

1. Jesus' birth paradigm of radical transformation, in Jn.3, has been and remains a fundamental strand in Christian (a) understanding of the divine intention and (b) experiencing of the divine grace, which is perceived under this image as at work in proportion to the radicality-spectacularity of the transformation experience [= "conversion," to use the Hebrew image (thus literalized into Lat.) "turning around" for repentance--life-change]. The passage from darkness to light after a long gestatory experience [in contrast to which the actual passage seeming sudden] is the joyous experience I had at 17 after several years of gestation under three-times-a-week fundamentalist preaching--a self-chosen exposure, unencouraged by my parents, who worried about my [my father's word] "fanaticism."
2. While in the present [the new wave of evangelicalism] some young people have this exposure, my own children did not--either under my preaching as they were growing up, or subsequently. They've had their own post-natal birth experiences, but none that give them a gut identification with the evangelical heritage.... This thinksheet puzzles over this. My children, of course, have some things I haven't; this evangelical-style "new birth" experience is something they don't have, and their parents do. "Twice-born," it's sometimes called. But one of the children is now writing a thesis on drugs and conversion....The evangelical church, with its warm promises/threats, was a social womb for Loree [by birth] and me [by choice]; and neither of us any more dissociates ourselves from it than we would deny our mothers--nor is either of us tied to its apron string.
3. The fresh occasion for these musings is the appearance of a major report on psychedelic research, REALMS OF THE HUMAN UNCONSCIOUS: OBSERVATIONS FROM LSD RESEARCH [Viking/75], by Prague's honored psychiatrist Stanislav Grof. Chemistry is of course unnecessary to consciousness altering. It can be achieved by the opposite of adding something to the body, i.e. by fasting [depriving the body of something: Socrates standing overnight in a snowbank; food/drink fasting (= "fasting" in the narrow sense); oxygen deprivation, as in advanced yoga tongue-swallowing or the carboxygen trip (which I had: brain deoxygenated for 2 1/2 minutes)]. Or it can be achieved by sensory deprivation/overload, prolonged isolation, meditation, fantasizing, hypnosis, ritual, and (as we've been hearing ad nauseam) dying. What contrasts Grof with most other authors here is his combination of scientific competence and metaphysical modesty. In this he is a model for the psycho- side of the psychotheotherapy dialog. I should add a third factor, viz. his extensive awareness of mythological and religious materials out of and in the psyche--which enable him, on the birth paradigm, to transcend Freud, Rank, and Jung.
4. In class yesterday (6Oct76) I said, "God will not ask what you did with your head. He'll ask what you did with your feet, and from that he'll be able to figure out what you did with your head." An Orthodox rabbi strongly agreed; how Jewish can you get? I have the feeling that Grof, too, is life-oriented instead of psyche-oriented....He believes that the birth process provides matrices (lit., "wombs") for all future experiencing: (1) peace, trust, security [INTRAUTERINE], (2) sin, loss, suffering [LABOR CONTRACTIONS, changing the womb from friendly to hostile], and (3) struggle, judgment, [re]birth/resurrection [PASSAGE OUT OF THE MOTHER'S BODY--which I say instead of THROUGH THE BIRTH CANAL, for all three of our children had to be born Caesarean]. (Grof separates death-of-the-ego into [re]birth/resurrection off from stage #3, making it stage #4.)....Additional notes: (1) Pharmacology is only amplificative; (2) Those who relive the three stages are freed up to "the transpersonal": Paradise is an amplification-enrichment of Eden; (3) Compare Streng et al, WAYS OF BEING RELIGIOUS, in definition of religion as "ultimate transformation"; (4) Huston Smith has been at work in this area: FORTGOTTEN TRUTH: THE PRIMORDIAL EXPERIENCE (Harper/76).
5. AFFIRMATION OF FAITH: I find the birth paradigm, and this research, exciting to my upper coil [cerebration] and my lower coil [feeling]. Three cheers!