

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

ANCIENT MYTHS AND SYMBOLS IN

THE CHRISTIAN TETRAMORPHS

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BY

ANNA LIND MACLEOD

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is attempting to trace the origins of the quaternary principle as displayed by the Christian Tetramorphs, with their synthesis of the four symbols of the Evangelists. There are numerous ways by which this ancient and universal idea may be explained, one is by way of diffusion of mythological material, another is linked with man's intuitive sense of spacial order and his concept of situation.

### MYTH

Chapter one deals with the importance of myth in the development of the Hebrew scriptures. Myths borrowed from earlier civilisations and neighbouring countries were used by the Hebrew scribes to express in symbolic terms their beliefs about the origin of the universe. The Eschatological myth was especially important to present the history of the Israeli people as a 'Salvation-History'. The concept of a catastrophic end of the present world order is a theme particularly characteristic to Jewish and Christian literature. Although it may owe something to the eschatology of Zoroastrianism ! (1).

There are two ways by which the presence of myths in any society may be explained. Some historians favour the doctrine of a spontaneous growth of historically unrelated ideas, while others believe only in the spread of myths through culture. There are reasonable grounds for assuming that trade, travel movements, migrations of peoples and invasions were a means of diffusion by which myths might be carried from one country to another. A geographical explanation for the Sumerian and Babylonian forms of the Flood-myth is the presence of the Tigris - Euphrates river and the periodical occurrence there of disastrous floods. But when we find the Flood-myth in countries where floods are not commonly known, it is no longer possible to trace or prove the method of diffusion. Otto RANK contends that "The myth is the collective dream of the people". A concept substantiated by many others including Rudolf STEINER, who believes in the common origin of the human race, which he states may be proven by the universal themes of folklore, legend and symbolism. (2)



## SYMBOL

Chapter two - in symbolism, numbers are not merely expressions of quantities but idea-forces, each with particular characteristics. The Greeks were much preoccupied with numbers and their combinations. Pythagoras observed that "everything is disposed according to numbers". Plato regarded the number as the essence of harmony and such harmony as the basis of the cosmos, saying that the movements of harmony "are of the same kind as the regular revolutions of our soul".

The same basic philosophy of numbers is found in Oriental thought Lao-Tse for example "One becomes two, two becomes three, and from the ternary comes one, the new order as four". (3) The idea that one engenders two and two creates three is founded on the idea that every entity tends to surpass its limits, or to confront itself with its opposite. If the number four no longer signifies separation but the orderly arrangement of what is separate, this chapter endeavours to show how the Christian Tetramorphs were based on sacred geometry in representing the cardinal points bringing the cosmos to order.

## CHRISTIAN

Chapter three looks at the content and emphasis of the Apocryphal Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Although there were numerous other Gospels which purported to recount facts not included in the four that we know, they are generally of a later date and of doubtful reliability. Tatian, a Syrian Christian of the second century (A.D. 170) who devised the first harmony of the Gospels, used for his work only the four, although he must have known of others. Iraneous, Bishop of Lyons and Vienne who lived about A.D. 180, said this concerning the Gospels:

"It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout the world, and the 'Pillar and Ground' of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh". (4)



In the New Testament, the 'Salvation-History' of the Israeli people reaches a crisis. The Jewish writers, whose minds had been moulded in the patterns of the Old Testament, used the same mythological elements to quote the historical events of this new and overwhelming display of divine activity. There is a considerable amount of ambiguity in the meaning and use of the terms, myth and symbol. The common distinction drawn between myth, symbolism, legend and saga is based upon literary criteria. A further current usage distinguishes between myth and historical truth. Arguing from the premise that there are symbols which exist only within their own symbolic structure, the conclusion is then drawn that all events which appear to be both historical and symbolic at once may be seen simply as symbolic matter transformed into legend and hence into history. This deplorable error has caused a considerable amount of protest from scholars. Mircea Eliade provides an interesting argument :

"The two points of view are only superficially irreconcilable ... for it must not be thought that a symbolic connotation annuls the material or specific validity of an object or action. Symbolism adds a new value to an object or an act, without thereby violating its immediate or 'historical' validity. Once it is brought to bear, it turns the object or action into an 'open' event; symbolic thought opens the door onto immediate reality for us, but without weakening or invalidating it; seen in this light, the universe is no longer sealed off, nothing is isolated inside its own existence : everything is linked by a system of correspondences and assimilations. Man in early society become aware of himself is a world 'wide' open and rich in meaning. It remains to be seen whether these 'openings' are just another means of escape or whether, on the other hand, they offer the only possible way of accepting the true reality of the world". (5)



There is a slight hint of scepticism at the end of this passage which could be ascribed to Eliade's predominantly scientific training at a time when science had achieved a basically analytical understanding of 'reality' without being able to grasp the overall organic unity of knowledge - that is as 'multiplicity in unity'. I feel that this scientific shortcoming has been instrumental in bringing about a loss of 'world-image'. This image is a synthesis of collective understanding which seems to be becoming increasingly more difficult for modern man to understand. Again, in connection with the relationship between the historic and the symbolic, Rene Guenon has observed :

"There is indeed an over eager acceptance of the belief that to allow a symbolic meaning must imply the rejection of the literal or historic meaning; such a view shows an ignorance of the laws of correspondences. This law is the foundation of all symbolism and by virtue of it, every thing proceeding from a metaphysical principle, which is the source of its reality, translates and expresses this principle in its own way and according to its own level of existence, so that all things are related and joined together in total, universal harmony which is, in its many guises, a reflection, as it were, of its own fundamental unity ... one result of this is the range of meaning contained in every symbol; any one thing may, indeed, be regarded as an illustration not only of metaphysical principles, but also of higher levels of reality". (6)

Thus the symbolic being independent of the historical, does not exclude it but roots it firmly in reality, because of the parallelism between the collective and individual world and the cosmic.

If we consider the myth and its symbolic content as a product of the human imagination arising out of a definite situation, the intention is at once functional and it is the use of that function in a religious context that this thesis is attempting to determine.



- (1) PERSIAN ZOROASTER (approximately C1200 + C550 B.C.)  
The world is seen as a compound of good and evil, light and dark, wisdom and violence, contending for victory. It is supposed that with the birth of Zoroastre, a decisive turn is given in the favour of good, and that when he returns in the person of the Messiah Saoshyant, there will be a final battle and cosmic conflagration; whereafter, all will be light and the kingdom of God Ahura Mazda will have been established forever.

- (2)\* CIRLOT. J,E, A DICTIONARY OF SYMBOLS p.15  
(3) JUNG. C,G. PSYCHOLOGY AND ALCHEMY p.125  
(4) TENNEY. M,C, THE NEW TESTAMENT, A HISTORICAL AND ANALYTIC SURVEY p.147  
(5) ELIADE. Mircea IMAGES AND SYMBOLS p.64  
(6) GUENON. Rene THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CROSS p.98

\* Publication data in bibliography



## CHAPTER 1. MYTH

"ALL MEN NATURALLY DESIRE TO KNOW"

(Opening words of Metaphysics, Aristotle)

The myth is no longer considered a mode of thought reserved for primitive societies; the object of the myth may be to explain the world, to make its phenomena intelligible. As with science, it would seem its purpose is to supply man with a means of influencing the universe, of making sure of material and spiritual 'possession' of it. Given a universe full of uncertainties and mysteries, the myth intervenes to introduce the human element. Natural displays of power (thunder, lightning, floods, etc) tend to lose much of their impetus when given the sensibility and motivation that an individual experiences daily. In this way, myth plays a large part in our intimate daily life by answering a fundamental need of the human mind. In the world of a child, to identify unknown forces as angels or fairies is a way of gaining influence over them by drawing them close. At this elementary stage, the myth is not fundamentally religious, here, the spirits of lights, water, earth, air, are not merely divinities but presences governing spheres over which we have no control. The relationship which we suppose these presences have with ourselves can be determined by persuasion, prayer and magical constraint.

### THE RITUAL AND CULT MYTHS

Most of the texts, from which our knowledge of Near and Middle Eastern mythology is based, have been found in temple archives. They imply the existence of highly developed urban civilizations resting on an agricultural basis. These texts show that the dwellers of the Nile and the Tigris-Euphrates river valleys had created an elaborate pattern of activities, to which the term 'ritual' has been accorded. The ritual consisted of the part which was done (dromenon - Greek) and the spoken part (muthos - or myth - Greek).



In the ritual, the myth tells the story of what is being enacted. At the Babylonian New Year Festival, the priests recited the ENUMA ELISH, which was the myth of creation. The yearly re-creation of this ritual myth was seeking to establish the renewal of Nature, to go back to the beginning of creation in order to ensure the perennial survival of cosmic order. With the myth performing a vital role in the life of a community, the ritual helped to secure conditions upon which the life of the community depended.

In the development of the religion of Israel, a new use of the ritual myth makes its appearance. The three seasonal festivals described in the Book of the Covenant were celebrated at various local shrines during the early stages of Israel's settlement in Canaan. An important part of each of the festivals (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles) consisted of the public recitation by the priests of certain events central to the history of Israel; the recitation was accompanied by antiphonal responses from the people. One of the most deeply rooted traditions of Israel was that of the deliverance of the people from the Egyptian bondage. At the feast of the Passover, this event was celebrated with a ritual whose origin was far older than the historical event thus commemorated.

Accompanying the ritual was the cult myth describing the event, not in historical terms, but in symbolic language, borrowed in part from Babylonian and Canaanite mythology (1). The function of the cult myth was to confirm the covenant relationship between Israel and their God Yahweh and to magnify glory and power of God.

#### THE ESCHATOLOGICAL MYTH

The purpose for which the early Hebrew writers (known as the Yahwist) had collected groups of myths belonging to various ancient civilizations and reformed their ideas into the form of a continuous narrative was to present the history of mankind and of his own people as a 'Salvation-History'. The prophets believed that world history must have its consummation in decisive divine intervention. The Eschatological use of myth was carried over to the New Testament where it becomes the foundation of



the teaching of Jesus Christ embodied in the Apocalypse of St. John.

#### THE MYTH OF CREATION (Ordering of Chaos)

In the first two chapters of Genesis, there are two stories of creation. The first has been assigned to the editorial activity of the priestly scribes after the Exile. There is a resemblance between the account of the creation contained in the Babylonian Epic of Creation and the account given by the priestly writers. The primeval condition of the universe in this version is a disordered chaos of waters, a state which corresponds with the description of the primeval state given in both the Sumerian and Babylonian forms of the creation myth. In the Babylonian ENUMA ELISH, the God Marduk splits the chaos-dragons (TIAMAT) body into two and fixes half of it in the heavens to keep the waters above in their place. The priestly account corresponds to this where the creation of the firmament is depicted as a solid vault stretched out above the earth. (See Job 38:4-11) The earlier version is regarded as the work of either two schools of opinion or possibly two individuals YAHWIST and ELOHIST. These were active in the early period of the monarchy and transcribed the oral traditions to manuscript. In the YAHWIST tradition, the original state was an uninhabited waste without water, man or vegetation. Both the Nile valley and the Tigris-Euphrates delta were dependent upon irrigation from the rivers but cultivation in Palestine was always dependent upon the regular autumn and spring rains which were regarded as a special gift from YAHWEH.

(See Jeremiah 5:24, 14:22 and Deuteronomy 11:10-12)

The differences between the two accounts may be best seen by setting them out in tabular form :-

<u>PRIESTLY</u> (Genesis 1:2-3)	<u>YAHWIST</u> (Genesis 2:4-25)
Original state of universe is a watery chaos	Original state of the universe is a waterless waste, without vegetation



PRIESTLY

The work of creation is assigned to Elohim and is divided into six separate operations, each belonging to one day.

Order of creation is :-

- a. Light
- b. The firmament - heaven
- c. Dry land. Separation of water from sea.
- d. Vegetation - 3 orders
- e. Heavenly bodies - Sun, moon stars.
- f. Birds and fish
- g. Animals and man - male and female together

YAHWIST

The work of creation is assigned to Yahweh Elohim. No note of time.

Order of creation is :-

- a. Man made from dust
- b. The garden to the East - EDEN
- c. Trees of every kind, including the tree of life, and of good and evil.
- d. Animals/beasts/birds
- e. Woman created of man

In addition to these two main versions of the ordering of chaos there are various references in Hebrew poetry to the divine activity in creation which suggest that other forms of the myth of creation may have been current in Israel. In Psalm 74:12-17, we have an account of how YAHWEH in a contest with the waters smote the many-headed Leviathan and then proceeded to create day and night, the heavenly bodies, and order the seasons. In the AKKADIAN Epic of Creation, Marduk's slaying of the chaos dragon TIAMAT is followed by his ordering of the universe and by the building of a great temple ESAGILA in Babylon. However, the name of the water-dragon Leviathan is generally accepted as the same as the Ugaritic LOTAN, the dragon slain by the God BAAL (2). Hence, it is possible that the writer of Psalm 74 was acquainted with many forms of the creation myth. Further traces of the creation story which are not dependent on the two main versions found in Genesis, Chapters 1 and 2, occur in Job 38. Here we find God described as laying the foundations of the earth on sockets 'When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted



for joy'. This finds an echo in the Ugaritic Epic of Creation where the gods rejoice the victory of MARDUK and also in the feast prepared by the God BAAL for the gods and goddesses to celebrate the building of his magnificent palace (3). We also have the taming of the waters, to which God says 'Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed' (Verse 11). In Job 3:8, there is a reference to Leviathan and the implication is that his name may have at some stage been used in magical spells.

Job 3:8 :

"Let those curse it who curse the day,  
who are skillful to rouse up  
Leviathan".

Under the name of RAHAB 'The Arrogant One' in Job 26:12-14, there is yet another account of creation but this has become poeticized and is less reliant on the ancient forms of the myth.

In the Book of ISAIAH, the myth of the chaos-dragon passes into eschatology.

ISAIAH 27 :

1. "In that day the Lord with His hand and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent and He will slay the dragon that is in the sea"

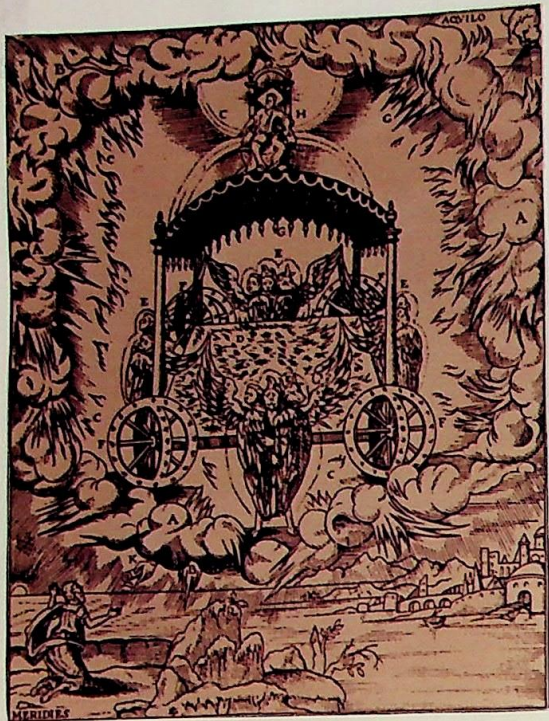
Isaiah lived at a critical time in Israel's history when the existence of the people were threatened by the King of Assyria (8th century). The latter part of the Book is remarkable for the words of comfort and encouragement and perhaps even more for the remarkable 'Servant Songs' prophecies about the Messiah to come, foretelling his sufferings (Isaiah 42:1-4). However, it is to EZEKIEL that we turn for the remarkable imagery of the Cherubim, throne of God and the symbolism of the four living creatures.

EZEKIEL'S VISION OF HEAVEN

EZEKIEL 1

"As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the North





1. THE VISION OF EZEKIEL  
from the 'Bear' Bible.



2. THE VISION OF EZEKIEL  
from the 'Winchester' Bible.

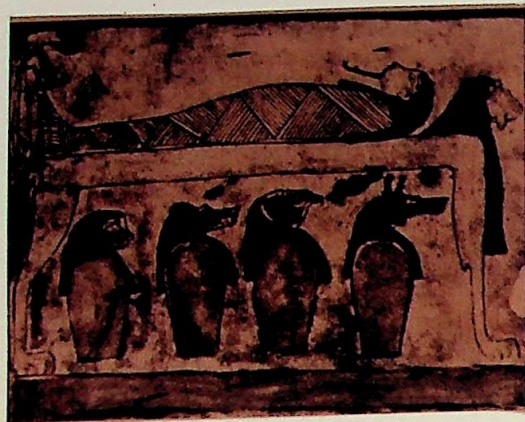
and a great cloud, with brightness about it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming bronze. And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance : they had the form of men, but each had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings, on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and wings thus; their wings touched one another; they went everyone straight forward, without turning as they went. As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man in front; the four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle at the back. Such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above; each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another while two covered their bodies. And each went straight forward; wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went." (FIGS.1 and 2).

The explanatory notes of the Revised Edition of the Holy Bible say of the 'Four Living Creatures' : "The description recalls the Assyrian Karibu; statues of animals with human heads guarding the palace at Nineveh. Here these creatures are pressed into the service of YAHWEH". Yet this might as easily be said of the four sons of HORUS, from the Egyptian Pyramid texts (Fig.3).

In mysticism, the four animal natures, creatures of the lower senses, must first be overcome by man before he can enter into the light. Adolph Franck wrote :

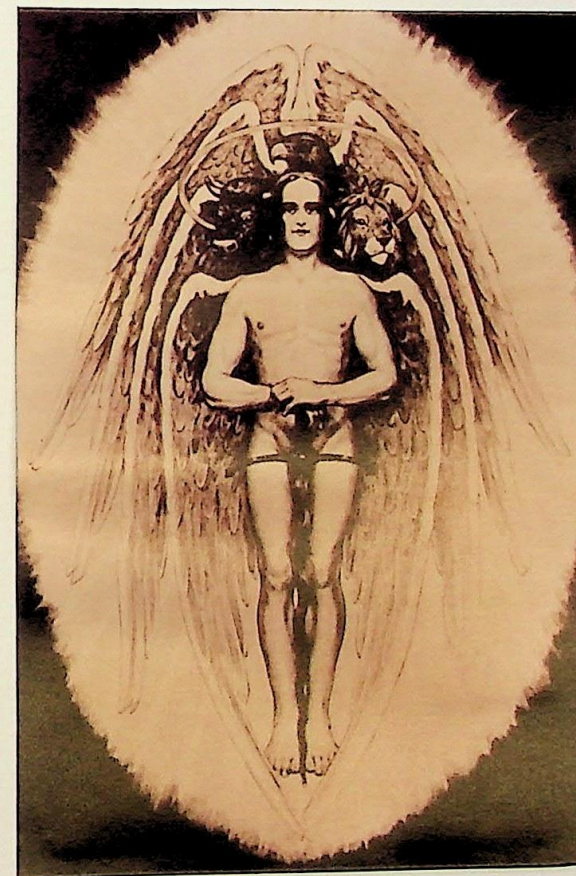
"All human faces may be traced, finally to four primary types, to which they can either draw near or from which they recede according to the rank held by the souls in their intellectual and moral order. These types are the Cherubim which occupy the mysterious chariot of Ezekiel, that is to say the figures of man of the lion, of the ox and of the eagle"(4). (Fig.4)





### 3. THE FAR SONS OF HORUS

The four Canopic Jars whose covers bear the heads of the sons of Horus - Amset, Hapi, Duamutef and Senuf, the guardians of the four directions - were the receptacles for a dead Egyptian's internal organs.



### 4. THE CHERUB OF EZEKIEL

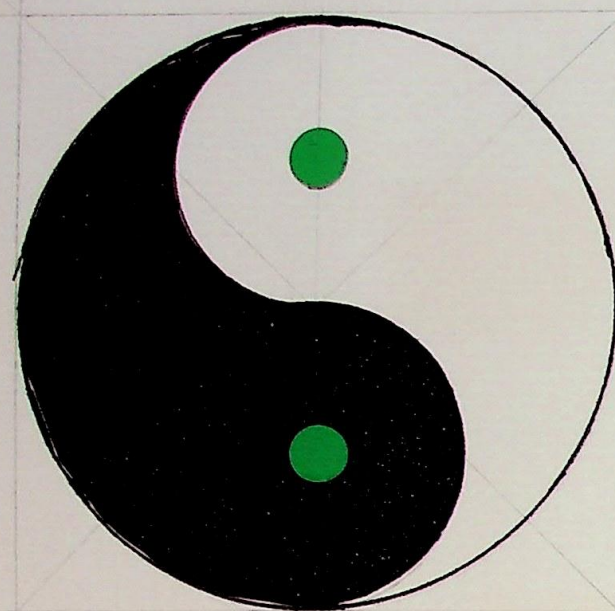
By Manly P. Hall.

The four living creatures as autonomous zones may take on a beneficial or malign character. As with the archers posted at the cardinal points in order to safeguard the cosmic arrangement, I wish to emphasise the beneficial aspects of the quaternary principle as a defense against the latter influence. When the twelve tribes of Israel encamped in the wilderness, the banners of Rueben (the man), Judah (the lion), Ephraim (the bull) and Dan (the eagle) were palced at the four corners (5). Sir W. Drummond has stated that the arrangement of the Israeli camp was symbolic of the order of the universe (6). According to Jung, such analogy expresses the strength and cohesion of a spacial order derived intuitively from spiritual and psychological principles (7).

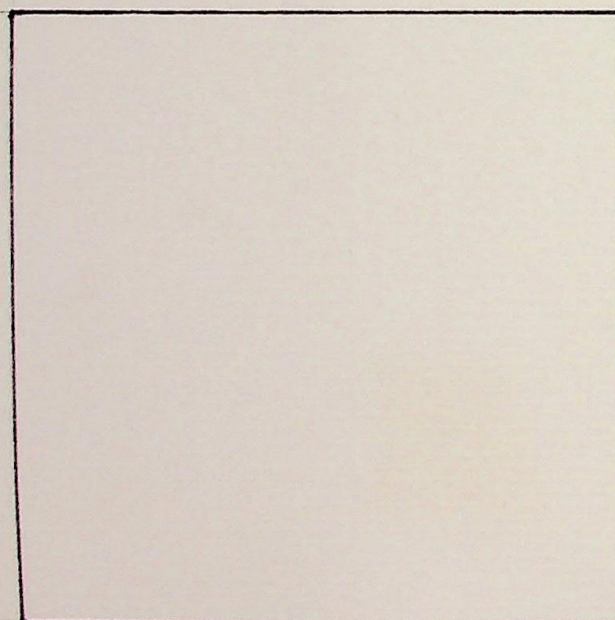


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|-----|-----------------|---|--------|
| (1) | HOOKE. S,H,     | <u>MIDDLE EASTERN MYTHOLOGY</u>   | p.13   |
| (2) | PRICHARD. J,B,  | <u>THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN<br/>TEXTS RELATING TO THE OLD<br/>TESTAMENT</u> | p. 104 |
| (3) | IBID            |   | p.117  |
| (4) | FRANCK, Adolph  | <u>THE KABBALAH</u>   | p. 94  |
| (5) | HALL, Manley,P, | <u>THE SECRET TEACHINGS<br/>OF ALL AGES</u>                                 | p.75   |
| (6) | DRUMMOND.W,     | <u>THE OEDIPUS JUDAICUS</u>   | p.54   |
| (7) | CIRLOT. J,E,    | <u>A DICTIONARY OF SYMBOLS</u>  | p.320  |





DIAG. 1  
YIN YANG SYMBOL



DIAG. 2  
SQUARE

## CHAPTER 2. SYMBOL

'NOTHING IS PURE FORM, EVERYTHING IS SUBSTANCE  
AND ACTION, BY VIRTUE OF SIGNS'  
(Anna Katerina Emmerich)

In symbolism, numbers are not merely quantitative but have symbolic qualities relative to geometric forms. In many traditions, notably the Babylonian, Hindu and Pythagorean, number is a fundamental principle from which the whole objective world proceeds; it is the origin of all things and the underlying harmony of the universe. In Chinese culture, odd numbers are yang; Yang is the active principle, the spirit, and is depicted by all that is light, dry and high, such as the mountain, the heavens, all solar animals and birds. Even numbers are yin, the passive principle, it is symbolised by all that is dark and belonging to the earth. The yin-yang symbol, the Taki (Diag.1) depicts the perfect balance of the two forces, each contains the germ of the other and there is perpetual alternation; one in essence, but two in manifestation. Greek preoccupation with numbers gave the ancients both 'rational' and 'super-rational' tools which could provide the key to a greater and more comprehensive realisation of 'world-image'. As tools for both the 'feeling' which requires meaning, and for the 'intellect' which requires reason, it is necessary to view numerology in the context of myth and symbol.

The numbers that concern this study are the representations of geometric forms that are incorporated in the imagery of the Christian Tetramorphs. We have already seen in Chapter one how the world was ordered by the separation of the four basic elements (Genesis). From four, one first solid figure is produced (The Square)(Diagr.2); it is the spacial scheme or order of manifestation, the static as opposed to the circular and dynamic form of the 'heavenly' number three. There are four cardinal points, seasons, winds, sides of the square, arms of the cross, rivers of paradise and quarters of the moon.



The quaternary principle depicted by the square and the cross is almost universal in symbolism. In Hindu culture the number four represents totality and perfection. Brahma, the creator, is four-faced watching and governs the four bodies of man and the kingdoms of nature (animal, vegetable, mineral, mind). To the Christian, four is the number of the body, with three as the soul. Christ, the man, was crucified on a cross and the spirit became one in the Trinity.

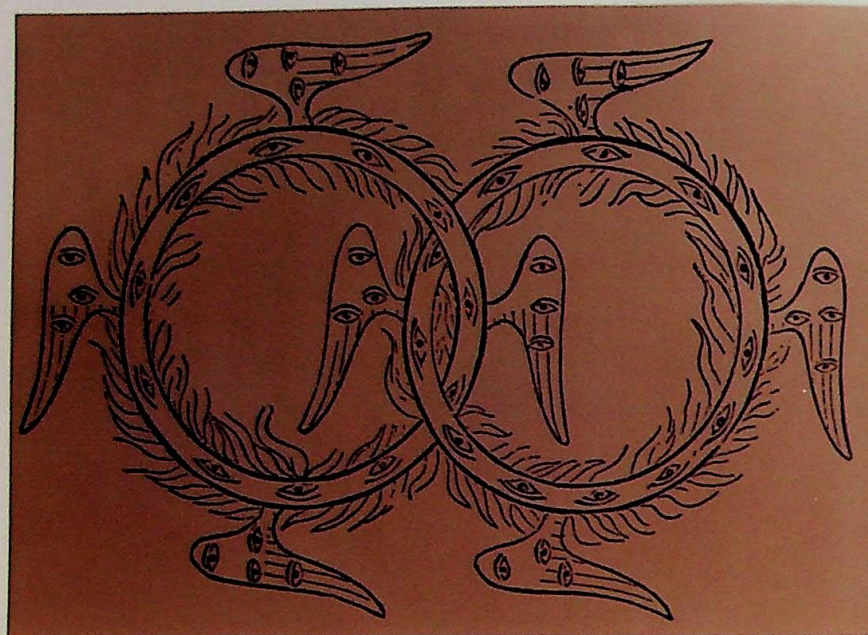
"Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said 'Father, into Thy hands, I commit my spirit". (Luke 24:46).

In medieval symbolism, the cross of Christ was said to have been made from the wood of the Tree of Knowledge, the cause of the fall, which thus became the instrument of redemption (1). The pattern of four Evangelists (as archers defending the Truth and Order of Christ) is completed by the number Five; four plus the centre. The idea of dividing a country into four provinces implies the same basic principle. Ireland used to be called the 'Island of the Four Kings', each King corresponding to a region, with the High King in the Centre. It is in this centre symbolised by a circle or a mandorla, that Christ is often placed, protected by the Evangelists. Five is the number of man, forming a pentagon with outstretched arms and legs. Like the circle, the pentagon represents the whole, the quincunx being the number of the centre and the meeting point of heaven and earth, and the four cardinal points.

#### CIRCLE

The circle has been universally accepted as a sacred symbol, one which expresses archetypal wholeness, and, therefore, divinity. Very frequently, the circle or disc is an emblem of the sun. When the Christian Missionaries asked the Red Indians about their God, they drew the circle of the feathered sun, with its red 'feathers' pointing inwards and the black outwards, depicting the two-way movement of power - inwards towards the centre; and outwards to the circumference, containing everything within itself.





5. WHEELS FROM THE THRONE OF GOD  
from Christian Iconography by  
Adolphe Napoleon, Dideron, 1886.

Including the number three, the circle also bears a relationship to the number ten symbolising the return to unity from multiplicity, in ten it also comes to stand for heaven and perfection. Jung observed that the square represents the lowest of the composite numbers and the pluralist state of man who has not reached inner unity whilst the circle would correspond to the ultimate state, oneness (2).

With the cross, the circle is one of the most complex of symbols, it represents the annulment of time and space and in the form of a wheel it also signifies perpetual recurrence and cyclic movement. The turning of the wheel depends on the axis, the point at the centre round which everything revolves but which is itself unmoving. This is known as the 'point quiescent', the unmoved 'mover' spoken of by Aristotle. In Ezekiel's 'Vision of Heaven' (Ezekiel 1:1-28) the Throne of God is borne upon flaming wheels with eyes and wings (Fig.5).

Verse 20 :

"Wherever the spirit would go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels".

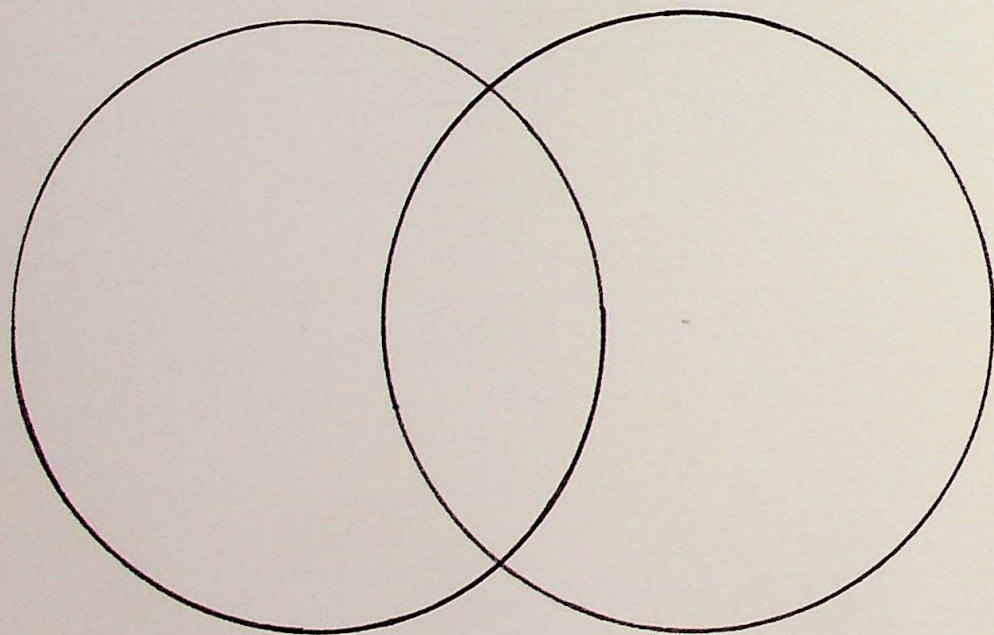
The symbolism of the circle and the centre is developed to a high degree in the Mandala, which combines the circle, square or cross and the centre. The world Mandala is derived from the Arabic AL MANDAL or centre. In Tibetan Buddhism, where it plays an important part, it portrays a world-image into which the meditation must penetrate, representing the pilgrimage of the soul through the world. The centre, when reached, is the sky door, a place of ultimate spiritual awareness. Hindu temples are constructed in the form of a Mandala, an important example of this comes from Indo-China - The Temple of BOROBUDUR (The seat of Secret Revelation) on the Island of Java. The temple is built in a series of terraces, four square shaped levels, with four more circular platforms surmounted by an enclosed belvedere. The terraces represent the universe as levels on the way to heaven. This format is similar to the concept of the Ziggurat temples of the Mesopotamians.





#### 6. TETRAMORPHS

Peacock-Angel opens a mandorla in the sky, in which Christ and the Tetramorphs are displayed. From the Bamberg Apocalypse, 15th. Century.



DIAG. 3. MANDORLA

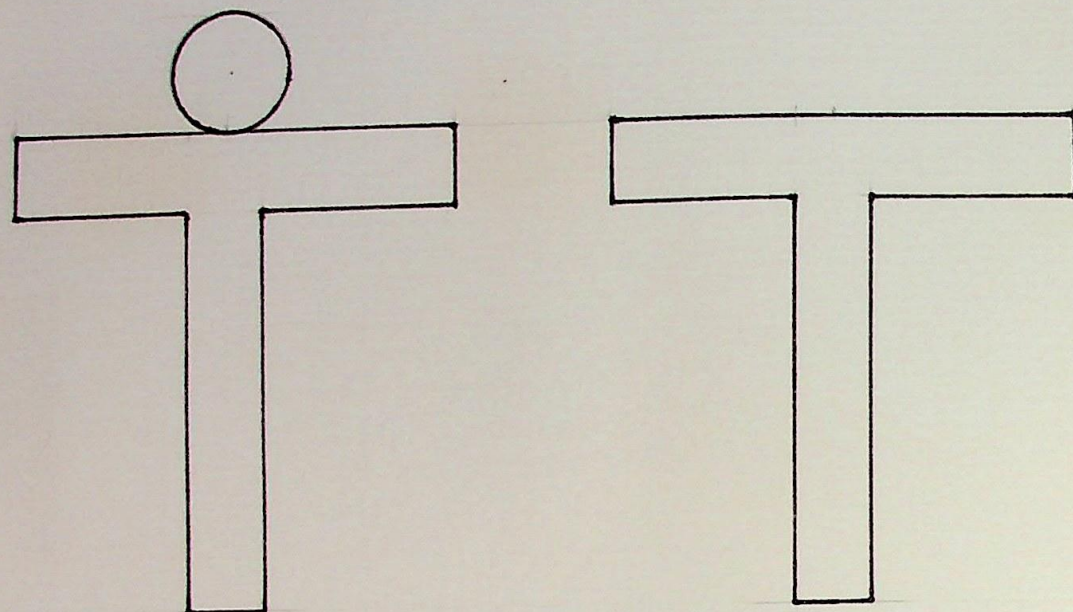
Mircea Eliade adds that the climb to the top of the Mesopotamian or Hindu temple-mountain was equivalent to an ecstatic journey to the centre of the world (3).

Although the geometric symbol of the earth is the square or cube, two circles are sometimes used to symbolize the union of the upper and lower worlds, that is the celestial and the terrestrial. This union is represented by the Mandorla, an almond-shaped figure formed by two intersecting circles (Diagr.3). For the purposes of iconography, the Mandorla is usually drawn vertically and the two circles have come to be regarded as the left (matter) and the right (spirit). The zone of existence symbolised by the Mandorla embraces the opposing poles of all dualism, hence it is a symbol of the dual streams of creative forces, life and death, ascent and descent, evolution and involution. The Mandorla formation is to be found in practically all illustrations of the Christian Tetremorphs (Fig.6).

#### THE CROSS AND THE SQUARE

Inseparably connected with the circle is the square and the cross. The ancient Mesopotamians used to place a circle between two squares in order to find its area. The idea of equating the circle with the square also grew out of the concept of the rotating square. Hence the octagon can be considered, in both a geometric and symbolic sense, the intermediary form between the square and the circle, and the reconciliation of the spiritual and terrestrial. The Christians believed the octagon to be a symbol of regeneration and it is for this reason that many medieval baptisteries, fonts and cupolas are octagonal in shape. In christianity the cross has a two-fold significance, first it is the symbol of the death of Christ and the redemption of mankind through His sacrifice, and secondly it is the symbol of humility, patience and the burden of life. It is interesting that the cross should be both a symbol of life and death. The Egyptian's 'ANKH' cross combining the male and female symbols of Osiris and Isis is a life symbol signifying immortality and 'life to come' (Diagr. 4). As a microcosmic sign, that is by analogy with man, the circle of the 'ANKH' cross would

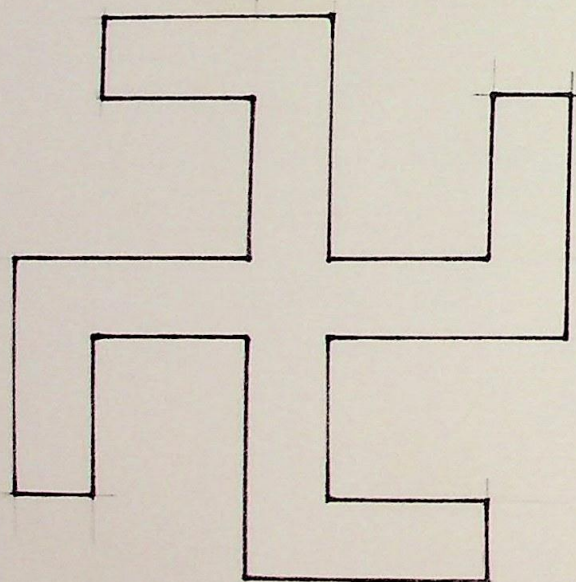




DIAG. 4

'ANKH' CROSS

TAU CROSS



DIAG. 5

GAMMADION

represent the human head or reason, the horizontal his arms, and the upright his body (3). Much of the symbolism of the cross is shared with the 'Tree of Life' as an axis linking the different worlds (the lower world : hell, the middle world : earth, the upper world : heaven).

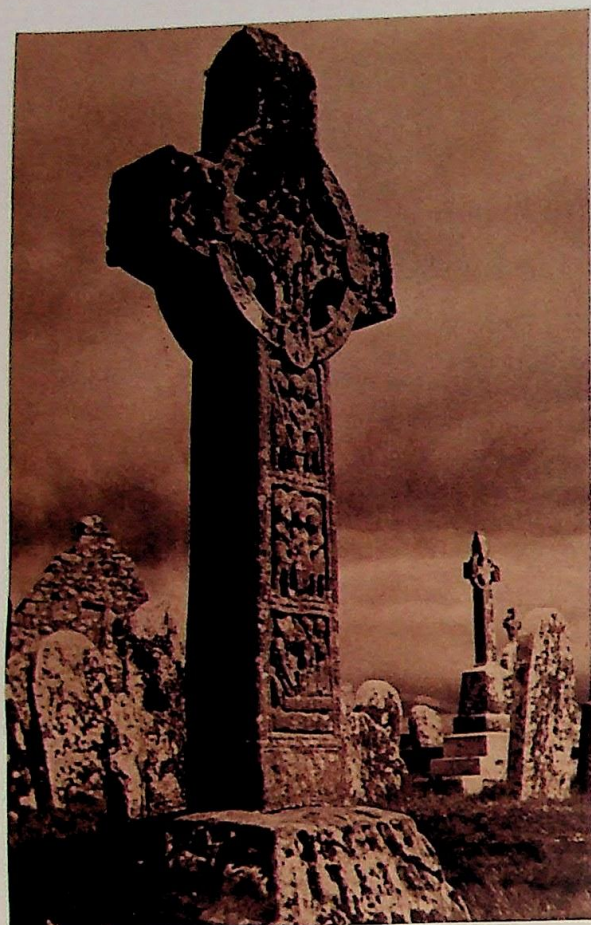
The TAU cross, which is mentioned in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 9:4) as a mark of redemption from the slaughter of the sinners, is to be found all over Asia and the American continent from ancient times. The Spaniards were amazed to find the TAU cross, the 'Tree of Life' and other symbols considered Christian, already long established in the Americas.

The ancient philosophers represented the elements with the four arms of the cross, placing at each end a creature to symbolize the power of that element. Thus they symbolized the element of earth by a bull, water by a scorpion, a serpent or an eagle, fire by a lion, and air by a human head surrounded by wings. In Hebrew symbolism the points of the compass are depicted by: North - winged Ox, South - winged Lion, East - Eagle, West - winged Man (5). Another universal form of the cross is the Swastika, which is in early Christianity appeared frequently in catacombs and stood for a symbol of the power of Christ. In medieval times, its form as the GAMMADION represented not only Christ as the cornerstone but also the four Evangelists, with Christ as the centre. It was used on garments of the early priesthood and was associated with the Good Shepherd (Diagr.5).

In sum, the most general significance of the cross is that of the conjunction of opposites; the positive (or vertical) with the negative (or horizontal), the superior with the inferior, life through death. Plato in TIMAEUS, tells how the demiurge joined up the broken parts of the world-soul by means of two sutures shaped like are St. Andrews cross.

The form of the cross is such that it maintains and destroys free movement; hence it is the antithesis of OROBOROS (the dragon or serpent denoting primeval chaos which preceded the





7. CROSS  
10th. Century monument at  
Clonmacnois, Ireland.

the emergence of order) and bears a close relationship to the sword, since both of them are wielded against the monster (Fig.7).

- |     |                |  |                        |
|-----|----------------|--|------------------------|
| (1) | COOPER. J,C,   | <u>AN ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPAEDIA</u><br><u>OF TRADITIONAL SYMBOLS</u> | p.46                   |
| (2) | CIRLOT. J,E,   | <u>A DICTIONARY OF SYMBOLS</u>                                       | p.65                   |
| (3) | COOPER. J,C,   | <u>SYMBOLISM, THE UNIVERSAL</u><br><u>LANGUAGE</u>                   | p.35                   |
| (4) | HALL. Marly,P, | <u>THE SECRET TEACHINGS OF</u><br><u>ALL AGES</u>                    | p.232                  |
| (5) | COOPER. J,C,   | <u>OP.CIT.</u>   | p.59,p.112,p.154,p.190 |
| (6) | CIRLOT. J,E,   | <u>OP.CIT.</u>   | p.273                  |



### CHAPTER THREE THE CHRISTIAN LINK

"... And round the throne, on each side of the throne are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind; the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all round and within, and day and night they never cease to sing :

"Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God,  
Almighty who was and is and is to come!".

In comparison with Ezekiel's vision, the tremendous beasts of the Apocalypse have been tamed to some extent, although the great commotion of the fiery cloud still seems to linger about them. It was some time before the symbols became definitively attributed to the man to Matthew, as his gospel starts with the enumeration of the human ancestry of Christ, the lion to Mark, because in the beginning of his gospel is quoted the prophecy of Isaiah about 'The voice crying in the desert', the calf or ox to Luke whose gospel starts with the story of Zacharias sacrifice and the eagle to John who soars in his first words to great height like the eagle who is not afraid to fly towards the sun.

When one investigates the content and emphasis of each gospel, it becomes evident that the early writers of the christian message were aware that in order to propagate their beliefs, it would be necessary to clothe the historical events thus commemorated in the same mythological patterns that were so deeply entrenched in the traditions of the people. Similarly, the visual imagery incorporated in the texts must serve both 'ascending' christianity and 'descending' paganism.

#### MATTHEW

The first gospel is traditionally ascribed to Matthew Levi, a tax collector, whom Jesus called to be one of His Twelve disciples.



should serve him;  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
which shall not pass away,  
and his kingdom one  
that shall not be destroyed.

Matthew's gospel is one which is admirably suited to a church which was closely related to Judaism, though becoming increasingly independent of it. If it were written for the Church of Antioch (as the writings of Papias (C.A.D. 115) and Irenaeus (C.A.D. 180) suggest) where gentile converts first came together in large numbers, the reason for the emphasis on the Messianic character would be plain. Matthew was seeking to show the converts the meaning of Jesus' ministry in terms of the Old Testament, which they themselves had been taught.

#### MARK

The earliest witnesses to the gospel of Mark generally accept it to be connected with the teaching of Peter in Rome in the seventh decade of the Christian era. Eusebius (A.D. 325) quotes Clement of Alexandria (C.A.D. 180) to the effect that Peter's hearers urged Mark to leave a record of the doctrine which Peter had communicated orally (2). The reliability of these traditions may be open to question but the content of this gospel suggests that it was written by a man who knew some of the Apostolic band and others who had been eyewitnesses at the time of Jesus.

The gospel is a terse historical account of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The wide use of Latinisms such as 'modius' for bushel and 'census' for tribute, indicate that the place of publication may have been Rome. At any rate, with little emphasis on the teachings of the Old Testament and Jewish Customs, it seems that Mark's gospel was intended for the Roman mentality. The gospel is almost entirely objective in its approach and gives a sequential account of Jesus' ministry; the last few days attracting more detail than any other period. A declaration by Jesus in Mark (10:45) attempts to explain the



tragedy of the crucifixion as an inevitable part of His service to mankind: ' For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many'.

Mark's gospel is seemingly more interested in deeds than in speculation, he pays great attention to minor details making the gospel one of vividness, written in a style which indicates oral testimony of eyewitnesses who were telling what they saw and how it affected them. In sum, it would seem that the purpose of the Gospel of Mark is to bring the message of Christ to the public in a forceful and didactic manner without assuming much knowledge of Theology or of Old Testament teaching on the part of the Hearer.

#### LUKE

'You may press the works of Luke (Luke and Acts) in a degree beyond any other historians, and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment'.(3)

Sir William Ramsey

External tradition supports the conclusion that Luke, the physician and friend of Paul, was the writer of the third gospel. Briefly, he was a Greek speaking gentile by birth who was well educated. He was probably one of the early converts of the first mission at Antioch. Nothing is known of his life until he met Paul at Troas about A.D. 51.

Luke's gospel is the most literary of the four. Four beautiful poems embedded in his work have come down to the Modern Days as Hymns of the Church.

- (1) The Magnificat (Lk. 1:46-55) The song of Mary when she went to visit Elizabeth.
- (2) The Benedictus (Lk. 1:67-79) Spoken by Zacharias at the birth of John the Baptist.
- (3) Gloria in Excelsis (Lk. 2:14) Song of the heavenly Host at the birth of Jesus.
- (4) Nunc Dimittis (Lk. 2 :28-32) Simeon's prayer at the dedication of the Infant Jesus.



Salvation is a prominent teaching in Luke '... The son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost' (Lk. 19:10) is a key sentence in the book, and several parables, particularly those of the fifteenth chapter, illustrate the meaning of salvation (The lost sheep, the Woman and the lost coin, the Prodigal Son). The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is given special prominence; in fact, there are more references to the Holy Spirit in Luke than in Matthew and Mark combined. All of the chief actors of the gospel, John the Baptist (Lk. 1:15), Mary (Lk. 1:35), Elizabeth (Lk.1:41), Zacharias (Lk.1:67), Simeon (Lk. 2:25-26) and Jesus Himself (Lk. 4:1) were empowered for their work by the Holy Spirit. The whole life of Jesus is presented as having been lived through the Spirit, from Conception to Resurrection and He expected that His disciples would complete His work in the power of the Spirit (Lk. 24:49).

#### JOHN

Traditionally, the fourth gospel was written by John, son of Zebedee, the last surviving member of the Apostolic band, while he was spending the declining years of his life at Euphesus. Although this opinion has been consistently attacked, all the Church Fathers from the time of Irenaeus have been in favour of Johannine authorship. From the gospel itself, certain facts about the author may be deduced. Both in John 1:14 'We beheld His glory...' and in John 19:35, where he speaks in the third person 'He who saw it has borne witness...', he claims to be stating what has been part of his personal experience.

We know from this gospel and from the records in the other gospels that John and Jesus were very close. He was with Jesus in Jerusalem during the Judean ministry and was participant later in the mission of the Twelve, as described by Matthew (Mat. 10 : 1-15). John assumed responsibility for Jesus' Mother Mary, when Jesus committed her to his care (John 19 : 26-27) :

26 When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near, He said to His mother : 'Woman, behold your son!'

27 Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!'



And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own home'.

The key to the gospel of John is the statement (John 20:30):

30 'Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, son of God, and that in believing ye may have life in His name'.

The words 'Signs', 'Believe' and 'Life' contain a clue to the organisation of the gospel around a select number of miracles. The seven 'Signs' which were performed by Jesus illustrate different areas of His power and bear witness to the central doctrine of John's gospel - Christ's Deity.

- |                                      |                |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Changing of water into wine       | John 2:1-11    |
| 2. The healing of the Nobleman's son | John 4:46-54   |
| 3. The healing of the Impotent Man   | John 5: 1-9    |
| 4. The feeding of the Five Thousand  | John 6: 1-14   |
| 5. The walking on water              | John 6:16-21   |
| 6. The healing of the Blind Man      | John 9: 1-12   |
| 7. The raising of Lazarus            | John 11: 1-46. |

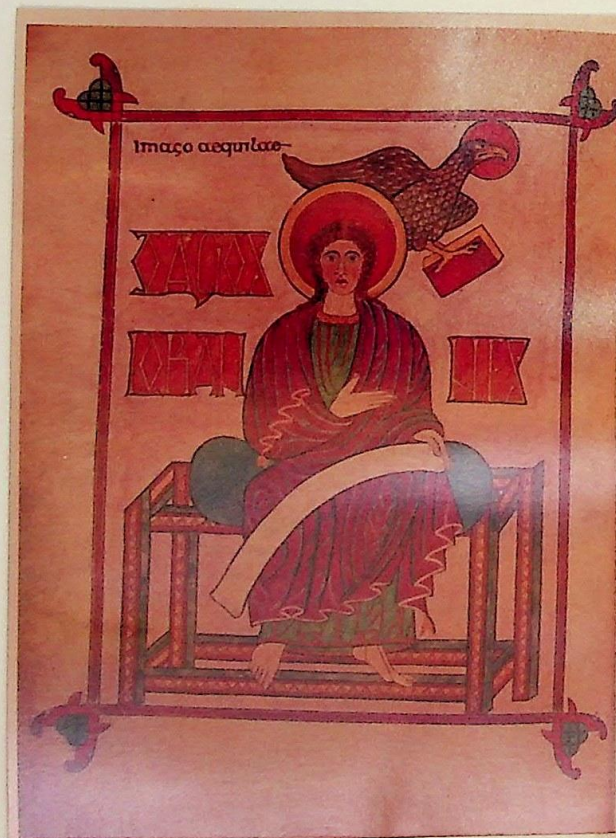
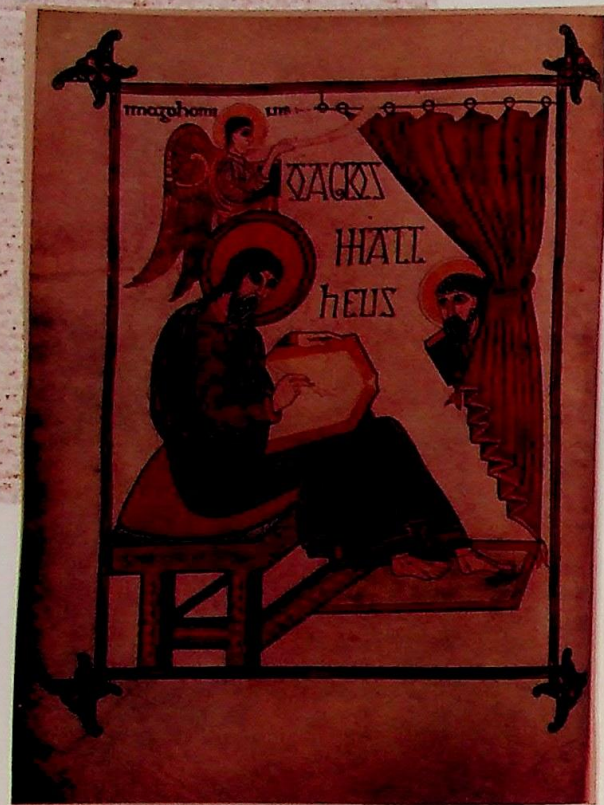
These seven signs or miracles deal with areas where man is unable to effect any change on the conditions which affect his life, therefore it is through these miracles that Jesus proved supernatural abilities.

The word 'Believe' occurs ninety-eight times in the gospel and is sometimes translated as 'trust' or 'commit'. John 2:23-24 :

23. 'Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in
24. His name when they saw the signs which He did, but Jesus did not trust Himself to them, because He knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for He Himself knew what was in man'.

This passage implies the full meaning of Christian life, the continuing process of belief and, in a sense, receiving Christ





FIGS. 8, 9, 10, 11.

# SYMBOLS OF THE FOUR EVANGELISTS

By Eadfrith, the artist of the Lindisfarne Gospels.  
Seventh Century.

into our lives through faith. The word 'life' according to John is not an animal vitality but the sum total of what is imparted to the believer in salvation. Christ is presented as the example of this life, which is God's gift to the Christian and God's goal for the Christian. In the 'Signs' is the revelation of God, in 'Belief' is the response; the signs are designed to produce, in 'life' is the result that belief or faith brings.

## THE IMAGE

Having studied the content of the gospel texts, the reasoning behind the attribution of the symbols accorded to each gospel becomes clear. 'The lion signifies the royalty of Christ, the calf His sacerdotal office, the man's face His incarnation and the eagle the grace of the Holy Ghost' (Irenaeus) (4).

The introduction of Christianity to the British Isles and Ireland produced a number of richly decorated manuscripts, which were a synthesis of the already highly accomplished work of the 'Pagan' artisans and objects of religious art that the Christian missionaries brought with them. In accordance with the policy of the Church, the missionaries proceeded with great care and rather than suppressing the artistic traditions of the people, they came to redeem, the native art of the Celts and Anglo-Saxons was put to a new use by the artists now serving the Church as they had once served the pagan Chieftains. However, it was only in the Sixth century that the form of Christianity which was to be most influential, monasticism, became firmly established. Copying the half-unicial script of the late Antique Codices that had reached them from the Continent, the Irish Monks developed a national 'Scriptura Scottica' or Insular Script.

In the early stages, the monks found artistic expression through the use of ornamentation and abstract symbols, around the seventh century, a step forward was brought about by contact with a new type of ornament : interlace. This decorative motif is thought to have been imported from Egypt through the art of the Egyptian Coptic monks; however, there were also similar trends in Byzantine and Italian art.





FIG. 14 Book of Kells  
The four-symbols page which  
precedes the Gospel of  
St. Matthew.

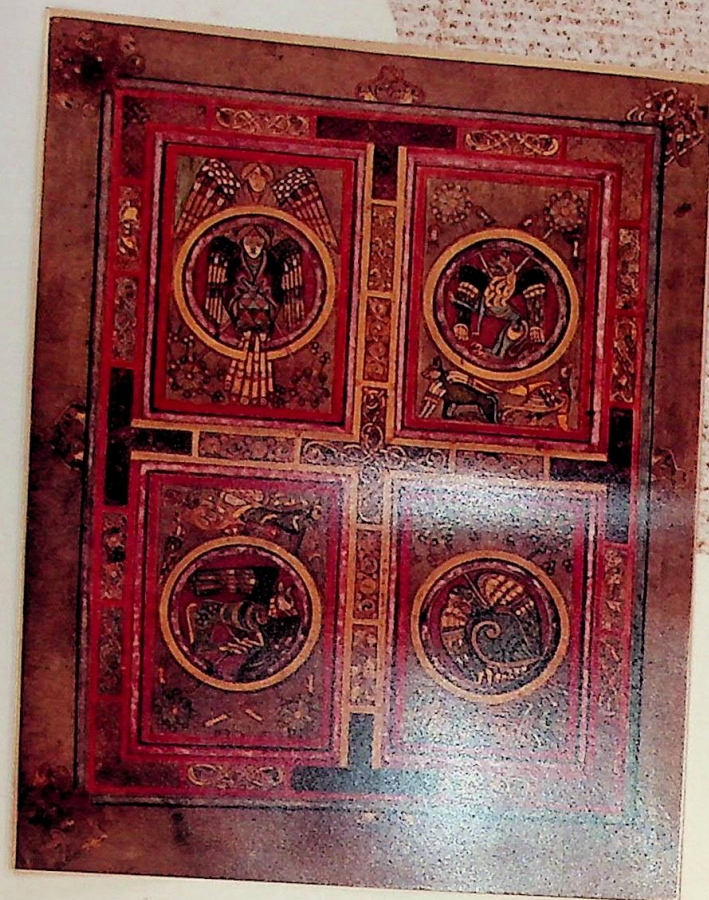


FIG. 15 Book of Kells  
The four-symbols page  
which precedes the  
Gospel of St. Mark.



FIG. 16 Book of Kells  
The four-symbols page which  
precedes the Gospel of St. John

the Book of Armagh (early ninth), but in each of these, there is only one such page for the whole book. Kells reaches a pitch of lavishness with a plan for a four-symbols page at the beginning of each gospel, though it seems that the page for Luke's gospel has been lost.

The page at the beginning of St. Matthew is presented quite simply, with each symbol enclosed in a rectangular compartment (Fig. 14). The page that opens St. Mark's gospel is more complex (Fig. 15). It is also divided into rectangular compartments, but inside these, the symbols are each almost completely contained in circular haloes penetrated by the pairs of flabella they hold. In the intervals between the halo and rectangle some of the other symbols are shown. One would expect these additional symbols to be complementary to that which is inside the halo, but this is not always the case. A detailed description of each compartment will make this clear 1) a winged human figure in the halo, above another winged figure. 2) a winged lion in the halo, below, a winged calf and an eagle. 3) a winged calf in the halo, above, an eagle and another winged calf. 4) an eagle in the halo, a lion and a winged calf below. We have already discussed the allusion in representations of one symbol to the other three, but in the case of this Kells' page, we are presented with something of a more elusive nature. The symbols page at the beginning of St. John's Gospel is by far the most magnificent of the three (Fig. 16). It is divided into four triangular spaces by a saltire cross ending in dragons' heads. St. Matthew's symbol at the top, dominates the composition, the lion on the left could easily be mistaken for a bird were it not for its fierce roaring head. The splendid purple eagle on its right looks over its shoulder, while the acid green calf with its little pointed horns has only one pair of wings.

The Book of Kells presents the greatest diversity of representations of the Tetramorphs than may be seen in any one book. The most remarkable thing about them is that they never seem to appear as they do in the visions, supporting and accompanying the 'Figure of Light' or 'Christ in Majesty'. It would seem likely



## CONCLUSION

The object of this thesis has been to find links between the principle displayed by the Christian Tetramorphs and the ancient concept of world order, the ordering of chaos.

The first link is the study of the spread of mythological material in the Old Testament and the influence of ancient myths on the development of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The central theme is the separation of the four basic elements in the creation myths and Ezekiel's vision of Heaven, which form the basis for a great deal of the symbols included in the Tetramorphs.

Following on from this, we examine the numbers and forms that are relevant to the separation of the elements, and the relationship between 'Matter' and 'Spirit' becoming reconciled through the use of symbolic imagery.

Each Gospel has a specific emphasis which, when seen in total, cover all aspects of Christ's ministry, the characteristics accorded to each of the Gospels also corresponding to key stages in the story of Jesus Christ : birth, death, resurrection and ascension. It is through relevant myths and symbols that I have tried to show that the writers and artists of early Christianity wished to present Christ not only as the Messiah but also as the protector of Cosmic order.

Jung observed that all energies and interest devoted today by Western man to science and technology were by ancient man once devoted to the study of mythology, symbolism, mathematics and astrology. So it would seem that in pursuit of a 'Rational' understanding of fundamental questions, western man has developed a linear approach detached from an holistic 'World-Image'.



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