much as covers that hide. Understandably, then, Isidore concludes with the reference to the Greek _mysterion_, stressing the hidden, the secret” (Van Roo 1992, p. 44). Isidore gives emphasis to the hidden element of the sacrament and uses the term frequently in reference to baptism and Eucharist.

Later, as I mentioned before, Pseudo-Dionysius’s understanding of mystery influenced much theological thinking from the sixth century onwards in the Western theological arena. For Dionysius, the transcendent divinity remains ineffable and an incomprehensible mystery to human intellect. Though it is always beyond comprehension, the mystery of divinity is known as being (O’Rourke 2005, p. 5). In the course of Church history, taking inspiration from the notions of Neo-Platonism and Dionysius, Peter Abelard (1079), St. Thomas Aquinas, and others in the scholastic period made stirrings of rationalistic skeptical notions, theological ideas, and arguments on the comprehensibility of the knowledge of God and divine things. Peter Abelard, in his famous book _Sic et non_ (“Yes and No”), raised doubts, showed contradictions in Christian beliefs, and revealed mysteries. Thomas Aquinas also depended much on Dionysius.\(^\text{15}\) Authors like Avery Dulles note that Thomas Aquinas used the term “_mysterium_” as the object of the verb _credere_. “In his theology, the _divina mysteria_ are truths hidden in God, knowable to man only under the veils of FAITH. . . he normally applies the term ‘mystery’ not to the inner being of God, but to His redemptive counsels, whether already executed or still to be accomplished in eschatological times” (Dulles 2002, p. 83). Even though Thomas speaks about the incomprehensibility of God, he rarely calls the trinity a mystery. He considers the mystery of trinity in connection with the mystery of incarnation (Dulles 2002, p. 83). Herbert McCabe observes that for Thomas, trinity is no less and no more mysterious, that is, “to say that there is Father, Son and Holy Trinity for him no more mysterious than to say there is God at all” (McCabe 2001, p. 538). The key to the trinity is not the notion of a person but of a relation for him. But Thomas’ notion of knowledge about God remains a mystery. Karl Rahner notices that the teaching of Thomas on the incomprehensibility of God itself is incomprehensible mystery. “The mystery that this teaching is concerned with reflects upon the teaching itself and makes it an unspeakable mystery, which is the ultimate mystery about man himself” (K. Rahner 1978, p. 108).

Coming to the period of controversies with various rationalistic movements, the word “mystery” became a technical term in Christian theology. The self-assured rationalists and semi-rationalists denied the existence of supernatural mysteries and belittled the role of faith. For rationalists, reason is the chief source and test of knowledge, and they argue that, because reality possesses itself inherently logical structure and reason accepts only the logical evidence, there is no significance for any medium between reasonable and unreasonable. For them, revelation of mysteries plays no role in comprehending reality. Astronomers like Galileo and scientists like Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin who contributed much to the history of rationalism, affirmed that nature and natural realities are governed throughout by stable laws with logical and mathematical precisions. Their discoveries and arguments were decisive in the conflict between reason and apparently revealed truths and challenged many religious beliefs. Movements like Deism, religious rationalism, and semi-rationalism and thinkers like Spinoza, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Friedrich Strauss, and Ludwig Feuerbach made new realms of critical thinking and wider acceptance of scientific views than the traditional admiration and reverence towards Christian mysteries and revelation.

At the same time, semi-rationalists hold the position that sufficiently trained reason is, in principle, capable of comprehending and demonstrating all the dogmas of faith (Dulles 2002, p. 83). They wish to illustrate the secrets of Christian revelation without succumbing to the fallacies of rationalism. They explain mysteries either as purely natural truths expressed in symbolic language or as solvable problems of philosophy. Even though, in general, they were submissive to the Church teachings at the beginning and tried to explain and defend the mysteries of faith, many of them deviated from scholastic
philosophy and theology. Consequently, they were corrected or severely condemned through the “Syllabus of Errors” by Church authorities. Authors like Benedict Statller George Hermes, Anton Günter, and Jacob Forschammer who tried to interpret Catholic dogmas using philosophies of their time were some of them.

3.2. Concept of Mystery in the First Vatican Council

Understanding the dangers arising from contemporary errors, Pope Pius IX summoned the First Vatican Council, which explained the term mystery in the Dogmatic Constitution concerning the Catholic faith (Dei Filius) on 24 April 1870. It is the fourth chapter of Dei Filius that dealt with the concept of mystery. We find the word “mystery” for the first time in the Council documents regarding the teachings of the natural and supernatural order of truths and their knowledge in this chapter. By speaking on faith and reason, this chapter affirms that “there is a twofold order of knowledge, distinct not only as regards to its source but also as regards to its object. With regards to the source, we know at one level by natural reason, at the other level by divine faith. With regard to the object, besides those things to which natural reason can attain, there are proposed for our belief mysteries hidden in God, which unless they are divinely revealed are incapable of being known.” Here, the council acknowledges that both faith and natural reason lead in their way to the knowledge of natural as well as supernatural order. It also says that reason alone cannot acquire knowledge in the supernatural order with its principles. Only divine initiative, which was taken by God given in faith, can uncover the mysteries hidden in God in revelation.

The use of the term “mysteries” in the plural, hidden in God, is not specified in the document. It does not distinguish how many or which mysteries are hidden in God. But it says that “the divine mysteries, by their very nature, so far surpass the created understanding that, even when a revelation has been given and accepted by faith, they remain covered by the veil of that same faith and wrapped, as it were, in a certain obscurity, as long as in this mortal life we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, and not by sight” (DF IV. 4). This statement means that no matter how hard reason tries, it cannot grasp these mysteries because they are hidden in God Michal notices that the council uses the term “mysteries hidden in God” in the same sense as in Deo abscondita in the Vulgate translation of Col.3:3, which says vita vestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo (your life is now hidden with Christ in God) (Michal 2012, p. 27).

The Council’s definitions of mysteries, condemnation of contemporary movements, and their philosophical and theological arguments at the First Vatican Council influenced the later reception of Dei Filius in neo-Scholastic dogmatics. The Council Fathers opened an authoritative starting point of the discussion on the hierarchical order of the divine mystery. As a summary of the speculations made during neo-scholastic theology, we can highlight the following order or classes of divine mystery, which are recognized generally in Catholic teaching (Cf. Dulles 2002, p. 84). This order is made according to the ascending sublimity. (1) Natural mysteries: These mysteries are naturally knowable truths that remain obscure because human reason lacks proper and positive concepts of the realities in nature. Avery Dulles mentions animal instinct and human free will as the places of such mysteries. These mysteries “are pre-eminently verified in God, because of the extreme deficiency of the created analogies by which we know Him” (Cf. Dulles 2002, p. 84). (2) Supernatural mysteries in the wide sense: These are the “truths concerning the created order that are not knowable without revelation but that, once revealed, are free from any special obscurity”. The primacy of the Roman Pontiff in the church is an example of such a mystery. After being revealed, these mysteries have an intelligibility comparable to that of other juridical notions. (3) Supernatural mysteries in the strict sense: As I mentioned above, these truths cannot be known without revelation, and even after the revelation, they remain obscure to us because of the sublimity of their object. The mysteries of the trinity, incarnation, and the elevation of finite persons to share through grace the divine life are considered mysteries in this class. All other supernatural mysteries, like original sin, Eucharist, the Church as
a supernatural communion, and predestination, are regarded as part of the three central mysteries in the strict sense. Avery Dulles mentions a controversy among theologians in the early part of the twentieth century regarding the comprehensibility of any strict mysteries. Theologians such as Dieckmann contended that revelation enables us to comprehend God’s mysteries, while writers such as Lagrange and M.D. Roland-Gosselin asserted that we may prove that God’s perfections must have elements that are absent from the created order. Thus, even after revelation, human reason is unable to comprehend the internal potential of the Godhead (Cf. Dulles 2002, p. 85).

Karl Rahner also wrote much about the concept of mystery, mysticism, mysticism of daily life, etc. Even though his views on the concept of mystery are extended throughout his different writings, we can summarize them based on his three lectures published in the fourth volume of *Theological Investigations* and his article on “mystery” in the *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (K. Rahner 1961, 1975). He gives detailed explanations of the concept of mystery in Catholic theology in his lectures through his philosophical and theological arguments. In the first two lectures, he focuses more on the philosophical understanding of mystery, presenting it as a reality of propositions and statements and the problems related to such a view on the Christian mysteries. In the third lecture, he explains theological grounds for viewing the diversity of Christian mysteries as many facets of the one mystery with which the Christian revelation confronts humanity. He first explains the conventional notion of mystery, which was also defined by the first Vatican Council and theological schools later. He summarizes the traditional doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God, which remains as a mystery and will be overcome in the beatific vision. Based on the scriptural texts (Jn 1:18; 6:46; 1 Jn 4:20; 1 Tim 6:16; Mk 4:11; 1 Cor 2:7), theological notions of Fathers of the Church like Gregory of Nyssa, arguments of scholastic theology, and affirmations of different councils, Rahner says that the theology of the past considered the concept of mystery on the cognitive potency of human reason (Cf. Rahner 1975, pp. 1000–2). According to him, the Vatican Council I and the schools regarded mystery as the property of a statement, while mysteries in plural comprised provisionally incomprehensible truths.

### 3.3. Return to Ancient Meaning of Mystery by Odo Casel

As part of the liturgical movement in the Catholic tradition, which started at the end of the 19th century and developed in the beginning of the 20th century, Odo Casel, who gave theological impetus for it, tried to rediscover the original and classical meaning of mystery and its relevance in Catholic theology (DeLorme 1968, p. 6). His views on mystery in connection with liturgy appeared first in the *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft*, in which he attempted to define the key word *Kultmysterium*. Casel pioneered the liturgical movement by reacting against the mentality of putting Christianity as a way of accepting certain doctrinal statements and a moral code.

In his book *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, Casel criticizes the thesis that the concept of mystery of God became a burden to modern man. The mystery of nature and the cosmos is emptied of its spiritual content as the symbol of higher realities. Made upon the pride of knowing everything with his ratio, “modern man thinks that he has thus finally driven out the darkness of the mystery and that he stands at last in the clear light of sober reason and self-consciousness, autonomous will, for the first time truly master of the world” (Casel 2016, p. 3). When one comes closer to Casel’s concept of mystery, he finds that Casel speaks of mystery in so many ways in his writings. He believes that no definition is comprehensive. “Mysteries” have three meanings for him. Firstly, it is God who is mystery in the sense that “God considered himself, as the infinitely distant, holy, unapproachable, to whom no man may draw near and live; in likeness to whom everything is impure, as the prophet said, ‘I am a man of unclean lips, dwelling in the midst of a people with unclean lips; and I saw the Lord, the King of battles, with my own eyes’” (Casel 2016, p. 5). Secondly, this all-holy one God reveals his mystery in incarnation, comes down to his creatures, and reveals himself in mystery. It is “revelation by grace, to those whom he has
chosen, the humble, the pure of heart, not to the proud and the self-important. Hence his revelation remains a mystery, because it is not open to the profane world but hides itself shows itself only to the believers, the ones whom he has chosen” (Casel 2016, p. 5).

According to Casel, the coming of God in flesh fulfilled all longing and all promises and gave the word *mysterium* a new and deepened meaning. It means that the revelation of God in the incarnation and crucifixion showed the wholeness of the love of God and, through the Son, the mystery of God, which was hidden before the ages, was made known and revealed to the ecclesia, the body of those whom he had called. So, for Casel, Jesus Christ is the mystery in person (Casel 2016, p. 6).

The third sense of the word *mysterium* is intimately connected with the first two and means the mysteries of worship, in which we meet the person of Jesus, his saving deeds, the working of his grace. For Casel, through participation in the mysteries, we enter the image and so reach the archetype. For example, he says that the Mass not only represents the death of Christ and communicates to us the effects of his sacrifice; it is an active image of the Pasch of Christ and makes us immediate members of what once took place in and upon him. He says,

Mysterion, or more usually the plural *mysteria*, is the Greek designation for the ancient Hellenistic and later Hellenistic secret cults which are unlike the cults of the Polis; they give to the worshippers of a god, who have been specially initiated and thereby joined to the god, a closer and more personal union with him; this union reaches beyond death and promises a happy existence in the next world. The divinities concerned are usually chthonic mother goddesses, related to the earth and its mysterious life. The way of the mystery passes through initiations and the mysteries proper, in which the deeds and decrees of the gods in the first age are presented in ritual and thereby made present. In this way the initiate, by carrying out the rite under the direction of the priests, takes his own share in the god’s deed and attains the god’s life; in this he finds salvation. (Casel 2016, p. 98)

For Casel, this primitive concept of the mystery is the root of the usage of patristic and primitive concepts of Christian mysteries. He gives a detailed summary of the rich meaning of the word mystery acquired in the ancient world, ancient philosophy, and patristic writings. After analyzing the Greco-Roman cultic rituals, he argues that there is a myth containing the story of God’s appearance on earth, which is lived out in every rite of any religion (Casel 2016, p. 109). Thus, Casel revived the meanings of mystery by studying and analyzing the original connotation of the word *mysterion* in ancient religions and its connection with Christian revelation.

### 3.4. Concept of Mystery in the Second Vatican Council

When one understands the history of the formation of the Constitution on the Church in Vatican Council II, one finds the importance of the inclusion of this concept of mystery, which changed the whole paradigm of the Council. The Council Fathers attempted in eight articles (LG 1–8) to define the mystery and the sacramentality of the Church in terms of symbols, images, parables, figures, theological ideas, and analogies. But this attempt to capture the mystery of the Church in human language also faces difficulties because the mystery is at the same time hidden and revealed in history. To call the Church a mystery points to the surplus of the meaning of mystery that transcends all time and place. Michal points out seven dimensions for the concept of mystery in *Lumen Gentium* (Michal 2012, p. 312). (1) LG uses the term “mystery” to show the mystery of the trinity. (2) Mystery in the sense of a truth revealed by God that transcends human knowledge—the secrets of knowledge with *mysteria stricte dica*. (3) The mystery of the Logos, already revealed in the Old Testament. (4) The eschatological mystery, which points to the future that awaits humanity in Christ. (5) The mystery of salvation history, which refers to God’s plan of salvation and leads humanity back to its true home in the mystery of the trinity. (6) Liturgical mystery with the seven concretized individual sacraments. (7) The mystery is a theandric structure that connects the mystery of God in the mystery of Christ (and his
mysteries) with the mystery of man. When we understand the Church as a mystery, the Council Fathers intended that all these dimensions of mystery are evident in the visible and invisible nature of the Church.

The Vatican Council II presents the Church as a mystery, primarily because her origin lies in the mystery of the trinity. LG 2 says that God, the Father, is the one who deals with the trinitarian origin of the Church and the history of salvation in which the people of God and the Church are embedded (Michal 2012, pp. 204–5). The Church is not a fourth divine person but a creation of the tri-personal God. The Church is based on the free act of the grace of God. It is, therefore, a disposition from above (Michal 2012, pp. 204–5). The Council Fathers emphasized the divine origin and its place in God’s plan of salvation history.

One can detect certain features by assessing the meaning of mystery in the development of theological thinking. First, taking from the primitive cultic context of the term mysterion, Christian theology also wanted to project something that was at the same time hidden and revealed. Early Greek Fathers compared pagan mysteries and Christian mysteries and distinguished Christian mysteries from pagan mysteries. They projected the Christian revelation of trinitarian God in and through the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For them, the Christian mysteries are revealed once through Jesus Christ. Secondly, Christian theology affirms that, different from pagan cult mysteries, Christian sacraments are the revealed sources of grace given by the Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. The sacraments are considered the channels of grace entrusted to the Church by Jesus Christ. Thirdly, the imbroglio made by Pseudo-Dionysius affected the intellectual world of Western theology, and thereby, the concept of incomprehensibility in knowing God and divine things dominated there. The emphasis given to the unknowability of divine things eclipsed the emotional and graceful elements of the mysteries of Christian faith. Finally, the attempts of Odo Cassel and the insertion of the concept of mystery in Vatican Council documents challenge scholars to trace out the original meaning of the term mystery.

Following the Council in 1966, Marie-Joseph Le Guillou initiated discussions on the notion of mystery in his book Christ and church, a theology of the mystery. After a thorough analysis using Thomistic reasoning to explore the concept of mystery in relation to Christ and Church, he says, “It seems possible to conclude that we have seen thus far that a genuine ecclesiology can be developed only when it has been replaced in the great perspective of the Mystery. Undoubtedly the most valuable doctrinal contribution we can make to the pastoral and ecumenical work of our day will be to restore to theological research its full scope and to see the Church in the Trinitarian vision of the Fathers and of St. Thomas, in an immense and truly dynamic perspective” (Guillou 1966, p. 367). Even though the Council was held more than 60 years ago, the original meaning of the word “mystery” and its ramifications for the idea that the Church is a mystery are still not entirely unearthed.

Therefore, the term and concept of mystery need to be rediscovered. The “why” and “what” of the mystery must be explored. The cultural background, the reasons behind the secret nature of mystery rites, and the comprehension of human reasons must be studied carefully. For this purpose, one must go back to the origin of the mysteriousness of the rites of the mystery religions.

4. “Mystery” in Mystical Religions

The elements of secrecy, incomprehensibility, and transcendence inherent in the concept of mystery are in some ways or another related to cultic mysteries and rituals in mystery religions. Many customs, rites, and traditions related to birth, childhood, initiation, territorial passage, rites related to pregnancy, betrothal, marriage, and funerals of different religions and cultures contain a spirit of secrecy and awe. In my opinion, a critical analysis of the rites of initiation into adulthood, membership in secret societies, fraternities or totem groups, or other festivals of mystery religions may help one understand the original meaning of mystery. Arnold van Gennep (Gennep 1960) and S. Agnus (Agnus 1975) explain different rites among the people of other cultures.
According to Gennep, similar customs and rites are found in the initiation to the “Maternity of Isis”, the cult of Dionysus, Mithras (initiation by stages), Attis, Adonis, Isis, etc., and the initiation rites of primitive religions such as the Eleusinian cult, the initiation into Orphism, and the religious associations of Thrace. These rites of different cultural groups contain a sense of mysteriousness and terror. Regarding the mystery element in these rites, Gennep says As I use the term “mysteries” comprise the ceremonial whole which transfers the neophyte from the profane to the sacred world and places him in direct and permanent communication with the latter. The display of sacra at Eleusis, as also in Australia (churinga, sacred bull-roarer) or in America (masks, sacred ears of corn, katsinas, etc.), is the culminating rite but does not by itself constitute the “mysteries” (Gennep 1960, p. 89).

Agnus also gives the details of the three stages of a mystery: cultic practices related to preparation and probation (katharsis), initiation and communion (muesis), and blessedness and salvation (epopteia). The most important mystery ritual in the stage of initiation in the mystery religions in the Greco-Roman world was the taurobolium or bath in bull's blood. They believed that this ritual cleansed their past and endowed them with the principle of immortality. For them, even though it is crude, the rite may have been, in its inception, used by God to give men peace in this life and hope beyond the grave. There were also similar sacramental rites, like criobolium or the sacrifice of a ram, which was attached to the same ritual, blood baptism, with its spiritual interpretation.

Another impressive rite of initiation was pallingensia (regeneration), which was common in Orphism, in the cults Isis, Attis, Dionysios, and Mythra. Every mystae who had undergone such rites of initiation believed that they became “twice born” in a new culture and passed in the real sense from death unto life, being brought into a mysterious intimacy with the deity. They attested to the belief that there was no salvation without regeneration (Agnus 1975, p. 79). The important and immediate result of the rites of initiation in the mystery religions was the epiphany of the deity. In the intense emotional exaltation of initiation, they believed that they could see God. They believed that they could obtain the fullness of truth and knowledge or mystical experience in witnessing the deity. It was not a revelation of the deity from heaven but the ascension of man through the experience of death and the elements of the cult into heaven (Agnus 1975, p. 109). “The initiand was predisposed by fasting, the suggestions, and promptings of the priest, the awful reverence of the sacramental drama, the contagion of collective emotion, the magical effect attached by antiquity to the repetition of cult formulae, the hallucinatory contemplation of the sacra, or by enkoinesis to behold what he expected” (Agnus 1975, p. 110).

After analyzing different ancient cults and explaining the extraordinary experience in them, Walter Burket says, “That participation in mysteries was a special form of experience, a pathos in the soul, or psyche, of the candidate, is clearly stated in several ancient texts; given the underdeveloped state of introspection in the ancient world, as seen from a modern vantage point, this is remarkable” (Burket 1987, p. 89). He mentions a quote from a rhetor’s description of an experience at Eleusis: “I came out of the mystery hall feeling like a stranger to myself” (Burket 1987, p. 90). Burket says that the experience of the participants in the initiation ceremonies is patterned as antithesis by moving between the extremes of terror and happiness, darkness, and light. It is an experience of death and life, suffering and joy, and agony and bliss. The initiand should bear the first purifications and unsettling painful events and hope for something sweet and bright to come out of the present anxiety and confusion. In the final stage of the ceremony, the initiand reaches the blessed status of those who have “seen” the mysteries. This “seeing” is said to be the ecstatic culmination of their mystical experience. They reach a state of divine experience by “seeing the sacred”. As I have mentioned before, for Plato and other philosophers, this vision of the sacred is the epopteic experience, which is the ultimate revelation that occurred for a philosopher in his or her journey for attaining knowledge. Aristotle is also said to have used the pointed antithesis that, at the final stage of mysteries, there should be no
more “learning” (mathein) but “experiencing” (panthein) and a change in the state of mind (diolethenai) (Burket 1987, p. 89).

As this mystical experience includes a paradox of suffering and happiness, darkness and light, and death and life, one must ask certain questions: Why is there paradox in such an experience? How can we explain these contradictory rituals in the same ceremony? What are the explanations for this mystical experience? What is mysterious in mystical rituals? What happens in between these paradoxical natures? I believe that with the help of mimetic theory, we can find answers to these questions and a re-defined meaning of mystery.

5. Mimetic Theory and Mystery

Studying the ancient myths and cultures, Rene Girard formulated mimetic theory and explained the anthropology of religions in the world. According to Girard, the mimetic cycle is the basis for all mythologies in the world. He explains mimetic theory in his different writings.21 He argues that all cultural institutions, practices, customs, and rituals emerged from the single victim who was murdered once in the undetermined past and later divinized. “Everything we call our ‘cultural institutions’ must stem originally from ritual acts that become so refined over the years that they lose their religious connotations and are defined in relation to the type of ‘crisis’ they are intended to resolve” (Cf. Girard 2001, p. 91).

In this sense, rituals of passage or initiation are based on sacrifice. The radical change that takes place through the “ordeals” is a kind of resurrection rooted in the death that precedes it. “In the first phase, the phase of “crisis”, the initiates died, as it were, to their childhood. In the second phase, they rose again, capable from now on to assume their rightful place in the world of adults” (Girard 2001, p. 90). According to mimetic theory, this process of death and resurrection, or abandoning the childhood inclinations in the ordeal and attaining the knowledge of adulthood, is related to a primordial event of violence and scapegoat mechanisms, which remain mysterious behind the sacrificial rituals of ancient religions.

According to Girard, even though there is a concrete event behind the myths, they do not allow us to identify it, for they distort it and transform it (Cf. Girard 2001, pp. 141–42). The myths conceal the history behind the paradoxical nature of rituals and sacrifices. They mask the snowballing character behind sacrificial and initiatory rituals and project them as peace-and-order bringing rituals in society. The rituals hide the primeval event under the pretext of their mysteriousness. Even though the rituals are enacted according to the same manner and ordinance of the founding event and its metamorphic pattern, they do not unmask the real event. Mimetic theory uncovers things hidden from the foundation of sacrificial rituals in primitive religion. Girard says, “Bloody sacrifices are attempts to repress or moderate the internal conflicts of primitive or archaic communities, and they do this by reproducing as exactly as possible at the expense of the victims substituted for the original victim, a real act of violence that had occurred in the indeterminate past” (Girard 2001, p. 78). Mimetic theory exhumes the mysteriousness and paradoxical nature of rites and rituals in ancient religions.

Starting with the concept of mimetic desire, which leads to rivalry among primitive human beings, mimetic theory exposes the mimetic contagion and scapegoat mechanism behind cultural institutions and myths. Mimetic theory narrates that the scapegoat mechanism resolved the mimetic crisis among primitive people. The community singles out a feeble victim as the trigger of their crisis and collectively lynches them. For example, Girard explains the Greek myth of Apollonius of Tyana in his book I Saw Satan Fall like Lightning. In this myth, Girard explains that Apollonius appeared as a person to restore the people of Ephesus from a plague. He gathered all the people in a theater and tried to find a solution. But when the people failed to find a solution, Apollonius himself found a miserable beggar as the cause of the epidemics. He wanted the people to throw stones at him. But when the people could not stone this feeble beggar, Apollonius projected the beggar as an incarnation of Satan or the demon itself. He urged the people to stone this “incarnated Satan” to death. Then, the people stoned him to death. This killing of the miserable beggar brought peace
Religions 2024, 15, 978

and order to Ephesians’ society. The broken relationship, which is called “epidemics”, was re-established by the violent action of lynching a beggar.

After killing the unanimously selected victim, the community feels purified of all its tensions, of all its divisions, and of everything that has fragmented it. The killing of the accused brings order to the chaotic society. For Girard, the victimary mechanism appeases chaos in human communities and re-establishes, at least temporarily, their tranquility. The lynching event re-establishes the former order or establishes a new one out of the old. Girard says, “Conflictual mimesis therefore creates a de facto allegiance against a common enemy, such that the conclusion of the crisis is nothing other than the reconciliation of the community” (Girard 1987, p. 26). Then, the new order itself is destined someday to enter a new crisis, and it goes on. It is a cyclic process of disorder and re-establishment of order that reaches climax and ends in a mechanism of victimary unanimity.

According to Girard, these two sides in the victimization process are there in every culture. When unanimous violence has reconciled the community and rejoined the social ties and relationships, then a reconciling power is attributed to the victim, who is already “guilty” and already “responsible” for the crisis. So, they considered this victim their savior—God—who brings peace and order. Girard says, “On the one hand he [the victim] is a woebegone figure, an object of scorn who is also weighed down with guilt; a butt for all sorts of gibes, insults, and of course, outbursts of violence. On the other hand, we find him surrounded by a quasi-religious aura of veneration; he has become a sort of cult object” (Girard 1977, p. 97). Thus, the victim is transfigured twice: the first time in a negative, evil fashion, and the second in a positive, beneficial fashion.

This process of transformation of the evildoer into a divine benefactor is a phenomenon that is simultaneously marvelous and routine. This transformation process remains mysterious in myths. Myths normally explain only the second part by hiding the lynching of the victim. By the end of the myths, we see a metamorphosis where the people enjoy peace and unity based on collective violence, and the victim, once projected as a demon, is seen as a god who heals epidemics, protects life, and brings order and peace to society. “Once the victim is killed, the crisis is over, peace is regained, the plague is healed, all the elements become calm again, chaos withdraws, what is blocked, locked, or paralyzed is opened, the incomplete is completed, gaps are filled, and the confusion of differences is restored to proper differentiation” (Girard 2001, p. 65). Girard points out that this is visible in every culture. He says, “In the Sumerian mythology, cultural institutions emerge from a single victim: Ea, Tiamat, Kingu. The same in India: the dismemberment of the primordial victim Purusha, by a mob offering sacrifices produces the caste system. We find similar myths in Egypt, in China, among the Germanic peoples—everywhere” (Girard 2001, p. 82). It is from the primordial murder and their remembrance and re-enacting in the sacrificial rituals that social institutions and culture evolved gradually (Cf. Girard 1987, pp. 48–83). According to Girard, this victimary mechanism acts as the imperative of prohibitions and of rituals in every culture and society. Girard states that rituals have emerged to end crises by replacing the violence against the original victim with victims of the ritual, and prohibition has evolved to prevent the crisis from recurring.

(Cf. Girard 1987, p. 28). The sacrificial rituals re-enact the primordial mimetic cycle and the resolution of it using unanimous snowballing and the lynching of the victim. Girard notes the Greek Pharmakos rituals and sacrifices, which re-enact the process of torture.22

6. Mystery as Process Deification

Taking mimetic theory into account, one can affirm that the mystery character of the rituals originated from or is related to the process of deification or divinization of a victim in the primeval event. In my view, the process of the founding murder of a collective victim and the deification of the same victim as a deity is the reason for the mysterious character of the rituals. The process of killing the victim and then deifying the victim is the mysterious process of dying and rebirth. It is this process of the birth of a deity or metamorphosis of
the evildoer into saving god that is interpreted as the incarnation of god by the community. It happens because the same collective community and the power of the mass itself lynched the victim and divinized it. It is this majority that tells or writes the mythical stories. They project the blissful aspect of the deity and conceal the first part of the process. As time passed, only the mythical stories survived, and the reason for the incarnation of the deity remained a mystery.

In many cultures, this deifying process was also recurring and thereby occurred in many incarnations. For example, this cyclical incarnation of gods is known as yuga in Indian culture and Hindu mythology (Thomas 1950, p. 4). Yuga is a specific period that starts with order, moves into chaos, and ends with the re-establishment of order through the incarnation of God. In every yuga, there are incarnations of God that remain mysteries in Indian mythology. When one understands the meaning of mystery as a process of deification, he can find that these yugas are nothing but mimetic cycles that start with mimetic contagion and end with establishing peace and order in a community. It is in this process that new incarnations of God occur. In this sense, one can also understand the meaning of the famous sloka (small poems) in the Bhagavad Gita. Lord Krishna says to Arjuna the following instruction. It says,

“Yada yadahi dharmasya glanirbhavati bharata
Abhyuthanam adharmasya tadatmanam srujam yaham.
Paritranaya sadhunam vinasaya cha dushkrtam
Dharma samsthapanardhaya sambhavami yuge”.

(Bhagavad-Gita 4:7, 8)

This sloka means that, whenever righteousness suffers and declines and unrighteousness is rampant, then I manifest myself personally. For the protection of the virtuous, the destruction of evildoers, and re-establishment of Dharma, I appear from yugas to yugas. This sloka contains the mystery of gods who manifest themselves cyclically in such a situation in society where social order is disrupted (but the reason for the disorder is not mentioned) and establish righteousness or order. According to P. Thomas, the number of such incarnations in Hindu culture is thirty-three million and three (Thomas 1950, p. 8; Kuzhippallil 2009, p. 274).

This process of killing a victim and deifying them remained the highest secret in myths. In this sense, one can understand the mystical experience the initiand underwent. The dramatic rituals of darkness and death before entering into new light and life in Eleusinian, Egyptian, and other mysteries of initiation are stages of the ritualistic re-enactment of the collective snowballing in the founding murder and the deification process. The rituals are thus performed in such a way as to impart the experience of death of the primeval victim and the bliss or new life, which is the experience of deification. Marvin W. Meyer says that, in several ancient texts, the initiates are specifically declared to be reborn after the ritual or symbolic killing.23 In my opinion, this process of collective killing and the divinization of the victims in primitive religions is very significant. This process of death and deification remains an unrevealed aspect of mystery rites. This may occur because the majority and the party that killed the victim fail to remember the first part or because mythological religions eventually forget about it. They are presenting and adoring only the glorious side of their deities and the state after the process of divinization of the victim, and the first part of killing the victim is kept as a “mystery”. They project the idea that death is a prerequisite for getting life and glory. Suffering and death are considered preparations for attaining life and bliss.

In this sense, in my opinion, the word “mystery” stands for the whole process of killing and deifying the primordial victim in primitive religions and cultures. As the description of this process of extermination of the victim is never written or propagated, it remains a great secret and mystery. The pre-history of incarnations or formulations of the deities endured the unknown, and their projections as life and order-bringer became fashionable and prominent. The secrets of gods, ultimate reality, religious rituals, customs, traditions,
etc. persisted, always unfathomable, and all those things related to them continued to be incomprehensible. Moreover, this undepicted process was presented symbolically. Therefore, the meaning of mystery must be understood as the process of deification.

7. Mystery Revealed in History

When one understands the meaning of mystery in this sense of a process of deification, they can also substantially interpret the Christian mysteries. The mysteries in Christianity can be understood not in the sense of something incomprehensible but rather as revealed mysteries. They are not a process of deification, but they are the process of revelation of a triune God. The salvation history narrated in the Bible reveals the mysteries of a God who is never victimized, nor the victim divinized. The Bible separates the divine reality itself from violence and designates more significance than ever in the person of the one God, Yahweh, who encompasses all divinity and does not depend at all on what happens among humankind. The refusal to deify victims is inseparable from the aspect of biblical revelation. Girard says, “what characterizes the biblical tradition is above all the discovery of a divine reality that no longer belongs to the sphere of the collective idols of violence” (Girard 2001, p. 119). Against the mythic deities stands a god who does not emerge from the deified victims but who voluntarily assumes the role of the single victim and makes possible, for the first time, the full disclosure of the single victim mechanism. He reveals, on the one hand, the hidden mysteries from the beginning of the world, and on the other side, the real nature of God, who is love.

Even though there are real events of snowballing just like the Passion of Christ, myths do not and cannot reveal these real events because they are duped by it. But the Gospels, while explaining the Passion, clearly narrate the mimetic snowballing and the single victim mechanism, which were hidden behind mythical narrations. Girard says, “behind the myths there is an event that governs them, but the myths do not allow us to identify it, for they distort it and transform it. But... the gospels represent this event as it is, in all its reality, and they make this reality, this truth, which human societies had never identified, available to all humanity” (Girard 2001, pp. 141–42). According to Girard, the same mimetic contagion that played the role of an un-objectified agent in myths also played with all its brutality in the Passion of Jesus. While the brutality of this contagion is not narrated in myths, the gospels reveal what the violence or contagion wants to conceal. Girard says that the mimetic contagion never thought that its fury would turn back against it in the Passion, where it will be recorded and represented with its exactness in the Passion narrative. Girard says,

The reality behind the scenes is nowhere available except in a few Old Testament texts and the passion narratives. For everything pertaining to their false glory, the powers don’t hesitate to take charge of their own publicity. But the Cross reveals their violent origin, which must remain concealed to prevent their collapse... By nailing Christ to the Cross, the powers believed they were doing what they ordinarily did in unleashing the single victim mechanism. They thought they were avoiding the danger of disclosure. They did not suspect that in the end they would be doing just the opposite: they would be contributing to their own annihilation, nailing themselves to the Cross, so to speak. They did not and could not suspect the revelatory power of the Cross. (Girard 2001, p. 142)

In contrast to the prevailing meaning of mystery, by which the ultimate reality is the incomprehensible, transcendent, all powerful, arrogant, or violent God found in the Old Testament and other religious traditions, Jesus revealed the image of a merciful and loving God. Raymund Schwager, the pioneer of dramatic theology, in his book Jesus in the Drama of Salvation (1999), explains the salvific work of Jesus in five acts of a drama. Beginning with his public appearance in the first act and continuing through four acts to the time of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, he presents the unique events in the history of salvation. Reading through all these acts in the Drama of Salvation helps one to see how the Christ event discloses the mysterious mechanism that ruled human history. “With Girard,
Schwager was concerned with exposing such processes of projection and to uncovering an authentically Christian understanding of God, in which God is all love and completely free from all forms of violence. In doing so, he responded to the modern shift in the Christian image of God from a punishing, judging, and wrathfully unpredictable God to a God who is all love, without, however, erasing or trivializing the problem of violence” (Willibald 2023).

As the Bible does not conceal anything, the passion and death of Jesus Christ are exactly written, and the resurrection of Jesus revealed the mimetic contagion from the beginning of the world; the Christian mysteries are known as “revealed” mysteries. The cross revealed both the deification processes that happened in all cultures in human history and revealed the real nature of God as the loving Father. While explaining the Gospel of Mark in the light of the mimetic theory, Robert J. Hamerton-Kelly also explains that the cross of Jesus is the final per contra disclosure of the power of the non-sacred, non-violent, non-present God. He says, “the juxtaposition of the death of Jesus, the rending of the veil, and the confession of the centurion (15: 37–39) identifies the decisive event. At the semantic level, the three events have the same meaning; the death is the unveiling of the sacred violence and the revelation of God to the gentiles” (Hamerton-Kelly 1994, p. 124). It is in this sense that he interprets revelation in the Bible as an unveiling of the hidden things from the foundation of the world.

Therefore, one can say that after the revelation process that Jesus brought into human history, there remain only “revealed mysteries”. There is no meaning or significance for the “original” meaning of the word mystery in history. The significance of “revealed mystery” becomes clear when we examine the Eastern sense of mystery, which is particularly relevant when examining the Syriac term raza and its deep connotations. In Syriac tradition, the names Sḥawtapuḥa and Mḏabbranuḥa are invariably associated with raza. It is through Mḏabbranuḥa that the raza is revealed and Sḥawtapuḥa is achieved. “In the Syriac tradition, the word Raz provides, in addition to the hidden plan of God’s salvation, the sacramental theology with a revelatory significance and explains the Holy Qurbana and all the sacraments of the Church in terms of revelation” (Rose 1998, pp. 107–8).

As Christianity is such a revealed religion and the mysteries in Christianity are revealed, they differ from pagan rituals and their mysteries. C. S. Lewis also explains a similar concept that the truths of Christianity should not be considered as the same truths of the myths. According to him, myths give general abstract truths rather than any concrete truth or meaning. But in Christianity, the myth becomes historical facts (Lewis 1970, p. 59). He says,

The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the dying god, without ceasing to be myth, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It happens on a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. We pass from a Balder or an Osiris, dying nobody knows when or where, to a historical person crucified (it is all in order) under Pontius Pilate. By becoming fact, it does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle. I suspect that men have sometimes derived more spiritual sustenance from myths they did not believe than from the religion they professed. (Hooper 1996, p. 584)

It is the revealed mystery that happened on the death and resurrection of Jesus that transformed the world and deprived the victim mechanism of what it needed to be genuinely unanimous and generate the systems of myth and ritual. That is why Girard observes that the spread of Christianity and the gospel message revealed the mysteries of all deities and brought about the disappearance of archaic religions. The reason for such disappearances of archaic religions was the uniqueness of Christ. He says, “Without cross, there is no revelation of the fundamental injustice of the scapegoat mechanism, which is the founder of human culture, with all its repercussions in our relationships with each other” (Girard 2007, p. 219).
8. Conclusions

As I have described in this essay, the term “mystery” has several meanings and implications, ranging from the inexplicable secret to a process of deification. I think that if we correctly understand mystery as a process of deification, we can explore the vast field of philosophy and theology and discover a plethora of diverse and ingenious interpretations. We can re-read all philosophical themes, as I mentioned before, like “the transcendent or absolute reality”, “the mystery of knowing”, “the mystery of Being”, “the mystery of language and explanation”, and “the mystery of reason and religious experience with new nuances”. The theological meaning of the mystery of trinity, incarnation, the Church, etc., can be interpreted more clearly and substantially. It is such an interpretation that we find in James Alison’s famous book *The Joy of Being Wrong* (1998). While presenting the theological anthropological question of original sin through the easter eyes, he is elaborating the mystery of triune God, creation, original sin, incarnation, and resurrection. He says, “The resurrection of Jesus made it possible to see that the same self-giving toward victimization present in the life of Jesus was the perfect image and imitation of the Father, revealing the Father as he really is, fount of all self-giving. The self-giving of Jesus was then, the Word, Logos, the full self-revelation of the Father” (Alison 1998, p. 99).

If one comprehends this new meaning of mystery, we can deduce that revelation itself is a mystery that can be made accessible to people. This is because, in revelation, mystery emerges and shines as truth proclaimed through the words of Christ and the events of the Paschal mystery (Cf. Kuzhippallil 2022, p. 19). Thus, the incarnation, preaching, or restoration of the kingdom of God through Jesus Christ’s life, death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit became the work of redemption through the revealed mystery. We can also understand the concept of the mystery of the Church of Vatican Council II with a new vision.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes
1. There are certain scholarly works that narrate different meanings of the term mystery in theological and philosophical studies (Cf. Priim 1937; H. Rahner 1955; K. Rahner 1961, 1975; Liccione 1988; Dulles 2002; Michal 2012).
4. There are enough scholarly works that deal with different aspects and arguments on the use of the mystery language in Platonic philosophy. Ann Mary Farrel gives a summary of the research conducted to explain the influence of the mystery terminology in Plato’s philosophy. She explains the finding of A. Dies, who made the first significant study on Plato’s usage of mystical terminology and said that Plato used Orphism and literary mysticism.
5. Farrel mentions this cycle in her description of the Eleusinian mysteries.
7. There are different opinions regarding the original name of the author of these writings. Even though in the early centuries, it was believed that Dionysius was one of the disciples of St. Paul, it is generally accepted in modern times that the author, Dionysius, must have lived in the time of Proclus in the late fifth century and early sixth century. He was perhaps a pupil of Proclus and was of a Syrian origin. Cf. Kevin Corrigan and L. Michael Harrington, “Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite” in Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (first published in 2004 and revised in 2019), available online: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pseudo-dionysius-areopagite/ accessed on 15 November 2022.
8. Benedict Spinoza also viewed being in line with Dionysius. God is there in everything, and everything is part of everything else. At the same time, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz argued that being was realized in the monad and the monadic system (Cf. Lindsay 1921, pp. 512–35). Immanuel Kant and Fredric Nietzsche also gave their explanations on the concept of the mystery of being
Girard says the Greek word for the sacrifices of the people, “Agnus explains in detail the three stages given by Proclus, five stages given by Olympiodorus, and five stages given by Theo. Even though the First Vatican Council was trying to give answers to questions like rationalism, semi-rationalism, pantheism, there were seven references to the term “mystery” in the council documents, “Pater Aeternus and Dei Filii. But for the First Vatican Council, the concept of “mystery” denoted something transrational and unrevealed truths. It was something opposite to the revealed truth. The emphasis of the Council was on the corpus visible, the visible body of Christ. The concept of mystery was not connected with the Church in the documents but was related to the mystery of the Eucharist in Vatican Council I. But at the same time, Vatican I confirmed the existence of mysteria stricte dicta, which gave an authoritative starting point of the neo-scholastic school of theology in the question of the mysteria. The discussions of new scholastic theology were around the concepts of mysteria stricte dicta or “mysteria absoluta”, i.e., “true and proper mysteries” or mysteries of faith (mysteria fidei) in the strict sense”.


O’Rourke explains the influence of Dionysius on the writings of Aquinas. He argues that the Dionysius effect is spectacular in metaphysical questions like the nature of existence, the hierarchy of beings, the nature of God, and the theory of creation in Aquinas’ writings (Cf. O’Rourke 2005, p. 5). But authors like Richard C. Taylor say that “it is not obvious how Aquinas read, understood, and transformed the Christian Neoplatonic theology in this apparent disciple of Proclus or Damascius so as to make it an integral part of his understanding on God and creation” (Taylor 1996, p. 842), available online: https://epublications.marquette.edu/phil_fac/842, accessed on 8 April 2024.

All citations from the Council documents are taken from Decrees of the First Vatican Council, available online: https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum20.htm, accessed on 12 April 2024.

Even though the First Vatican Council was trying to give answers to questions like rationalism, semi-rationalism, pantheism, fideism, and devaluation of reason, there were seven references to the term “mystery” in the council documents, Pater Aeternus and Dei Filii. But for the First Vatican Council, the concept of “mystery” denoted something transrational and unrevealed truths. It was something opposite to the revealed truth. The emphasis of the Council was on the corpus visible, the visible body of Christ. The concept of mystery was not connected with the Church in the documents but was related to the mystery of the Eucharist in Vatican Council I. But at the same time, Vatican I confirmed the existence of mysteria stricte dicta, which gave an authoritative starting point of the neo-scholastic school of theology in the question of the mysteria. The discussions of new scholastic theology were around the concepts of mysteria stricte dicta or “mysteria absoluta”, i.e., “true and proper mysteries” or mysteries of faith (mysteria fidei) in the strict sense”.

Agnus explains in detail the three stages given by Proclus, five stages given by Olympiodorus, and five stages given by Theo Smyrnaeus (Cf. Agnus 1975, p. 61).

Taurobolium was formed as part of the ritual of the Cybele–Attis cult from the second century onwards. Based on the description of a Christian poet, Prudentius, Agnus explains the details of this ritual: “A trench was dug over which was erected a platform of planks with perforations and gaps. Upon the platform, the sacrificial bull was slaughtered, whose blood dripped through upon the initiate in the trench. He exposed his head and all his garments to be saturated with the blood; then he turned around and held up his neck so that the blood might trickle upon his lips, ears, eyes, and nostrils; he moistened his tongue with the blood, which he then drank as a sacramental act. Greeted by the spectators, he came forth from this bloody baptism believing that he was purified from his sin and born again for eternity” (Agnus 1975, p. 76).

A similar rite of initiation has been practiced even today in the Hindu religion in some places in India. Aitareya Brahmana:1,3 explains how to conduct such rites. The one who is initiated is admitted into an embryo, which is made by the priests, and they sprinkle him with water, which is symbolized as a man’s sperm. The priests cover him with a garment, which is the caul. Above that, they put the black antelope skin as the placenta is above the caul. He closes his hands, and the embryo has its hands closed so long as it is within; the child is born with closed hands. The initiand casts off the black antelope skin to enter the final bath, and the embryos then enter the world with the placenta cast off. He keeps on his garment to enter it, and therefore a child is born with a call upon it. Details are available from https://factsanddetails.com/world/cat55/sub388/entry-5634.html#chapter-2, accessed on 4 April 2022.


Girard says the Greek word for the sacrifices of the people, pharmakoi, refers to those victims who were ritually beaten, driven out of cities, and killed. He says, “the word pharmakos, designating a person who is selected as a ritual victim, is related to pharmakon, which means both ‘remedy’ and ‘poison,’ depending on the context”. (Girard 2001, p. 51)

Marvin W. Meyer mentions texts from Apuleius, The Golden Ass, bk 11; the Mitraic inscriptions from Santa Prisca; the inscription of 376 C.E. on the taurobolium and criobolium, (the bath in the blood of a bull or a ram); (Meyer 1987).

Sbawtaputth is the Syriac word equivalent to the Greek koimonia and Latin communio and denotes fellowship or sharing with someone or something.

Mrtabdrannut is the Syriac word equivalent to the Greek oikonomia and Latin disposition and dispensation and denotes the revelation of God through the incarnation, life, and works of God.


**Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.