

ΑΜΑΤΕ: LOVE!

A Selection of Ancient Symbols

An Art Exhibition by

ΕΛΜΑ ΕΙΔΣΕ ΝΕΥΦΕΛΔ

Hand-cast paper sculpture tracing the appearance of
human symbols since the dawn of time

Annotations by

Deb Elkink

Exhibition is curated by

Faith Arts

Hosted by

Calvary Church

89 Scott Street, St, Catharines, Ontario, Canada

Opening Reception

November 2, 2025

Available for viewing Sunday mornings
and by appointment until July 2030

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Elma Eidse Neufeld of Medicine Hat, Alberta, has been working professionally in various media, mostly collage, since the 1960s. She grew up on the prairies of Manitoba; dreaming of becoming an artist, she attended the Forum Art Institute of Winnipeg under the direction of Nick Belajac, then studied at the University of Manitoba and the Banff School of Fine Arts, distinguishing herself through scholarship and purchase prize.

She was named Okanagan Live artist of the year in 1997, was represented in Kelowna Art Gallery in 2003, and continues her active membership in the Federation of Canadian Artists.

Her longstanding involvement with various galleries and arts associations has earned her several prizes and provided ample opportunity to display her work through solo and group shows nationally and internationally. You are welcome to visit her online gallery at www.chateauroc.com.

ABOUT THE EXHIBIT

Papermaking and high relief collage is a lengthy process. For this work, Elma used natural fibres – mostly 100% cotton with some linen and silk. She first shredded the fabric into stamp-sized pieces and then, in small amounts, fed them into a water-filled paper mill. After processing, she removed the mash and added bonding. She then layered the wet pulp onto hand-carved forms. The water was reduced and the pieces dried, after which she pulled them from the forms and mounted them.

The marquee piece, a stylized spelling of the Latin command to love, denotes the theme of the show. This collection has been enthusiastically received and hung as a cohesive story in a variety of venues since its creation:

1984	Grant Memorial Baptist Church, Winnipeg, MB
1999	Briercrest Biblical Seminary, Caronport, SK
2004	Peachland Baptist Church, Peachland, BC
2005	Canadian Mennonite University's Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, Winnipeg, MB
2006	University of Manitoba: under the auspices of The Navigators, Winnipeg, MB
2010-20	Private Gallery, Medicine Hat, AB
2020-24	Private Showings, Peachland, BC; Medicine Hat ,AB
2025-	Calvary Church Auditorium, St. Catharines, ON

Elma says, “This show, though one of my earlier collections, has remained a pivotal articulation of my artistic statement. I believe that whatever I create is an expression of my life’s experiences – of who I am and of what I have encountered. As a young child, I spent hours poring over prints by the great masters found in my parents’ huge Bible and over drawings of the fantastical creatures in *Alice in Wonderland*, both books using the Old German script – beautiful lettering that I was too young to read but that fascinated me nonetheless.

This current body of work came about while I was receiving instruction in the Scriptures, the teacher referring to the original languages of the source documents, his sketches of Greek lettering further stimulating my interest in how visual symbols communicate meaning. My concurrent attendance at university gave me the opportunity to experiment in papermaking techniques – the perfect art form for reaching others with truths from the Word of God.

Though my style has evolved over the years, each exploration and each decision adds another layer and another line to my artistic expression, resulting in works of art that become allegories of the organic and spiritual processes of life.”

ABOUT THE TEXT

Elma’s daughter, Deb Elkind of Medicine Hat, Alberta, put together the companion guide for the Amate show. Deb (B.A. Bethel College, St. Paul, MN; MA Historical Theology summa cum laude, Briercrest Seminary, SK)

edits academic papers for international scholars and writes literary fiction with a theological twist (The Third Grace, The Red Journal, Vagabond Come Home). (Visit www.debelkink.com.)

Deb says, “My brief annotation of Elma’s symbols, based on historical and literary study, dovetails with my interest in Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy as taught to us in the Scriptures. I’m particularly passionate about story because I believe it has the same capacity as the visual arts to stir a person through her senses and steer her towards truth. The meditations of the heart result in the words of the mouth, so writing becomes, for me, an outward and verbal expression of my inward and spiritual reality.”

ABOUT CURATION & VENUE

Both **Faith Arts**, *where faith intersects with the arts*, and **Calvary Church** actively support Christian artists and appreciators by fostering and promoting creativity that reflects beauty, truth, and goodness. (Visit www.faitharts.org and www.calvarychurchonline.ca) To view in person, text “visit amate” to the curator: 289-783-1545.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore, seek not to understand that thou mayest believe, but believe that thou mayest understand.

St. Augustine, *On the Gospel of John*

Very useful, then, is the mode of symbolic interpretation for many purposes; and it is helpful to the right theology, and to piety, and to the display of intelligence, and the practice of brevity, and the exhibition of wisdom.

St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, Ch.VIII

Besides, all things that shine through a veil show the truth grander and more imposing; as fruits shining through water, and figures through veils, which give added reflections to them.

St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, Ch.IX

HARMONY – INCEPTION

In the beginning . . .

Genesis 1:1; John 1:1

Unspoken, then pronounced by the First Speaker, the invisible Logos took on form, became seen. The seed of all symbols, the dot is the innermost essence of the visual, the contact point between Creator and created, the touch of the finger of God. It is the spot at which pencil meets paper, the genesis of art and the germination of the written word. Like warm breath on

a frosty windowpane, it creates an aperture onto the cryptic world of imagery.

As the first of the five earliest basic signs, the dot existed since the days of rock and cave carvings. In ancient hieroglyphic writing, the dot denotes a grain of sand or corn. It signifies a beginning or an end goal and stands as a sign for mathematical multiplication, indicating the point at which the X meets.

*No worldly thing
Can a continuance have
Unless love back again it bring
Unto the cause which first the essence gave.*

Boëthius, *Philosophiae Consolationis*, Bk. IV, Ch. 6, L.46

God is a geometrician.

Plato

In my beginning is my end.

T.S. Eliot, *East Coker*

HARMONY – SPIRIT

As power descends from above onto man, the oneness of God is encapsulated in the simple, vertical stroke. Unity, authority, and absolute power are figured by the movement of the dot downward, the contact between higher and lower, the extension of infinity into the finite.

God is Spirit . . .

Jesus the Christ, John 4:24

*God appears and God is light
To those poor souls who dwell in night;
But does a human form display
To those who dwell in realms of day.*

William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

HARMONY – MATTER

The plane of earth below is passive, receptive, and feminine, awaiting the piercing from above. A horizon of the material plane of existence, this symbol possesses a linking quality in contrast to the division of the vertical stroke of separation. It is basic in western ideography, exuding the sense of an even life flow, the status quo. It awaits interjection.

*But friend to me
He is all fault who hath no fault at all.
For who loves me must have a touch of earth.*

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

*Of all virtues and dignities of the mind, goodness is the
greatest, being the character of the Deity; and without it,
man is a busy, mischievous, wretched thing.*

Sir Francis Bacon

HARMONY – JUSTICE

The celestial meets the terrestrial in the angle of justice, touching but not crossing, connecting but not joining, possessing nothing in common but the seed of inception from the First Cause. The vertical beam alights upon the material plane.

In ancient Greece, this symbol denoted one-half of an entity, and Pythagoras' right angle stood for justice and morality.

God is not one thing because He is, and another thing because He is just; with Him, to be just and to be God are one and the same.

Boëthius, *De Trinitate*, Ch. 4, Sec. 19

There is one evident, indubitable manifestation of Divinity, and that is the laws of right which are made known to the world through Revelation.

Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, Pt. VIII, Ch. 19

*The present's nothing; but eternity
Abides for those on whom all truth, all good,
Hath shone, in one entire and perfect light.*

St. Paulinus of Nola

Truth, which only doth judge itself, teacheth that the inquiry of truth, which is the love-making or wooing of it, the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature.

Francis Bacon, *Of Truth*

I had, at the same time, a very affecting sense, how meet and suitable it was that God should govern the world, and order all things according to his own pleasure; and I rejoiced in it, that God reigneth, and that his will was done.

Jonathan Edwards

HARMONY – JUSTIFICATION

Incarnation is achieved through the intersection of heavenly and earthly, as two simple lines form a complete, harmonious unit symbolic of salvation.

This simplest of crosses pre-existed Christianity by millennia, in use as a power symbol in the Euphrates-Tigris basin in 1500 B.C. and appearing on Egyptian tombs to display the ideas of life and death, the spiritual and the worldly. The ancient Chinese writing system employed this cross to figure the number ten, perfection, while the positive vertical pole of life traversing the negative horizontal pole of death forms a sign that unites in both mathematical and electrical systems. It was functional as a Hopi Indian symbol for the four winds or the four corners of the earth. Its universal connotations of connection are recognizable interculturally, throughout time.

*But mercy is above this scepter'd sway,
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's,
When mercy seasons justice.*

William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

The one thoroughly laid down and safe way to avoid going wide of the truth is the doctrine of the Incarnation—that one

and the same person is God and man; as God, the end of our going; as man, the way we are to go.

St. Augustine, *The City of God*, XI

Eternity is a negative idea clothed in a positive name. It supposes, in that to which it is applied, a present existence, and is the negation of a beginning or end of that existence.

William Paley

CREATION – EARTH

The orb, void, was beheld by the unblinking gaze of the Creator.

As a symbol, the circle of the earth doubles as the ancient scientific sign for oxygen, most vital to our bodies. In mechanics a circle indicates the center of rotation, and meteorology employs the circle in forecasting a full moon in a clear sky. The French hobo sign system uses the circle etched on a doorpost to mean “This is a hospitable house.” It is upon this circle of the earth that the open eye of God rests.

*The world embarrasses me, and I cannot think
That this watch exists and has no watchmaker.*

Voltaire, *Epigram*

*One of the most convenient hieroglyphics of God is a circle;
and a circle is endless; whom God loves, he loves to the end;
and not for their own end; and his end is that he might love
them still more.*

John Donne

CREATION – GOD

The open eye of God—ever seeing, overseeing—knows neither beginning nor ending. Perfect in symmetry, unvarying in balance, this ring of eternity is inhabited by the dot of inception.

As one of the four elements, air, this symbol has also figured the sun in almost every culture earth has known. The pagan cult of Mithras, among others, worshipped solar gods. Perhaps the colour of sunshine stimulated the ancient alchemists to use this sign to depict gold, that elusive metal which was the goal of their attempts to transmute the base into the pure and precious.

But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.

Malachi 4:2

God is a sun, which, though but one, is sufficient to enlighten and vivify a whole world.

Michael Le Faucheur

When a ray is projected from the sun it is a portion of the whole sun; but the sun will be in the ray because it is a ray of the sun; the substance is not separated but extended. So from spirit comes spirit, and God from God, as light is kindled from light.

Tertullian, *Apology* XXI

*Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
About the center of the silent Word*

T.S. Eliot, Ash Wednesday

I live and love in God's peculiar light.

Michelangelo

CREATION – LAND AND WATER

God separated the water under the expanse from the water above it, and so the horizontal stroke within a circle indicates the element of water, even in earliest rock carvings. It is a chemical sign for salt and the metalloids, mined from the bowels of the earth and extracted from the sea.

*The Sea
An everywhere of silver,
With ropes of sand
To keep it from effacing
The track called land.*

Emily Dickenson, *Book III, Nature, LXVII*

*There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice
Which is more than liberty.*

Frederick William Faber

CREATION – LIGHT AND DARKNESS

The active male element of time, descending from on high, divides light from darkness, day from night.

An ancient sign of the alphabet used in antiquity in the Near East, this emblem stood for nitrogen in nineteenth-century science. Meteorologically it pictures a solar halo.

Light has come down to the depths, a light illuminating the man coming into this world.

Medieval Hymn

His life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

John 1: 4, 5

*He who receives light from above,
from the Fountain of Light,
No other doctrine needs, though granted true.*

John Milton, *Paradise Regained*, Bk. IV, L.288

And God said, "Let there be light!"

Genesis 1:3

CREATION – COMPLETE

The male element of spirit pervades the female matter, and creation is accomplished. Air, earth, fire, and water combine in Aristotelian symmetry to produce a mark indicative of ultimate power, the king, ancient Chinese

thunder, energy, and respect. The spirit of the circle combines with the cross of matter to bring forth creation.

Also known as the sun-cross, it was the seal of Odin, the Nordic God of art, culture, warfare, and the dead. As a trademark in the days of peasant proprietors, this stamp punched into iron or branded onto wood denoted a millwheel. The whimsical alchemists used it to signify stardust!

How exceedingly fine is the godlike work of the best and greatest artist!

Nicholas Copernicus, *On Revolutions of Celestial Spheres*

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

John 1:3

*Oh! how shall I, whose native sphere
Is dark, whose mind is dim,
Before the Ineffable appear,
And on my naked spirit bear
That uncreated beam?*

Reverend Thomas Binney (1826),
Service of Song in the House of the Lord

SEASONS

For everything there is a season, and a time for everything under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

But God hath made no decree to distinguish the seasons of his mercies. . . . If some King of the earth have so large an extent of Dominion, in North, and South, as he that hath Winter and Summer together in his Dominions, so large an extent East and West, as that he hath day and night together in his Dominion, much more hath God mercy and judgement together: he brought light out of darknesse, not out of lesser light; he can bring thy Summer out of Winter, though thou have no Spring; though in the wayes of fortune, or understanding, or conscience, thou have been benighted till now, wintred and frozen, clouded and eclipsed, dampened and benumbed, smothered and stupified till now, now God comes to thee, not as in the dawning of the day, not as in the bud of the spring, but as the Sun at noon to illustrate all shadowes, as the sheaves in harvest, to fill all penuries, all occasions invite his mercies, and all times are his seasons.

John Donne, *Sermons*

SEASONS – SPRING

Springtime generates the earth's new growth. This early Germanic symbol for spring introduces the cycle of the earth's life corresponding to the phases of the sun's orbit, the stages of the moon, and the ages of a man's life.

Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime.

Martin Luther

*There's a further good conceivable
Beyond the utmost earth can realize.*

Robert Browning, *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*

*What is all this juice and all this joy?
A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
In Eden garden.—Have, get before it cloy.*

Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Spring*

SEASONS – SUMMER

The fullness of the summer season is depicted as a receptive vessel. As mankind anticipates the ripening of the fruit, so creation watches as the season of God's grace unfurls. The bowl was a common ideogram in Medieval times, appearing in ecclesiastical art of the era.

*The one that could repeat the summer
Were greater than itself, though he
Minutest of mankind might be
And who could reproduce the sun,
At period of going down—
The lingering and the stain, I mean—
When Orient has been outgrown,
And Occident becomes unknown,
His name remain.*

Emily Dickenson, *Book III, Nature, XCVII*

Thou crownest the year with thy goodness.

Psalm 65:11

SEASONS – AUTUMN

Harvest is reaped as the autumn progresses, the bounty stored safely for future use. The Day of Salvation is closing.

*Summer ends now; now, barbarous in beauty, the stooks rise
Around; up above, what wind-walks! what lovely behaviour
Of silk-sack clouds! has wilder, wilful-wavier
Meal-drift moulded ever and melted across skies?
I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes,
Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour.*

Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Hurrahing in Harvest*

*As the earth can produce nothing unless it is fertilized by the
sun,
So we can do nothing without the grace of God.*

Vianney, *Curé d'Ars*

SEASONS – WINTER

Winter finds the house full, the occupants warmly protected against the snow and cold.

*Announced by all the trumpets of the sky,
Arrives the snow, and, driving o'er the fields,
Seems nowhere to alight: the whited air
Hides hills and woods, the river, and the heaven,
And veils the farmhouse at the garden's end.
The sled and traveller stopped, the courier's feet
Delayed, all friends shut out, the housemates sit*

*Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed
In a tumultuous privacy of storm.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Snowstorm*

*There is an awful warmth about the heart like a load of
immortality.*

John Keats, *Letter to J.H. Reynolds*

*Winter is on my head, but eternal spring is in my heart. The
nearer I approach the end, the plainer I hear around me the
immortal symphonies which invite me.*

Victor Hugo

TIME AND ETERNITY

The sands of time sift inevitably towards eternity within a fragile vial. This classic hourglass shape combines two equilateral triangles, meeting at their apexes. The uppermost triangle is masculine in nature, signifying heavenly showers, while the female element, firmly based on earth, reaches toward the celestial as a flame licks upward.

The simple triangle originated in ancient Egypt as a symbol for the Triune God, holy and divine in its number. It is the Pythagorean indicator for wisdom, and has come to stand for fire, divine inspiration, and the Holy Spirit. It appears as a halo on some Renaissance art and is employed by over forty sign systems to indicate power, danger, safety, success, or prosperity.

The combined triangles of the hourglass become an emblem of temperance, one of the four cardinal virtues along with prudence, justice, and fortitude. These secular virtues were first introduced by pagan philosophers

of Greece and later added by Christian moralists to the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, forming a composite still extolled today.

Time is but a stream I go fishing in. I drink at it. But while I drink, I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slips by, and eternity remains.

Henry David Thoreau

Time is the image of eternity.

Digenes Laertius, *Plato*, XLI

TRINITY

A stylized dove of the Spirit hovers above the cross of Christ that crowns the Divine Triangle in a classic and clear symbol of the Holy Trinity.

Ancient alchemy used the overarching line when signifying the essence or spiritus of a substance, and it bears resemblance to the chemical indicator for sublimation. Common in Western ideographic pictures, this line has been used alone or in combination to connote redemption or the Holy Spirit.

The figure of a triangle emitting a cross may have originated from the sign for phosphorous, a light-bearing chemical.

O Light, blessed Trinity and primal Unity: now that the fiery sun goes down, pour thy light into our hearts.

Latin Chant, Later Middle Ages

The Holy Ghost is not of an inferior nature to the Father and the Son, but, so to say, consubstantial and coeternal.

GODHEAD

A triangle balanced on its point often indicates rain showers or an outpouring of emotion. These three triangles, all with apex facing down, pivot around the central point of eternity to form a single figure, three in one.

Examples of this form were found on a seal from Sumeria and on a picture stone from the Sweden of the Viking era, and denoted success and protection against evil in days of superstition. For the believer, it speaks forth the generosity of the Godhead.

*This is what we mean by Father and Son and Holy Ghost.
The Father is the Begetter and the Emitter; without passion
of course, and without reference to time, and not in a
corporeal manner. The Son is the Begotten, and the Holy
Ghost the Emission.*

Gregory of Nazianzus,
The Third Theological Narration

*Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire.*

Rabanus Maurus, Archbishop of Mainz,
Veni Creator Spiritus

TRANSCENDENCE

Heavenly power exudes from this radiant wheel, the triceps, originally a Nordic sign for divine movement. The rhombus, sometimes standing for soap in the order of alchemy, is triplicated in this composition, reminding us of the three-fold cleansing of body, soul, and spirit by the Trinity.

*It is impossible for any nature at all to be or to be known
apart from its essential activity.*

Maximus the Confessor, 7th century

*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory.*

Isaiah 6:3

SEVEN-BRANCHED CANDELABRA

The *menorah* is a symbol of the spiritual light of faith and salvation found in the Old Testament. It signifies Judaism and the rituals of Jewish worship. It marks the graves of the ancient Jewish fathers throughout the Roman catacombs, distinguishing them from their Christian descendants. Yet the “new” faith did not ignore the menorah, which is used in Christendom to illustrate the diversity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, rooted in one love.

The lamp, too, was placed to the south of the altar of incense; and by it were shown the motion of the seven planets, that perform their revolutions toward the south. For three branches rose on either side of the lamp, and lights on them; since also the sun, like the lamp, set in the midst of all the planets, dispenses with a kind of divine music the light to those above and those below. The golden lamp conveys another enigma as a symbol of Christ, not in respect of form alone, but in his casting light, “at sundry times and in

diverse manners” (Heb.1:1), on those who believe on Him and hope, and who see by means of the ministry of the First-born. And they say that the seven eyes of the Lord are the seven spirits resting on the rod that springs from the root of Jesse.

Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*

*They never fail who light
Their lamp of faith at the unwavering flame
Burnt for the altar service of the Race
Since the beginning.*

Elsa Barker, *The Frozen Grail*

Sufficit unum (lumen) in tenebris—One light suffices in the dark.

Isabella d’Este, 1525

SALVATION – FORK

The silhouette of man, arms raised heavenward in supplicatory prayer, is known in Latin as furca. The philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras (about 500 B.C.) used this emblem as a map for the course of one’s life, with a path progressing toward a point of choice between good and evil. The Cross of the Robbers mimics the fork’s shape and is painted in early art on each side of the Cross of Christ, portraying men in despair.

*There is not a heart but has its movements of longing,
yearning for something better, nobler, holier than it knows.*

Henry Ward Beecher

*To bliss unknown my lofty soul aspires,
My lot unequal to my vast desires.*

John Arbuthnot

*To every man there openeth
A Way, and Ways, and a Way,
The High Soul climbs the High Way,
The Low Soul gropes the Low,
And in between, on the misty flats,
The rest drift to and fro.*

John Oxenham, *The Ways*

*God sits effulgent in heaven, not for a favoured few, but for
the universe of life and there is no creature so poor, or so
low, that he may not look up with childlike confidence, and
say, "My Father, Thou art mine."*

Henry Ward Beecher

SALVATION – INVERTED

Descending from above and encompassing creation with outspread arms, the inverted fork depicts Sovereignty stooping. Medieval artists used the three-pronged figure to illustrate the Trinity.

*The Infinite Goodness has such wide arms that it takes
whatever turns to it.*

Alighieri Dante

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am humble and gentle in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Jesus the Christ, Matthew 11:29, 30

SALVATION – INTERSECTION

Man's yearning melds with God's saving as the arms of each intersect.

I beseech You, God, to show my full self to myself.

St. Augustine of Hippo

Ascend, I follow thee, safe guide, the path

Thou lead'st me, and to the hand of heav'n submit.

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk. XI, L.371

SALVATION – COMPLETION

Union is accomplished when man appropriates the offer of grace, resulting in a complex of the forks of yearning and yielding. The center point, the inherent dot of essence, is the source from which the rest of the sign radiates outward. This ancient chrismon, composed of the initial Greek letters of the name of Jesus Christ (*I and X—the iota and the chi*), appeared in pre-Constantinian Europe. The symbol takes the shape of a naturally occurring celestial phenomenon called a helion (which some historians believe to be the basis of Constantine's religious vision of 312 A.D. preceding his military victory over Rome).

The intersecting forks are found also in cartography to indicate a lighthouse on nautical charts, in the early chemical sign system to stand for ammonia salts, and in meteorology for snow, freshly falling.

Faith, like light, should always be unbending; while love, like warmth, should beam forth on every side, and bend to every necessity of our brethren.

Martin Luther

But now I began to understand the security of the covenant of grace, and to expect to be preserved, not by my own power and holiness, but by the mighty power and promise of God, through faith in an unchangeable Saviour.

John Newton

First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. . . . All that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him.

Jean Calvin,
The Institutes of the Christian Religion

SALVATION – SIGN OF SIGN

God's mark, the crux ordinaria, so basic and beautiful to Christendom, encapsulates the message of the gospel with the descending action of God metamorphosing the horizontal plane of humanity. Yet ancient Phoenicians developed the cross as an instrument of torture, and long before Christ's

death this shape symbolized the staff of Apollo, appearing on coins with the sun god and associated with powers controlling the weather. Constantine outlawed the punitive use of the cross in the fourth century in favour of its employment in art. The death of sin and guilt, and the resurrection of life, forevermore distinguished this as the emblem of Christ's victory.

*The certainty that He who went through death, who restored
the connection between nature and the spiritual world,
changes death to win a triumph, a triumph that is awaiting
us like the warrior who is going toward a certain victory.*

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling

*The Pilgrim of Eternity, whose fame
Over his living head like Heaven is bent,
An early but enduring monument,
Came, unveiling all the lightnings of his song
In sorrow.*

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Adonais*

THE RAISED CROSS

In triumphant, exclamatory ascendancy, the cross of Christ overshadows the created order—that focused and definite dot of inception, the ground upon which the timber was raised.

*Nothing is so lofty or so far above danger that it is not below
and in the power of God.*

Ovid, *Tristia*

*Who never doubted, never half believed.
Where doubt there truth is— 'tis her shadow.*

Philip James Bailey

*The more at home the Word of God is among us, the more we
shall bring about faith and its fruits.*

Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*

CROSS PATÉE

That shape so evocative of deity in agony with arms outstretched above mankind, the cross exists in hundreds of variations. The Greek Cross (often used as a floor plan for churches) gave birth to this Cross Patée, distinguished by its simple and gracefully curving arms of equal length.

Whether heavily encrusted with gems as a piece of jewellery, embroidered on ecclesiastical vestments as a declaration of authority, or lovingly etched into the granite of a grave marker, the cross is a proclamation!

The way of the cross is the way of light.

Medieval Latin Proverb

*O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your
sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the
law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through
our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul the Apostle, I Corinthians 15:55-57

MONOGRAM OF CHRIST – CHI-RHO

This emblem was emblazoned on the imperial standard and the shields of Constantine's troops on the Milvian Bridge in 312 A.D. Known as the chi-rho, the sign led Constantine to victory against Rome, securing for the Church a millennium of peace, prosperity, and freedom from persecution. On the day preceding this momentous battle, Constantine is said to have called out to the "supreme God" for aid against his enemy and been answered by a vision in the noon sky and a dream in the night: "Conquer by this."

The symbol's rich history infiltrates the record of early Christianity. The chi-rho, a combination of the first two Greek letters of the name of Christ, was used in the first centuries by believers to mark possessions. It stood also as an initial for the Greek word meaning "auspicious" and had long been used as an omen of good luck as it connoted the pagan word for gold. The X and P bear a striking resemblance to the Latin word for peace, pax, and the chi-rho sometimes appears in art as the Star of Bethlehem. From the fourth century on, it was increasingly replaced by the Latin cross.

Victory is redemption purchased for men's hope at a cost so terrible that only defeat could be more bitter.

Gordon R. Munnoch, *We are Debtors to Sacrifice*

*By thine agony and bloody sweat; by thy cross and passion;
by thy precious death and burial; by thy glorious
resurrection and ascension, and by the coming of the Holy
Ghost, good Lord, deliver us.*

The Book of Common Prayer

MONOGRAM OF CHRIST – IN THIS SIGN

This sacred monogram uses the first three letters of the name of Jesus, originally formed from the Greek characters IH. The symbol supplanted the chi-rho in the twelfth century and heavily adorns the art of the Middle Ages, reaching its peak of usage in the Byzantine period. The figure was adapted to read, in Latin, *Iesus Hominum Salvator* (“Jesus Saviour of Men”) or *In hoc signo vinces* (“In this sign you will conquer”), and further variations abounded. It was used as a political/military symbol during the Thirty Years’ War of seventeenth-century Europe and by the Jesuits of the Society of Jesus.

*Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God’s own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name,
From age to age the same,
And he must win the battle.*

Martin Luther (1529), *A Mighty Fortress is our God*

*Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes
that Jesus is the Son of God.*

1 John 5:5

ALPHA AND OMEGA

The initial and final letters of the Greek alphabet are hidden here within cross and anchor, within faith and hope. As funerary inscription in the earliest Roman catacombs, epitaphs often read: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord” (Revelation 14:13). The Greek for “in the Lord” (*en kurio*)

closely resembles the word for “anchor” (*ankura*); thus the anchor used on graves, as a symbol of hope, may have been a play on words.

For the city of saints is above, although here below it begets citizens, in whom it sojourns till the time of its reign arrives, when it shall gather together all in the day of the resurrection; and then shall the promised kingdom be given to them, in which they shall reign with their Prince, the King of the ages, time without end.

St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Bk. 15, Ch. 1

Cast all your cares on God; that anchor holds.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Enoch Arden*

Love is a symbol of eternity. It wipes out all sense of time, destroying all memory of a beginning and all fear of an end.

Madame Anne Germaine de Staël, *Corrine*

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

Jesus the Christ, Revelation 12:13

FISH

The cryptic Christ-symbol of the fish, sketched casually in the sand, could be taken as a mere doodle by persecutors or recognized as a message of identification by fellow believers in first-century Rome. The letters of the Greek word for fish, ΙΧΘΥΣ (itself composed of several meaningful

symbols), form an acrostic of the initials for the title “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour.” By the fifth century, the fish had become a common subject in Christian literature and painting, synonymous with Jesus, baptism, and the Eucharist.

The fish, long eaten by the Jews on Sabbath and fast days in expectation of the coming Messiah, was used in Christendom as a design for frescoes, monuments, and signet rings. The Greek italic form for the letter alpha resembles a fish and has been used by modern British lawyers as a stamp on files to indicate that a case is closed.

Let the dove and the fish, the vessel flying before the breath of the wind, the harmonious lyre used by Polycrates, and the marine anchor sculptured by Seleucus be signs unto you.

St. Clement of Alexandria

Jesus Christ, the great fish taken by the fish-hook of God . . . nourishes the world.

Julius Africanus, d. 240

Fill me with the Fish, I pray thee, Lord Saviour.

Epitaph from Autun, France, 3rd century

ROYALTY

Adorned or simple circlet, made of thorns, laurel leaves, or precious metals, the crown is a clear symbol of royalty, ascendancy, power, and victory. The name of the first-century martyr, Stephen, means in Greek “a crown.” As a headdress of Medieval popes, the coronets of the fourteenth century were regarded as Trinitarian, while the twenty-four elders of

Revelation are pictured laying down their crowns of gold before the throne of God, who alone is King.

*O sacred Head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded
With thorns, thine only crown!
O sacred Head, what glory,
What bliss till now was thine!
Yet though despised and gory,
I joy to call thee mine.*

Cistercian Hymn, 12th century

There are crowns worn by living monarchs, of which it would be difficult to estimate the value. The price paid for their jewels is the least part of it. They cost thousands of lives and rivers of human blood; yet in His esteem, and surely in ours also, Christ's crown outweighs them all. He gave His life for it; and alone, of all monarchs, He was crowned at His coronation by the hands of Death. Others cease to be kings when they die. By dying He became a king. He laid His head in the dust that He might become "head overall." He entered His kingdom through the gates of the grave, and ascended the universe by the steps of a cross.

Guthrie

I go from a corruptible to an incorruptible crown, where no disturbance can have place.

Charles I of England, on the scaffold

ΑΜΑΤΕ: LOVE!

As red as the spilled blood of atonement, this symbol cryptogramatically houses the Latin imperative form of the command “Love!” The motivation behind divine, vertical, God-to-man communication, love serves also on the human plane as the bond of unity.

Frequently at the great Roman games, the emperors, in order to gratify the citizens of Rome, would cause sweet perfumes to be rained down upon them through the awning which covered the amphitheatre. Behold the vases, the huge vessels of perfume! Yes, but there is naught here to delight you so long as the jars are sealed; but let the vases be opened, and be poured out, and let the drops of perfumed rain begin to descend, and everyone is refreshed and gratified thereby. Such is the love of God. There is a richness and a fullness in it, but it is not perceived till the Spirit of God pours it out like the rain of fragrance over the heads and hearts of all the living children of God. See, then, the need of having the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost.

Charles Spurgeon

Love is the weapon which Omnipotence reserved to conquer rebel man when all the rest had failed. Reason he parries; fear he answers blow for blow; future interest he meets with present pleasure; but love is that seen against whose meeting beams the winter cannot stand.

Martin Farquhar Tupper

He brought me to his banqueting table, and his banner over me love.

CONCLUSION

If thou didst know the whole Bible by heart, and the sayings of all the philosophers, what would all that profit thee the love of God, and without grace?

Surely, an humble husbandman that serveth God, is better than a proud philosopher that neglecting himself laboureth to understand the course of the heavens.

Thomas á Kempis



Printed by Calvary Church
89 Scott St., St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

