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The Early Christian Prayer Circle

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The nature of the early Christian prayer circle may be described by letting the oldest documents speak for themselves, beginning with the latest and moving backwards to the earliest. The rite was depicted for the last time in a document read to the assembled churchmen of the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 A.D. and condemned by them to the flames. Their objection was to parts of the text that proclaimed the Gnostic doctrine of the total immateriality of Christ; on the subject of the prayer circle, which was strange to them, they preserved a discreet silence. 1 Actually that part of it was an excerpt taken from a much older writing, the Acts of John, being the earliest apocryphal Christian Acta, dating at least to the early third century.

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In reading this and other accounts of the prayer circles we seem to enter, as Max Pulver expressed it, into "a strange space, a strange world--unlike ours--a world above that opens before us when we enter into the round dance of the disciples, led by Jesus" 2 The passage from the Acts of John reads as follows, after a notice on the extreme secrecy in which these things were guarded:

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Before he was seized by wicked men and by the wicked serpent of the Jewish authorities (lawgivers, nomothetoumenoi), he called us all together and said: "Before I am given over to those men, let us sing a hymn (of praise) to the Father and so go forth ready to face whatever lies ahead." Then he commanded us to form a circle, taking hold of each other's hand; And he himself taking up a position to me (epakouete mou --follow my instructions)." Then he began a hymn, saying.

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"Praise (glory, doxa) to thee, Father," and we standing in the circle, followed him with
the Amen.

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"Glory to thee Logos, glory to the grace(charis, love). Amen.

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Glory to thee spirit, glory to thee Holy One; praise to the glory.

Amen.(or be praised [doxasou] with glory. Amen).

We praise thee Father; we thank the Light in which there is no darkness. Amen.

And while we (all) give thanks, I say (explain):

I wish to be saved and I wish to save. Amen.

I wish to be delivered, and I wish to deliver. Amen.

I wish to bear wounds (titrosko) and I wish to inflict them. Amen.

I wish to be born and I wish to bring forth (bear). Amen.

I wish to eat and I wish to be eaten [cf. Ignatius, Epistle to the Romans 4:1]. Amen.

I want to hear and I want to be heard. Amen.

I want to comprehend (know), being all intelligence(Nous). Amen.

I want to be washed, and I want to wash. Amen.

Charis (grace) (leads) dances in the chorus: I wish to pipe (Play the flute)--dance
all of you! Amen.

I wish to mourn, all of you mourn (lit Kopsasthe--inflict blows [cuts] upon
yourselves). Amen."

And after having led us in other things in the circle (chorus), beloved, the Lord went out. And we went forth like lost wanderers or like people in a dream, fleeing our several ways. 3

St. Augustine in his 237th Epistle quotes a slightly different version calling it "hymn. . . commonly found in the apocryphal writings," which he gets from the Priscillians, who believed it to be "the hymn of the Lord which he recited in secret to his disciples, the holy Apostles, according as is written in the Gospel: After he recited a hymn, he ascended the mountain" (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26). Its absence from the New Testament, which was Augustine's argument for rejecting it as spurious, was explained by the sectaries by quoting Tobit 12:7: "The ordinances of the King it is well to conceal, though it is praiseworthy to reveal the works of God." Conventional Christianity, following Augustine, has always denied that there was any significant teaching of Christ not included in the New Testament, for to admit such would be to admit serious gaps in their own knowledge. Yet Augustine labors to show line by line that the hymn is not heretical (as the Bishops of Nicaea found it 350 years later) but that each statement can be duplicated somewhere in the scriptures. 4 The further back we go the more prominent becomes the rite in the church.

The actual performance of such a rite is described in a seventh century Syriac translation, entitled "The Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ as delivered orally by him to us the Apostles after his Resurrection following his death." 5 In celebrating the sacrificial death of the Lord (Pulver calls his study "The Round Dance and the Crucifixion"), the Bishop would make the sacrifice, the veil of the gate being drawn aside as a sign of the straying of the former people; he would make the offering within the veil along with priests, deacons, authorized widows, subdeacons, deaconesses, readers and such as were endowed with spiritual gifts. As leader the Bishop stands in the middle. . . [the men and women are assigned their places, north, south, east and west, around him]. Then all give each other the sign of peace. Next, when absolute silence is established, the deacon says: "Let your hearts be to heaven. If anyone has any ill feeling towards his neighbor, let him be reconciled. If anyone has any hesitation or mental reservations (doubts) let him make it known; if anyone finds any of the teachings incongenial, let him withdraw [etc.] For the Father of Lights is our witness with the Son and visiting angels. Take care lest you have aught against your neighbor. . . . Lift up your hearts for the sacrifice of redemption and eternal life. Let us be grateful for the

knowledge which God is giving us." Then the Bishop says in an awesome voice: "Our Lord be (or is) with you!" And all the people respond: "And with thy spirit." 6

A sort of antiphonal follows with the people on the ring responding to the words of the Bishop. Then the Bishop begins the prayer proper, "the people repeating these same things, praying." He thanks God "for the Plan of Salvation," by which "thou hast fulfilled thy purposes by preparing a holy people, hast stretched forth thy hands in suffering, that they might be freed from such suffering and from the corruption of death." 7

The identical idea is expressed in the prayer circle so fully described by Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 350 A.D.) which we have discussed elsewhere:

O strange and paradoxical thing! We did not die in reality. . . after having been actually crucified. Rather it was an imitation by a token. . . .

O love of men overflowing! Christ really received the nails in his blameless hands and feet and suffered pain; while I, without any pain or struggle, by his sharing of suffering the pain enjoy the fruits of salvation! 8

Also in a long passage in the Acts of John:

You who dance, consider what I do, for yours is this passage of Man which I am to suffer.

For you could by no means have understood what you suffer unless to you as Logos I had been sent by the Father. . . .

If you knew how to suffer you would be able not to suffer.

Learn how to suffer and you should be able not to suffer. . . . 9

Plainly the rite is intimately involved with the suffering of the crucifixion.

The Syriac prayer ends: "Grant, therefore, O God, that all those be united with thee who participate in these sacred ordinances. . . ." And the people say Amen. Bishop: "Give us unity of mind in the Holy Ghost, and heal our spirits. . . that we may live in thee throughout all eternity!" Then certain ordinances are explained to those in the circle: "It is he who gave Adam a garment and the promise that after death he might live again and return to heaven." It is explained how Christ by the crucifixion reversed the blows of death, "according to the Plan of the Eternal Father laid down before the foundations of the earth." 10

Still older are some documents designated as the Gospel of Bartholomew, belonging to that growing corpus of very early writings believed to contain instructions and teachings given to the Apostles in secret by the Lord after his Resurrection. "On one occasion when the Apostles were met together, Bartholomew said to Peter, Andrew, and John, 'Let us ask Mary the favored one how she conceived the Lord and bore him. . . .'" This was an embarrassing question, and no one was willing to approach Mary on the subject. "And Bartholomew said to Peter, 'You are the President and my teacher, you go and ask her!'" But Peter says Bartholomew himself should ask, and after much hesitation he approaches Mary on behalf of the other apostles, and she agrees to enlighten them. 11

They form a prayer a prayer circle, "and Mary, standing before them, raised her hands to heaven"

and began to call upon the Father in an unknown language, a number of versions of which are given.

When she finished the prayer, she said, "Let us sit on the ground (or stand quietly, kathisomen, at the prepared place, edaphos--since it is plain that they remain standing); come Peter, you are in charge. Stand at my right hand and place your left hand under my forearm; and you, Andrew, you do the same thing on my left side." 12

John and Bartholomew are instructed to support or catch Mary if she faints, "lest my bones fail me when I start to speak." This mutual support in the circle is necessary where some may be caught away in the spirit and pass out.

In a variant version, when the brethren are met together on the Mount of Olives, "Peter said to Mary, 'Blessed one, please ask the Lord to tell us about the things that are in heaven.'" But Mary reminds Peter that as Adam has precedence over Eve, so it is his business to take the lead in such things. 13 Having taken position in the circle, Mary begins to speak:

When I was in the Temple of God [a number of early sources report that Mary served in the Temple, like Samuel, as a Child] 14 . . . there appeared to me one day a manifestation like an angel of unfamiliar aspect. . . . And suddenly the veil of the Temple was a great earthquake and I fell on my face unable to bear the sight of him. But he stretched forth his hand and raised me up, and I looked up to heaven and a dewy cloud came and (lacuna) moistened me from head to foot; and he wiped me off with his stole (robe, shawl) and said to me, "Greetings, thou favored one, chosen vessel!" and he grasped my right hand. And there was bread in abundance and he set it out on the altar of the Temple (cf. the shewbread), and he ate first and then gave to me. And he put forth his hand from his garment and there was drink in abundance, and he drank first and then gave to me, and I beheld and saw a full cup and bread. And he said to me, "In three years' time I shall send to you my Logos and you will bear a son, and through him the creation will be saved. . . . Peace to thee, my beloved, forever and ever." And suddenly he was gone from me, and the Temple was as it was before.

At this point the Lord himself appeared and commanded Mary "to utter no more of this mystery," while "the Apostles were sore afraid that the Lord would be angry with them." 15 The sacramental episode is close to the holy wedding in the temple described in the Story of Joseph and Asenath, giving some indication of the great age and wide ramifications of the motif. 16 The account continues with Jesus giving the apostles further instructions in the ordinances, but the text is badly damaged. In one version Andrew accuses Mary of teaching false doctrine (an authentic human touch is the occasional reference in the early documents to a slight but uncomfortable tension between Mary and some of the apostles), but Peter reminds him that the Lord confided in Mary more than any other, while Mary, upset, weeps and says, "Peter, do you think I am making all this up?" 17

In the book of 2nd Jeu, considered by Carl Schmidt to be the most instructive of all early Christian texts, the apostles and their wives all form a circle a circle around the Lord, who says he will lead them through all the secret ordinances that shall give them eternal progression. 18 Then :all the Apostles, clothed in their garments, placing foot to foot, made circle facing the four directions of the cosmos," and Jesus standing at the altar (shoure) proceeded to instruct them in all the signs and ordinances in which the Sons of Light must be perfect. 19

Snatched at the last moment from the rising waters of the Aswan Dam in 1966 was the Kasriel-Wazz fragment, where we read,

We made a circle and surrounded him and he said, "I am in your midst in the manner of these little children." When we finished the hymn they all said Amen. Then he said other things and each time they must all answer Amen. "Gather to me, O holy members of my body, and when I recite the hymn, you say Amen!" 20

The Acts of John describes the circle as being in motion, a sort of dance, and earlier texts than the Nicaean version add a cosmic touch to the formula:

"I would pipe: Dance all of you. I would mourn all of you! 21

One Ogdoad sings praises with us. Amen.

The number 12 dances on high. Amen.

All that which is above participates in the circle. Amen."

[Or--(alternate version)] "He that danceth not knoweth not what is being done. Amen. . . ."

"Now if you follow my dance

See yourself in Me who am speaking,

and when you have seen what I do,

keep silence about my mysteries." 22

It is doubtless to this rite that Clement of Alexandria refers in the second century when he writes, "Come to our mysteries and you shall dance with the angels around the Unbegotten and Eternal one, while Logos of God sings along with us. . . the great High Priest of God, who prays for men and instructs them." 23

Clergymen of every denomination have vied in fervor in condemning all dancing as of the devil, yet strangely the only passages they can find to use from early Christian writings never condemn it outright. The favorites are St. Augustine's dictum: "Melius est arare quam saltare," 24 and Chrysostom's, "Where there is dancing, there is the devil also," but the churchmen who quote it never finish what Chrysostom has to say, as he continues, "God gave us feet not to cavort shamefully. . . but that we may some day join in the dance of the angels!" 25 To which angelic dancing the great Basil also refers as part of the Christian tradition: "What is more blessed than to imitate the dance of the angels here on earth?" 26 Ritual dancing was condemned by the Fathers not because it was new, but because it was old in the Church--it smacked of the old Jewish heritage. Both Augustine and Chrysostom condemn the old Jewish dancing as part of the Sabbath rejoicing. 27

Were it not for a violent prejudice against dancing, the long debates of the scholars as to whether the participants in the prayer circle really danced or not would be pointless, since the earliest texts clearly say they did dance. But what kind of a dance? In the classic work on the Essenes, Philo, writing at the time of Christ, tells how men and women in the circle following the lead of an exarchos or choral instructor would chant hymns with antiphonal responses in a manner resembling both the "rapt enthusiasm" and the circular motion of ancient choreic dances, "hands and feet keeping time in accompaniment." 28 He is describing the Therapeutae who were an Essene group related both the Egyptian communities of desert sectaries and to the people of the

Dead Sea Scrolls – one could hardly accuse them of frivolity.

The Greek and Russian Orthodox churches still preserve the ring dance around the altar in that most conservative of rites, the wedding ceremony, when bride, groom, and priest all join hands and circle the altar three times; H. Leisegang connects this definitely with the old prayer circle. 29 At the coronation of the Byzantine Emperor everyone danced around the emperor's table three times. 30 The most common representations of ritual dancing in early Christian art show pious damsels dancing around the throne of King David. 31 And the Jewish apocryphal writings often depict a situation best described at the opening of the Book of Mormon, where Lehi sees God on his throne "surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God" (1 Nephi 1:8). Surrounding concourses are concentric circles, and the singing and praising are never static: it is a dynamic picture with everything in motion, as Lehi sees it, and as the cosmic pattern of the thing requires. The prayer circle is often called the chorus of the apostles and it is the meaning of chorus which can be a choir, but is originally a ring dance, as Pulver designates it in the title of his study. The prayer was a song such as Paul prayed and sang in the darkness of a prison: "About midnight they prayed a hymn to God. . ." (see Acts 16–25). And if they sang in chorus, would they not dance? Philo says that the true initiate during the rites moves "in the circuit of heaven, and is borne around in a circle with the dances of the planets and stars in accordance with the laws of perfect music"—the music of the spheres. 32

The most puzzling reference to the dance is also the oldest one, that in Matthew 11:16–17: "[This generation]. . . is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. . . ." It was taking liberties with this strange passage "as a pretext" that the early sectaries justified the dancing in their prayer circles, according to Gougan. 33 In the text read at Nicaea the Lord says to the circle, "Amen! When grace comes I want to pipe and you all dance." But in a circle where they are already singing, the dancing is only to be expected in view of old Jewish customs—and this episode takes place in the upper room at the Last Supper, the Passover. Why should that playful game be introduced on that most solemn of occasions? In Matthew 11:7, Jesus is speaking about John the Baptist's followers and begins, "concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see?" This is a challenge to the desert sectaries. They were out there, as the Serekh Scroll (VIII, 12ff.) so clearly tells us, to "prepare the way" (see Matthew 11:10). He speaks of John's great mission as the herald of a dispensation, an "Elias, which was for to come" (Matthew 11:14), and then addresses the initiates: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (v. 15), describing the present generation as those rejecting John's message (v. 12) – they would accept neither John nor the Lord (vs. 18–19): they refused to dance to their playing, nor would they mourn with them for the sins of the world (vs. 16–17). The knowledge is properly guarded – "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (v. 15), a hint to the initiated that it is meant only for them. In the Acts of John, the Lord says, "Grace is dancing. I would pipe: Dance all of you. I would mourn: mourn all of you!" The connection with Matthew is undeniable, and again the limitation of the real meaning to the inner circle: "He that does not move in the circle knows not what is happening. Amen." An important clue is the likening to little children in Matthew 11:16. The Kasr el-Wazz fragment says, "We made a circle and surrounded him and he said, 'I am in your midst in the manner of these little children. . .,' he added, 'Gather to me, O holy members of my body, and when I recite the hymn, you say Amen.'" 34

In both the Acts of John and the Apocryphon of John, Jesus appears at the same time as a grown man and a little child; and in a famous infancy account when he and John embrace as small children, they fuse into one. 35 Is it a mere coincidence that he repeatedly speaks of the little children and the dancing when declaring unity with John? The central act of the prayer circle was prayer, and it was "as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said

unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1-2; italics added). Again in close comparison With John, he teaches them the Lord's prayer. Jeremias in a recent study of that prayer notes the significant fact that in it Christ addresses the Father as Abba. And that, Jeremias observes, "was something new," using an Aramaic word "used by a small child when addressing his father. . . . Jesus' contemporaries," Jeremias writes, "Never addressed God as Abba" 36--that was little child's talk, addressing God as a real, intimate father, ad a trusting little child would. Little Children do not stand on their dignity when they are happy; their singing and dancing is spontaneous. Some of the spontaneity and simplicity carries over into the later cult of the Christ child; but in the early Christian texts it is the clue to an authentic situation. In the Testament of the XII Apostles, the Lord, appearing to the people after the resurrection just before producing bread and wine miraculously for the administering of the sacrament, has a conversation with a little child. 37 In exactly the same situation in the Book of Mormon the resurrected Lord blesses the little children "one by one," but he begins his discourse to the Nephites by telling them three times that no one can approach him except as a little child. (See 3 Nephi 9:22, 11:37-38.) The prayer circle is the nearest approach to the Lord that men make on earth - and they can approach him only "as little Children."

The prayer spoken in the circle differs every time; it is not strictly prescribed. The one leading the prayer expresses himself as the Spirit moves him, and the others either repeat each line after him (Which would not be necessary if they all knew it by heart) or add an "amen" at the end of each phrase, which is the equivalent of reciting the prayer for oneself. The most significant example of this freedom of composition is certainly the Lord's Prayer. "Originally," wrote Jeremias, "the doxology, 'For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever', was absent," yet it is found in the oldest Church order, the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles." Has someone taken liberties with the sacred canon, then? No, "the absence of the doxology from the original text,

. . ." Jeremias explains, "does not mean that Jesus intended his prayer to be recited without a word of praise at the end. But in the very earliest times, the doxology had no fixed form and its precise wording was left to those who prayed." Only "later on . . . it was felt necessary to establish the doxology in a fixed form," 38 which explains why the prayer has different forms in Matthew 6:13 and Luke 11:4. Also, the older Aramaic form of the prayer required forgive "our debts" which the Greek of Luke changes to forgive "our sins." 39 This vindicates both the inclusion of the doxology in the Lord's prayer in 3 Nephi 13:9-13 and the reading there of "debts" instead of "sins."

Almost all accounts mention the introduction of the prayer as being in a strange Language, a triple formula of words resembling each other. Thus in 1 Jeu after they form the circle, Jesus "begins a hymn which appears to be meaningless, a speaking in tongues, a glossolalia." 40 In the Pistis Sophia also, the Lord, having formed the apostles and their wives in a circle around him and "taking the place of Adam at the altar, called upon the Father three times in an unknown tongue." 41 Elsewhere the text explains how whole they stood "all in white, each with the cipher of the name of the Father in his hand, Jesus prayed in a strange language," beginning with the words Iao, aoi, oia! which, we are told, meant "Hear me Father, the Father of all fatherhood, boundless light!" According to our source, "This is the interpretation: Iota, because everything came out of (began with) it; Alpha because everything will return to it; Omega because everything is process (lit. the fulfilling of all fulfilling)." 42

In another version, when the Lord "ordered the Twelve to make a prayer circle and join him in a tripe Amen and hymn to the Father and Creator of all treasure," he began by saying "ie, ie, ie, calling upon the Father to create beings to be the Lords of every treasure, and as such to bear the name of their Father Jeu, who has replenished the treasuries with countless spirits and degrees of

glory." 43 When Abraham, according to an old and highly respected source, "rebuilt the altar of Adam in order to bring a sacrifice to the Eternal One," as he had been instructed by an angel, he raised his voice in prayer, saying: "El ,El, El! Jaoel! [the last meaning Jehovah] . . . receive the words of my prayer! Receive the sacrifice which I have made at the command! Have mercy, show me, teach me, give to the servant the light and knowledge thou hast promised to send him!" 44 Abraham was following the example of Adam, who prayed to God for three days, repeating three times the prayer: "May the words of my mouth be heard! God, do not withdraw thyself from my supplication! . . . Then an angel of the Lord came with a book, and comforted Adam and taught him." 45 When Adam and Eve found themselves cut off from the glory of the Lord, according to the intriguing Combat of Adam, they stood with upstretched hands calling upon the Lord, as "Adam began to pray in a language which is unintelligible to us." 46 The so-called Coptic Gnostic Writing purports to give us Adam's words on the occasion as being composed of the elements io-i-a and i-oy-el, meaning "God is with us forever and ever," and "through the power of revelation." 47 The Jewish traditions indicate that the story is no Gnostic invention, though of course mysterious named and cryptograms are the stuff on which human vanity feeds, and every ambitious sectary would come up with his own words and interpretations. Yet, though none of these writings may be taken as binding or authentic, taken all together they contain common elements which go back as far as the church of the apostles. When Mary asks the Lord "tell me your highest name!" "He, standing in the midst of a cloud of light, said, 'He, Elohe, Elohe, Elohe; Eran, Eran, Eran; Rafon, Rafon, Rafon; Raqon, Raqon, Raqon,'" etc., etc. 48 Such mysteries are just the sort of thing unqualified persons love to play around with, and various Gnostic groups took fullest advantage of them. But again, the Jews are way ahead of them, as we see in the huge catalogues of mysterious angelic names in such works as 3 Epoch.

What H. Leclercq calls "that magnificent gesture" of raising both hands high above the head with which those in the prayer circle began their prayer was, as he notes, a natural gesture both of supplication and submission. 49 It was specifically a conscious imitation of the crucifixion, 50 and that brings to mind the significant detail, mentioned by the Synoptic writers, that the Lord on the Cross called upon the Father in a strange tongue: those who were standing by, though Aramaic was supposed to be their native tongue, disagreed as to the meaning (see Mark 15:33ff.), and indeed the Mss give many variant readings of an utterance which the writers of the Gospels left untranslated, plainly because there was some doubt as to the meaning. It recalls the cry of distress of David in Psalms 54:2: "Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth," 51 and on Psalms 55:1: "Give ear to my prayer, O God . . . Attend unto me, and hear me . . . My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me."

F. Preisigke, studying the same gesture among the Egyptians (it is none other than the famous "ka" gesture), notes that it represents submission (the "hands up" position of one surrendering on the battlefield) while at the same time calling the attention of heaven to an offering one has brought in supplication. He also points out that the early Christians used the same gesture in anticipation of a visitation from heaven, to which they added the idea of the upraised arms of the Savior on the cross. 52 We have already mentioned the prayers of Adam and Abraham calling upon God in a strange tongue in the midst of darkness and distress. Abraham, says the Zohar, received no message until he built an altar and brought an offering, "for there is no stirring above until there is a stirring below

. . . we do not say grace over an empty table"—or altar. 53 Enoch was another who as he prayed "stretched forth his arms, and his heart swilled wide as eternity," and to comfort him God sent him the vision of Noah's salvation. (See Moses 7:41ff.) According to First Enoch, Noah also prayed in his distress, "calling upon God three times and saying, Hear me! hear me! hear me!" 54 Let us also recall that when Mary led the prayer circle of the apostles "she raised her hands to heaven, and

began to call upon the Father in an unknown tongue" (above note 17).

Suffering is an important theme of the ancient prayer circle. The rite is always related to the crucifixion, according to Pulver, which was anticipated by it in the upper room, for "the care of the Lord's Supper is the idea of sacrifice." 55 In the rites "the believer must incur the same sufferings as his god, and therefore he must mourn with him"--hence the peculiar passage in Matthew 11:16-17. 56 Ignatius' Letter to the Romans shows that "real suffering . . . alone enables one to become a disciple, to learn and gain experience . . . For Ignatius, the believer must repeat the destiny of his God, he must become an imitator of God, *mimetes tou Theou*." 57 This is done ritually, as is plainly stated by Cyril of Jerusalem and the author of the Testament of Jesus Christ, cited above:"and thou hast stretched forth thy hands in suffering, that they might be freed from such suffering" by an act of imitation. 58

The clearest expression of the idea is given in that archetype and model of all initiates and suppliants, Adam. As he and Eve were sacrificing on an altar "with arms upraised," an angel came down to accept the sacrifice, but Satan intervened and smote Adam in the side with the sacrificial weapon. Adam fell upon the altar and would have died were it not that God intervened and healed him on the spot, declaring that what Adam had suffered so far was acceptable to him as a true sacrifice, being in the similitude of his own offering: "Even so will I be wounded!" 59

The prayer asks for light and knowledge as well as other aid, and the answer is a teaching situation. Thus the angels who came down in answer to Adam's three-fold appeal, "May the words of my mouth be heard!" etc. "came with a book, and comforted Adam and taught him." 60 Or, in another version, when Adam and Eve prayed at their altar three messengers were sent down to instruct them. 61 The Lord himself appears to teach Abraham as he is studying the heavens, according to Clement, 62 and the valuable Testament of Abraham begins with his receiving instruction at an altar on a holy mountain, surrounded "by men whom I will show you, how they will form a circle around you, being on the mountain of the altars." 63 Indeed, the main theme of those many ancient writings called "Testaments," and attributed to almost every patriarch, prophet, and apostle of old, is the journey of the purported author to heaven during which he receives lessons in the most advanced theology, history, and astronomy.

Of particular interest is the Testament of Job, whose age has been vindicated by the recent discovery of fifth century Coptic fragments of it. 64 "Make a circle around me, my children, form a circle around me that I may show you what the Lord and I did," (lit., what the Lord did *met'amou*--along with me). Thus he begins with what seems no more than an admonition to gather round. But when he begins explaining things to his daughters, strange ordinances emerge. When the famous three daughters of Job complain to him that their seven brothers received a greater inheritance than they, he assures them that he has reserved for them a better heritage (46:1ff., 5). He then tells one of the girls to go to the "celle" and fetch three golden caskets containing their inheritances. In each one is a mysterious article of clothing designated as a *chorda*--a string or thread, but of such cunning design as to defy description, being of no earthly design, but of heaven "giving off lightning-like emissions like sunbeams" (46:8). The girls are told to put them on like shawls "so that it would be with them throughout the days of this earthly life" (46:9). One of the women asks, disappointed, "Is this the heritage you told us about?" In reply Job tells her that these *chordai* will not only preserve them in this life "but will also lead you into a better world, even the heavens" (47:3). He explains that the Lord gave him the three bands "on the day when he decided to show me mercy," healing him of the afflictions of the flesh, and placing the item before him saying: "Arise, gird up thy loins like a man! I shall ask you certain questions, and you shall give me certain answers!" (re:4-6). When Job tied them on, all sickness left him and his body became strong and his mind at ease (47:7-10). "And the Lord spoke to me

in power, showing me things past and future" (47:10–11). He tells the girls that they will have nothing to fear in this life from the Adversary, because these things they wear are a "power and a protection (phylakterion) of the Lord" (47:11–12). Then he tells them to arise and gird themselves to prepare for heavenly visitants (47:12).

Thus it was that when one of the three daughters . . . arose and clothed herself (perieilexen--showing that this was a garment and more than a string) according to her father's instructions, she received another heart and no longer thought about earthly things. And she began to utter words (apophthengxato--make a clear and important statement) in the angelic sounds (phone), and sent up a hymn to God using the manner of praising of the angels. And as she recited the hymns, she let the spirit make marks (charagmata) on her garment (48:1–8).

Here the "string" or chord is definitely called a garment--stole. The next girl girded herself likewise and recited "the hymn of the creation of the heavens" speaking "in the dialect of the Archons," making her a true Muse (49:1–3). The third girl "chanted verses in the dialect of those on high . . . and she spoke in the dialect of the Cherubim," her words being preserved as The Prayers of Amaltheiaskeras--a most significant name (50:1–3).

In the opening lines of the Testament, Job tells his three daughters and seven sons to form a circle around him (the second son is called Choros). "Make a circle around me (perikyklosate me--he repeats the word) and I will demonstrate (hypodeixo, a very explicit word) to you the things which the Lord did with me (epoiesen met' emou, i.e., which we did together. It does not mean what he did to or for me!). For I am your father Job who was faithful in all things (en pasei hypomomei) and you are the chosen and honored lineage (genos) of the seed of Jacob"; i.e., he gives them a patriarchal blessing--his "Testament" (1:1–5).

Then Job recounts an adventure quite like that of Moses in the first chapter of the Book of Moses, after which Job suddenly appears as the humiliated King who regains his glory, the "Job who ruled over all of Egypt," no less! (28:86). He shows his royal visitors his real throne, which is in heaven (33), and they become upset and angry about his illusive "eternal kingdom" which he assures them is the only stable state of existence (36). "If you do not understand the functions of the body," he asks them, "how can you hope to understand heavenly matters?" (38:86). In the midst of his terrible afflictions he calls upon the Lord with upraised hands: "They lifted me up, supporting my arms on each side, and standing thus I first of all gave thanks, and then after a great praying I said to them: Lift up your eyes to the East" and there they saw Job's dead children crowned in the presence of the Heavenly One (40:2) and his wife who had just joined them: she having died of sorrow and exhaustion. According to an old legend, Satan had appeared to her as a baker, and when she asked for a scrap of bread to feed herself and her ailing husband, reminding him of his former generosity to one and all, Satan coolly replied that he would give her bread when she gave him money, piously assuring her--"You can have anything in this world for money!" (cf. 24:6–8). Elephaz and the other friends were forgiven by God for resenting Job's claim (which is also Enoch's) that God had given him a right "to his own throne in the heavens" (43:1), and in his joy Elephaz led another prayer circle: "He began a hymn, the other friends repeating after him along with their supporters (troops) near the altar." He began by casting out Satan (43:1ff.). "Behold, the Lord has drawn near, the Saints now stand prepared, their crowns of glory awaiting them in advance (proeyoumenon)" (43:11a). "After Elephaz finished with the hymn, all the others repeating after him (epiphonounton) while moving in a circle (Kraft: 'and circling about'), we arose and went into the city to the house where we live and carried on festivities rejoicing in the Lord: (44:1). Thus the story ends as it were in the upper room where it began (cf. Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26).

In 2 Jeu the apostles and their wives form a circle around Jesus specifically "so that he can teach them the ordinances of the treasury of light, they being conducted by him through all the ordinances and thereby learning to progress in the hereafter." 65 At Mary's request on behalf of the apostles the Lord specifies the progressive order of "all ordinances (mysteria), all knowledge (instructions--Sooun), seals (sphragides), tokens (psephoi), supplications (or forms of address--epikalesthai), degrees (or positions--Topoi.)" 66 And in the Acts of John he tells those in the circle, "What you do not know, I myself will teach you." 67 The whole situation centers around the Last Supper and belongs to the church from the beginning. 68

In a Bartholomew text, the Lord takes the Twelve up into the mountain and standing in their midst gives them certain signs and tokens and then departs. 69 The Gnostics exploit and distort this situation in their usual way: Thus when an angel comes to rescue Norea in response to her prayer he says, "I am El-El-Eth . . . who stands before the Holy Ghost (obviously a Hebrew source--the Shekhina). I have been sent to converse with you and to save you from the Adversary. I will instruct you concerning what you should know." 70

Indeed, in various accounts Satan tries to get in on the act. We have seen how he smote Adam, interrupting his lessons at the altar. And when Abraham prayed at his altar, "Have mercy, show me, teach me, give to thy servant light and knowledge thou hast promised to send him!" Satan promptly appeared on the scene with an insolent "Here I am!" And as he began to teach Abraham, a true messenger from God arrived and cast Satan out and proceeded with the proper instructions. 71 In 2 Jeu the Lord warns the men and women in the circle that the ordinances in question are very secret, because Satan wants them distorted and misrepresented, as they surely will be if they go abroad in the world. 72 Divulging those very things, it will be recalled, was the sin for which the Watchers in Enoch's day were destroyed. 73 According to Rabbi Eleaser, Abraham built three altars on order to instruct his children and fortify them against apostasy. 74

As to the teacher, sometimes it is Jaobel or Jehovah as "the heavenly choirmaster," and sometimes it is Michael or Gabriel. As often as not it is three Sent Ones. 75 But of course all the knowledge is sent down from God. "Abraham . . . would utter prayers on certain occasions while sacrificing, thus invoking the 'One God.'" 76 This was the beginning of Jewish liturgy. Clement, however, takes it back a step farther: "Adam finding he needed help, solicited divine assistance with prayers and sacrifices. . . . That was the beginning of the ordinances of God." 77 According to the Moslem commentators, all creatures form in circles around God to be taught, suggesting the gathering of all the beasts at life-giving water holes in the desert. 78 H. Leisegang finds that throughout the ancient world the prayer circle is for the instruction of initiates. 79 We may even go beyond his range to the medicine circles of Indians all over America. Among the Plains Indians, as described by H. Storm,

the people all sit quietly together and learn the four harmonies of balance. Each of the people can now perceive the others, and they realize that they are all Teachers. They put their arms around each other and care for each other. Then they begin to dance towards the Flowering Tree together in a Great Circle. 80

The "four harmonies" mentioned in the last quotation appear throughout the world in the ring dance. The number of those forming the circle is among the pagans almost always sixteen, as Leisegang shows; with the Christian circle it is twelve, combining the three levels and the four cardinal points. 81 In the Jewish 3 Enoch the three levels of the twelve produce rings of thirty-six. In 1 Jeu, "At every station (or step, topos) there are twelve springs of reason . . . and in each every father has three faces, so that the fathers that encircle Setheus have 36 faces. . . . At every level (taxi) there is a treasure containing 12 heads . . . and in each topos there are always three

Watchers to instruct." 82 As might be expected, the number 360 is constantly mentioned and pedants and mystics had a field day shuffling and rearranging their cosmic circles, as did mathematicians and astronomers--our circles still have 360 degrees. If the Gnostic can tell us in a typical text that "the Nous of the universe has 12 faces and the prayer of each one is directed solely towards Him," while in the midst stands an altar upon which is the Only Begotten Word, 83 that it is not so far from the impeccably orthodox Ignatius of Antioch, for whom the dance of Twelve "is in imitation of God." 84

Monuments of great age and imposing majesty in many parts of the world suggest the prevalence of the main ideas. Thus when Heliodorus went far up the Nile to Meroe, describing conditions during the Persian occupation of the fourth century B.C., he saw a council of holy men sitting in a circle of twelve with three altars in their midst. 85 As an eyewitness to the operation and as a personal friend to the Emperor, Eusebius was able to describe the arrangement of Constantine's tomb and the mystique behind it. "He built a martyrium in memory of the 12 Apostles in the city bearing his name." It was a golden superdome, open to the sky and utterly dazzling. A ring of twelve columns with relics of an apostle deposited at the foot of each represented the holy chorus. Then Constantine had a happy afterthought: He had twelve reliquaries in honor and memory of the sacred chorus of the apostles placed in the circle of the rotunda, each at the foot of a column; and in the center of this he put his own casket . . . so that, as he explained it, by a clever calculation any honor shown to an apostle would be automatically focused--as if by a burning glass, on the object in the center--the remains of the Emperor. Thus that smart man characteristically "utilized the intercession of the Apostles to his own advantage." 86

The plan was carried out in the still-surviving mausoleum of Constantine's daughter Constantia, with its twelve double columns in a circle around the sarcophagus or altar, 87 and from the same period in the Tomb of Diocletian at Split and many other imposing monuments dedicated to harnessing the power of the heavens through the prayer circle. There is a definite cosmic connection here. "What is eternal . . . is circular, and what is circular is eternal," write Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, quoting Aristotle with the Comment, "That was the mature conclusion of human thought over millennia. It was . . . an obsession with circularity." 88 If Plato bids us behold "immortal souls standing outside of heaven (as) the revolution of the spheres carries them round, and they behold all things beyond." 89 1 Clement, among the oldest and most esteemed of Christian writings, declares that "the sun and the moon and the Chorus of stars according to his decree in harmony and without any deviation circle in their appointed orbits." 90 The life of the soul is related to the motions of the heavenly bodies in the Twelfth Thanksgiving Hymn of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the remarkable tenth psalm of the Manual of Discipline is an ecstatic song with instrumental accompaniment and dance in the temple attuned to the circling of the spheres and the revolutions of the times, seasons, and festivals. It begins:

At the beginning of the rule of light in its circling, at the gathering to the appointed place, at the beginning of the watches of darkness, when its treasury is opened and poured out upon the earth, and in its revolving and drawing together from its source of (or for the sake of) light, when the outpouring of the light shines forth from the holy abode, etc. . . . I will sing what I learn and all my harping is for the glory of El, and all the sound of my harp shall be attuned to his holiness while the flute of my lips shall strictly conform to (lit. be laid to the line of) his instruction . . . I will prescribe the limits from which I will not depart (11) . . . I will gladly receive what he teaches me . . . As soon as my hand and feet are stretched forth I will call upon (abarekh) his name at the beginning both of the going out and the coming in. (line 13). 91

Here the singer compares his solitary song to the strict discipline and instruction of the prayer circle in the temple, e.g., "I will make the heave-offering with my lips" (line 6), that being a

temple ordinance.

With the Fall, according to a Hebrew Enoch fragment, Adam tried his best to behold again the glory of the Shekhina, but had to settle in his fallen state for "the circle of the Sun which all behold in glory as the sign of the Shekhina with 6000 prophets circling around it." 92 In the various "Ascension" texts we are taken again and again through the various levels of concentric rings, "the order (taxi) of holy angels in their ring-dances (Chorostasian, lit. standing properly in a ring)." Isaiah is instructed in his Ascension not to worship at any of the six central thrones at any of the chorostaias or singing praisecircles, circles he must pass on the way up, since all the others are simply focusing their praise on "him who sitteth in the Seventh Heaven." 93 Such a mounting up is described by Philo:

The soul . . . is borne ever higher to the Ether and the circuit of heaven, and is carried around with the dances of the planets and fixed stars in accordance with the laws of perfect music, reaching out after . . . the patterns of the originals of things of the senses which it saw here (on earth, while) longing to see the Great King himself. 94

Philo is attempting to combine Jewish lore with the mysteries of Egypt. Pulver notes that the eight-circle is commoner than the twelve and "occurs also in early Christianity whenever it discloses an Egyptian influence." 95 Certainly what is purportedly the first and oldest shrine in Egypt, the Abaton, tomb of Osiris and first place of settlement with its great ring of 365 altars and its three levels, etc., 96 suggests the circle of 365 aeons that marks the place of the Adam of light with its three sides or directions, 97 and even more does the arrangement of the ideal temple in the newly published Temple Scroll from the Qumran Cave I. 98 Plutarch explains certain mysteries on the authority of the Egyptians on a combination of earthly and heavenly geography which is typically Egyptian: "The worlds are so ordered that one always touches the other in a circle, moving as it were in a stately ring-dance," which takes place surprisingly within a triangle, "the foundation and common altar of all these worlds, which is called the Plain of Truth, in which lie the designs, moulds, ideas, and permanent examples or samples of all things that ever were or shall be." 99 Some have suggested that the three-cornered plain in question is the Nile Delta, 100 and it is not surprising that Plutarch's image of things was Christianized by an Egyptian, Clement of Alexandria: "That which Christ brings forth (is) transformed into an Ogdoad . . . and through three names is liberated as a formed into an Ogdoad . . . and through three names is liberated as a triad When you bear the image of the terrestrial world then you also bear the image of the celestial." 101

It is because each prayer circle is a faithful reproduction of the celestial pattern that impulses can be transmitted from one to the other by all who are in a receptive state; the thoughts of those in the circle are concentrated as in a burning glass, or, since the thing most emphasized as the indispensable requirement of the circle is the absolute purity of mind, concentration of thought devoid of any reservations or distractions, and since the communication is beamed from one Treasury of Light to others, the analogy of the laser is quite striking. 102 The three who were sent to teach Adam and Eve the order of prayer gave them the pattern "after the manner of what is done above in the Treasury of Light." 103 If that sounds too Gnostic, the same image meets us in the above-mentioned tenth page of the Manual of Discipline. In the Book of Adam, Adam is endowed

with the image and likeness of the Lords (above), while Eve is the Queen of this world. . . . I (God) provided [sent] the three visitors (Genies) for their protection, and taught them the holy mysteries. . . and the prayers which they must recite . . . and I told them further, "I have provided for you this earth, in a dwelling-place fit for eternity. And then sitting near them I taught them the

manner of calling upon the Lords to bless them." 104

According to the Hasidic teaching, "the order of prayer is in accordance with the emanation of the Worlds," since through prayer we become "attached . . . to Him Who is blessed" 105 and rules the worlds. In orthodox Judaism "the Talmud represents the Beth Dinn or Tribunal of Heaven, as a circle, in the centre of which, God is seated," and the earthly Sanhedrin as a reflection of it. 106 The sympathetic vibration makes the individual also a microcosm responding to the cosmic forms, as we see in the Odes of Solomon, which echo the Dead sea Scrolls with the ecstatic declaration, "The Lord is the Crown upon my head, I will not be shaken. . . . As I strike the chords of the lyre the Spirit of the Lord speaks in my members." 107 In forming the prayer circle one excludes the outer world, as families holding the Passover feast form closed circles with their backs all turned on the outer world, or as the true initiates form the inner or "esoteric" circle, leaving all the rest to the outer or "exoteric" world. The Lord explains this to the apostles, telling them of higher prayer circles as he takes each by the hand and introduces him into "the First Mystery," explaining, "That is why I said to you that you were chosen out of the world." 108 It was from such a circle in heaven that God at the creation of this earth chose those who would be his rulers in it, according to 1 Jeu, the Apocalypse of Abraham and the Book of Abraham 3:23: "And God. . . stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits." 109

The special object of Leisegang's study, an alabaster Orphic bowl depicting a prayer circle, bears an inscription beginning with "an invocation of the celestial force which moves the outermost sphere, encompassing all the spheres of heaven"; 110 the third line reads, ". . . because thou movest in a circle," and "exhorts the readers to invoke the divine cosmic power, the sun which rules the infinite cosmic space over the heaven of fixed stars . . . carrying the reader's thoughts back to the primordial age before the birth of the cosmos." 111 For the rites in the circle "take place in the supercelestial space beyond the starry heavens." 112 Leisegang concludes that the many pagan versions of the thing "all bear witness to the mysteries, to the diverse yet always interrelated forms of the original Orphic-Dionysian cult . . . descended deep into the Christian world." 113 His final word is that "all these rites were in some way related, though today the nature of the connection can only be surmised." 114 They go much farther back than the Orphic-Dionysian tradition, however, since the old Babylonian hymn of creation, the Enuma Elish, tells how at the Creation God drew "the universal figure," the quartered circle, which is repeated at every level of existence, 115 with the idea that whatever is done on one level or world is done in heaven also. 116 The only proper place for such activities is the temple, since that edifice is expressly designed for taking one's bearings on the universe in every sense. "The Temple is the center from which light goes forth, and which at the same time draws everything to itself and brings all things together." 117 Its ordinances are those prescribed after the heavenly pattern (see Hebrews 8:5). We have written extensively elsewhere on the "hierocentric" layout of ancient temples, cities, camps, and other ritual complexes--of their universality and antiquity there can be no doubt. Nor is there any shortage of early writings to tell us what they signified to their builders.

In 3 Enoch, the Rabbi Ishmael mounting up to heaven must pass through six hekaloth, "' chamber within chamber', the Halls being arranged in concentric circles." The word hekal usually means simply temple (it is the Arabic word for shrine or temple), but in the Enoch literature it regularly refers to the chambers or rooms of the temple representing various steps of initiation. 118 "Arriving at the entrance of the seventh hekal," Rabbi Ishmael reports, in the opening lines of his epic:

I stood still in prayer before the Holy One, blessed be He, and, lifting up my eyes on high (i.e. toward the Divine Majesty), I said: "Lord of the Universe, I pray thee that the merit of Aaron . . .

who received the crown of priesthood from [in the presence] of Thy Glory on the mount of Sinai be valid for me in this hour" [no unclean thing can take this step otherwise].

One thinks of Moses also "clothed upon with glory" on the mountain (Moses 7:3; 1:2, 9). Rabbi Ishmael having reached the door to the presence of God must become a crowned king and a priest before he can enter. He asks for this because, like others who make this supreme prayer, he seeks to be delivered from his lower condition, that Satan "may not get power over me nor throw me down from the heavens," 119 i.e., even as they were, for on meeting Adam in the dark and dreary world, Satan boasts and taunts him, that he has caused him to be cast out of Paradise even as Adam had caused his expulsion from heaven at the time of the Creation. 120 In short, Ishmael utters the classic prayer of Adam, Moses, Abraham, and others, and receives the proper reply when God immediately sends "Metatron, his Servant the angel, the Prince of the Presence" to instruct him and bring him farther on the way: "Forthwith the Holy One . . . sent to me Metatron, his Servant the angel, the Prince (sar) of the Presence," who came joyfully to Ishmael, grasped him firmly by the right hand in the sight of all, and said, "Enter in peace before the high exalted King and behold [comprehend] the picture [likeness] of the Merkabah." The use of special words (hitsaqel, "comprehend" for "see," demuth, "likeness" or "picture" instead of simply saying God, and Merkabah [that elaborate circumlocution]) all save the writer from further obligation to say just what it was Rabbi Ishmael saw--since it cannot be described to those mortals who have seen nothing like it. The same caution is expressed in Lehi's report that "he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne" (1 Nephi 1:8; italics added). Rabbi Ishmael also reports, like Enoch (and he is reporting all this to explain what it was that Enoch experienced) that God had given him a throne "similar to the Throne of Glory [cf. Moses 7:59]. And He spread over me [before me, on my account--'ali] a curtain [veil] of splendour and brilliant appearance, of grace and mercy, similar to the curtain of the Throne of Glory; and on it were fixed ass kinds of lights in the universe." 121 "The Curtain," comments Odeberg on this, "regularly represents the recording," comments Odeberg on this, "regularly represents the recording of the Divine decrees with regard to the world, the secrets of the world's creation and sustenance, etc., in short the innermost Divine Secrets" 122--the secrets, that is, of this earth and of all other "lights in the universe." We pointed out in the Egyptian Endowment that ancient temple veils represented the point or act of transition between man's sublunary life and the vast open reaches of the immensity of space beyond, into which one passes by passing through that veil. 123 They were cosmic veils, appropriately adorned, as Rabbi Ishmael reports, with astronomical marks and emblems.

Such a veil was discovered in a cemetery of Astana in central Asia by Sir Aurel Stein and has been hailed by De Santillana and Von Dechend as done "in true archaic spirit (which means that only hints are given, and the spectator has to work out for himself the significance of the details)." 124 It dates from the seventh century, was found in position suspended from pegs on a wall; it is in Sassanian rather than Chinese workmanship and was found near the body of a man dressed in Sassanian style. "Near the head lay also the crownshaped paper hat." An accompanying document says "that several sutras were copied and recited by monks" at the funeral of the man's wife: she was buried in 8 December 667, her husband in 689 A.D. 125 A mixture of cultures is apparent--the Sutras, Sassanian art and Chinese elements (the Chinese having moved in quite recently--640 A.D.)--and the ritual with which the parties are so much concerned may have been somewhat eclectic, with a foundation of Nestorian Christianity. In the veil inn Question, what first catches the eye are the signs of the square and the compass, boldly drawn as they are held up in the right and left hands respectively of the lady and her husband. To quote the official description: "Silk . . . perhaps originally white. Subject the legendary Emperor Fuhsi with his consort Nuwas facing each other . . ." about three-quarters life-size. "The bodies rise from a continuous founce-like short white skirt"--an apron, "their two inner arms stretched stiffly and horizontally towards each

other . . . the hand of each appearing under the opposite armpit of the other shows that they are embracing . . . Fu-hsi holds in his uplifted left hand a mason's square. . . . Nu-was holds in her right hand a pair of compasses. . . . From below issue two intertwined serpentine bodies which coil around each other . . ."--the well-known caduceus, of life and death, signifying that all things have their opposites (cf. John 3:14, etc.). The whole design is completely surrounded with diagrams of the constellations, while above the heads of the two figures "is the sun disc, white with red spokes" surrounded by twelve smaller circles, each connected to the next by a straight line to form an unbroken circle except at the very top where it is left open--plainly the circle of the months of the year. 126 Fu-hsi is not only the 1st king but also the patron of artisans, the Creator-god . As De Santillana and Von Dechend explain it, "The two characters surrounded by constellations are Fu Hsi and Nu Kua, i.e., the craftsman god and his paredra, who measure the 'squareness of the earth' and 'the roundness of heaven' with their implements, the square with the plumb bob hanging from it, and the compass," 127 as they lay the foundations of the world. So the Pharaoh would go out by night with the Lady Seshat to lay out the foundation of a new temple by taking direct bearing on the stars with the proper instruments. The Lady was his one indispensable assistant on the occasion. 128 Let us recollect that in the creation hymn of the Manual of Discipline the singer promises to gauge all his doings and mark the course of his ring-dance to the music of the spheres with the plumb-bob and line. 129 The constellations on the Astana veil are dominated by the Great Bear, indicating the center of the universe, the omphalus or umbilicus mundi, the navel of the cosmos. 130 Thus square, compass, and Pole-star designate the veil as the cosmic gate, curtain, or barrier to worlds beyond.

Rabbi Ishmael recited his prayer just before passing through to the throne which was behind a curtain, and he also informs us that God "made for me a garment of glory," 131 bearing the same marking as the veil and having the same cosmic significance, which reminds one of the close affinity between robe and veil in the very early Christian Hymn of the Pearl 132 and also recalls how the Bishop leading the prayer circle in the Syriac Testament of Our Lord "stands with upraised hands and offers a prayer at the veil," after which he proceeds "to make sacrifice, the veil of the gate being drawn aside. . ." 133 St. Augustine's version of the Priscillian prayer circle ends with the apparently incongruous statement, "I am the Gate for whoever knocks on me," which Augustine explains in terms of Psalms 24:7, referring to the veil of the Temple. 134

The fullest expression of that altruism by which one saves oneself in saving others is a simple but ingenious device employed in the prayer circle; it was the "diptych," a sort of loose-leaf notebook or folded parchment placed on the altar during the prayer. It contained the names of persons whom the people in the circle wished to remember. The diptychs are among the oldest treasures preserved in the oldest churches. The name means "folded double," though the documents could be folded triple quadruple as well if the list of names was very long. 135 The prayer for the people on the list was never part of the later mass but was always a litany, a special appeal for certain persons: "By litanies one intercedes for certain classes of persons." 136 The original diptychs were the Consular diptychs, carried around by top Roman officials--the mark of the busy pagan executive in high office. According to Leclercq, when bishops became important figures in city politics, high government officials would present them with diptychs "as flattering presents." 137 As notebooks they were convenient and practical--just the thing for keeping and handling important lists of names, and to such a use the Christians gladly put them. 138 "In the place of the diptychs properly so designated [those used in government business] there were substituted at an early time notebooks or leaves or parchment which one would place on the altar during the celebration of the Mass. . . . Gradually the reading of the names (out loud) was given up, and the priest merely referred to all the faithful whose names were written down on the diptychs or the leaves taking the place of diptychs." 139 The practice of laying names on the altar

is of unknown origin though it is very old and, it is agreed, may well go back to the days of the Apostles. 140 Confusion with the old Roman pagan custom of reading off the names of donors from such lists caused it to be repeatedly denounced by the early fathers in the West; 141 but the problem never arose in the East, and "the laying of a small tablet containing the names is to this day the practice in the Western Syrian rite." 142

At first the list of names was read aloud before being placed on the altar, but as that took up too much (one of the surviving lists has over 350 names) the reading was phased out; "the list could be placed on the altar without any vocal reading of the names." 143 The common practice of scratching one's name on the altar to assure inclusion in the prayers forever after may go back to old Jewish practice, for in 3 Enoch when the ministering angels utter the prayer (the Qaddish) "all the explicit names that are graven with a flaming style on the Throne of Glory fly off. . . . And they surround and compass the Holy One. . . on the four sides of the place of His Shekhina." 144

Since the purpose of the prayer circle was to achieve total unity of minds and hearts, "keeping in mind the absent ones," it was natural to include the dead as well as the living in remembrance. One prayed for himself "and also for all my relatives and close associates (consanguinitate vel familiaritate) and for all the Saints of the Church of God, as well as for those who died in the faith, who are recorded in my Book of Remembrance." 145 We pray for ourselves, our brothers and sisters . . . and for those who have paid their due to death, whose names we have written down or whose names appear on the holy altar, ". . . and all who stand in the circle with faith recognition, with devotion and honor to thee." 146 But in the earliest times the lists of the living and the dead were kept strictly separate "in two separate books." 147 For the work for the dead was something special and apart. "We remember the dead," wrote Epiphanius in the 4th century, "(1) by performing ritual prayers, (2) by carrying out certain ordinances, and (3) by making certain special arrangements (oikonomias)." 148 In the Clementine Recognitions when Clement asks Peter "Shall those be wholly deprived of the kingdom of heaven who died before Christ's coming?" he receives a cautious answer: "You force me, Clement, to make public things that are not to be discussed. But I see no objection to telling you as much as we are allowed to." He tells him of the spirits of the dead "retained in good and happy places" but refuses to explain how they are to be redeemed. 149 Likewise when Mary asks the Lord on behalf of the Apostles how "a good man who has completed all the ordinances" may save an undeserving relative who has died, she is told that the good man must repeat all the same ordinances again while naming "the soul of such-and-such a person, on whom I am thinking in my heart (mind) . . ." whom he thus mentally accompanies through "the proper number of circles (kykloi) in the transformations (metaboliai), as he becomes baptized and sealed with the signs (psephoi) of the kingdom . . . and so advances." 150 What these circles are the reader may decide for himself. "We remember not only the saints," writes the Areopagite, "but our parents and friends, rejoicing in their condition in the refrigerium and praying that we too may finish this life worthily. We all join together in this." 151 The refrigerium referred to by the Areopagite means those "good and happy places" spoken of by Peter and Alma. The Greek name for it is anapausis, a place where you rest for a time, and the famous Stowe Missal says the members pray for all who are in the anapausis, "from Adam down to the present day, whose names are known to God. . . and also for us (the living) sinners." 152

Lists beginning with Adam smack of genealogy, and we have already noted one person who prayed for all those "even including the faithful dead who are recorded in my Book of Remembrance" (note 145). In the fierce contentions between churches, from the second century (the Age of Heresy) on, in which each sought to establish its priority in authority and doctrine, the lists of Bishops were brought forth as the strongest proofs of rival claims tracing the line of each church down from Adam, Abel, Seth, etc., thus combining the idea of dispensation with that of genealogy. The idea of keeping such Bishop lists was inspired in the first place, Stegmüller

maintains, by the general practice of keeping family records and genealogies among the Romans and Greeks; indeed it may go back to what Mommsen called "the genealogical mania" of the Hellenistic world. 153 In one of the earliest of all orthodox Christian writings, the Pastor of Hermas, when the angel asks the writer if he knows the names of the Elect, he replies, "I cannot keep them in my memory; give me a book and I will write them down." 154 In his Confessions, St. Augustine requests, "Whoever reads this, please remember my mother and father at the altar," for which purpose he gives their full names. 155

St. Augustine makes a sharp "distinction between the martyrs to whom one prays and the living for whom one prays." 156 Typically Roman, Innocent I condemned the old Gallic and Celtic practices of praying "for all the faithful of this place as well as our kinsmen and servants in this place" and limited the prayer to the official dead and recognized Saints of the Roman church though the order was not enforced outside of Italy until Charlemagne cracked down. 157 In the Eastern churches the lists and the prayers were always separate; it is specifically for the living, Chrysostom says, "that we pray standing with upraised hands." 158 As Cyril of Jerusalem explains it, "In the circle we pray for those who are sick and afflicted; in short, we pray for whoever is in need of help." 159 Cyril does not mention the list of names on the altar in account, but he does elsewhere, referring to this very custom specifying separate lists for the living and the dead. 160 In the Eastern churches "they prayed mentally for the living," while the memento for the dead was something else, requiring, of course, the actual speaking of their names at some time. The prayer uttered for those whose names were on the altar was not a fixed formula, to judge by one old rubric giving instructions: "He (the leader) joins hands and prays for a while (no set limit); then he proceeds with his hands stretched out (extensis, extended): and all those standing in the circle join in." 161

The physicist Fritjof Capra in his "Reflections on the Cosmic Dance" 162 calls attention to that "system of archetypal symbols, the so-called hexagrams," formed of trigrams which were "considered to represent all possible cosmic and situations," in the religious philosophy of the Far East. To convey their message "the eight trigrams [are] grouped around a circle to the 'natural order,'" the circle among other things "associated with the cardinal points and with the seasons of the year." These rings, based on multiples of six and eight, he compares with the latest schemes and formulas of advanced physics for interpreting the universe. Not only is the basic circle of eight hexagrams in the I Ching "vaguely similar" to the way in which "the eight mesons . . . fall into a neat hexagonal pattern known as the 'meson octet,'" but also the great ring-dance, "the sixty-four hexagrams . . . the cosmic archetypes on which the use of the I Ching as an oracle book is based," (p. 270) presents "perhaps the closest analogy to the S-matrix theory in Eastern thought," both being as near as the mind of man can get to explaining reality and matter.

The various patterns and designs produced by ancient oriental religion and modern Western science do look a lot alike, and this is no accident, according to Capra, because they both represent the same reality, though why that should be so, and exactly what the reality is, and how the two systems of thought are related is beyond human comprehension at present and may remain so forever. What bids us take both systems seriously however is that each is not only perfectly consistent within itself, but that without any collusion both turn up the same series of answers. So there must be something behind it. This reminds us of Leisegang's discovery that "all these rites are in some way related, though today the nature of the connection can only be surmised." 163 The many ring dances to which he refers were also cosmic circles and must somehow fit into the same picture.

Yet one closes Capra's book, and a lot of others, with a feeling of disappointment. Somehow this Mayahana fails to get off the ground. What is wrong? In giving us a picture of the entire universe,

including ourselves, both the Eastern sages and modern physics, covering the same ground in different ways, seem to leave out something very important. They give us the stage without the play. Granted it is magnificent stage, a universal stage with self-operating scene-shifts providing constant display of ever-changing light, color and sound, filling the beholder with genuine religious awe; still the more we see of it the more restless and disturbed we become. We are taken on a tour of the studio, but that is all. The sets are overpowering, they include the most dazzling space-science spectaculars, but our tour-group becomes restive. Where are the actors, where is the show, what is the play? What is supposed to be going on here? The cosmic dance of particles whose nature we can never hope to grasp is not ultimately satisfying, even after we are convinced that that is all there is. "The divine lila is a rhythmic, dynamic play," Capra tells us. 164 Yet "ultimately there is nothing to explain," and "as long as we try to explain things we are bound by Karma." What you have seen is the whole show, for "every part 'contains' all the others. . . . Every particle consists of all other particles." 165 The "bootstrap principle" would quiet all complaints with its neat circular argument; e.g., one hadron (particle) produces other hadrons and they produce it--don't ask how, because the process cannot be grasped in terms of anything in our own experience. So the only solution is to stop worrying or looking for explanations; you must settle for that because that is all there is. Learn to live with it: "Don't expect more and you will not be disappointed"; that is the sum and substance of the East.

The whole thing rests in the end not on reason or experience, we are repeatedly told, nothing can be described or defined, but all depends on feeling and intuition. But if that is so, must we not have respect for our own deep-seated feelings in the matter? The fact is that we cannot escape that haunting discontent; there is surely more to the play than the properties. The prayer circles, Christian and Jewish, give us assurance of that.

The old Christian prayer circle does not pretend, as the Orientals do, to embrace the whole universe and sum up all knowledge; it is merely a timid knocking at the door in the hopes of being let into what goes on in the real world. Mr. Capra completely ignores the Near Eastern and old European schemes and patterns in his survey, and they are quite as rich and ingenious and probably more ancient than their Far Eastern derivatives. The Jewish and Christian systems are late and confused as we get them, they wander in an apocalyptic mist that cannot distinguish between revelation and speculation, but the dominant idea is that there is more, much more, going on than we have yet dreamed of, but that it is all on other side of the door. The Oriental shuts his eyes in mystic resignation and with infinite humility makes sure that we are aware of his quiet omniscience. He knows all there is to know, and that is the message.

It is Joseph Smith's prayer circle that puts it all together. Not only did he produce an awesome mass of purportedly ancient writings of perfect inner consistency, but at every point where his contribution is tested--and since he affects to give us concrete historical material as well as theology and cosmology it can be tested at countless points--it is found to agree with other ancient records, most of which are now coming to light for the first time. The prayer circle is one example of that; we may not discuss his version too freely, but we have seen enough of the early Christian prayer circle to justify some important conclusions:

1. It always appears as a solemn ordinance, a guarded secret and a "mystery" for initiated only. This does not express a desire to mystify but the complete concentration and unity of the participants that requires the shutting out of the trivia and distraction of the external world.
2. It always takes place in a special setting--the temple. Even in Christian churches of later time there is a conscious attempt to reproduce as nearly as possible the original temple situation.

3. The words and gestures do not always make sense to outsiders--only "he who has ears to hear" may hear, and only "he who joins in the circle knows what is going on." This is because the prayer circles are integral parts of a longer series of ordinances that proceed and follow them; taken out of that context they necessarily seem puzzling.

4. Though private prayer--circles would seem to be out of the question (quackery, magic and witchcraft made use of them), the members of the circle are never those of a special social rank, family, guild or profession--they are ordinary men and women of the church, with a high--priest presiding.

In the Cairo Museum written on a huge shard of red pottery is an ancient Coptic liturgical text which provides a remarkable link between ancient Egyptian and early Christian beliefs. It is a Christian "Book of Breathings" with name of Osiris (representing the initiate) replaced by that of Adam, as if the "Egyptian Endowment" were organically linked to the Christian. Equally instructive is the predominance of the prayer circle in the text and the cosmic significance given it. As its modern editor, L. Saint-Paul Girard notes, it has eight main divisions. 166

A. Calling upon God:

Line 1. (The Tau-Rho sign). 167 Hail El! Fathouriel, 168 who giveth

2. strength (comfort?), who gives replies [antiphonei] to the angels! 169

3. Hail Adonai (My Lord), Hail Eloï (My God), Hail

4. Abrasax! Hail Iothael! 170 Hail

5. Mistrael (for Mizrael) who has looked upon the face of the Father 171

6. in the power of Iao! 172 . 173

B. Solemn adjurations. Adam as the type of initiate.

I adjure you (i.e. put you under covenant), 174

7. by the seal placed upon the bo-

8. dy of Adam. I adjure you (a different word: "give the hand to," make to swear") 175 by the second

9. [seal] which is upon the members of Adam. I covenant with you

10. by the third seal which marked the vitals (bowels) 176

11. and also the breast (heart, mind) 177 of Adam, when he was brought low (cast down) to become dust (earth)

C. The healing of the man Adam

12. until Jesus Christ stand bail for him (lit. takes him by the hand) in the embrace

13. of his Father. 178 The Father hath raised him up (or met him). 179

D. The Breathing (Resurrection) motif

He hath breathed in

14. his face and filled him with the breath of life. Send to me

15. thy breath of life, (even) to this true and faithful one (or, to this vessel) 180

Amen, amen, amen!

E. A Type of the Crucifixion

16. Sousa, sousa, sousa! 181 I covenant with you by the three cries (of distress) which

17. The Son uttered on the cross, namely: Eloi, Eloi, A –

18. hlebaks atone 182 That is to say, God, my God, why (djou) has thou forsaken me?

F. The Hymn

19. Holy, Holy, Holy! Hail David the father (ancestor)

20. of Christ! He who sings praises (psalms) in the Church of the First-born (pl.) of heaven, Hail

21. David, theopa [tor?] (ancestor of the Lord), of the joyful ten-stringed lyre 183 who sings

22. within (the veil of) the altar 184

23. the joyful one (either David or the altar). Hail Hormosiel, who sings within the veil G. Prayer Circle

G. Prayer Circle

24. of the Father! 185 They repeat after him, those who are the entrances (gates,

25. doors) and those who are upon the towers (i.e. the watch men at the gates) And they hear what he says, namely the tribes (or gates?) who

26. are within the Twelve Worlds, they joyfully

27. repeat it after him: Holy, Holy, One (or Jesus) Holy Father. 186 Amen,

28. Amen, Amen. Hail Arebrais in heaven and earth!

29. Then you (pl.) bless (praise God, pray), 187 KOK (meaning that at this point certain actions are performed). Hail O Sun! hail ye twelve little children

30. who overshadow (protect?) the body of the Sun! 188 Hail ye twelve phials

31. filled with water. They have filled their hands, they have scattered abroad

32. the rays of the Sun, lest they burn up the fruits
33. of the field 189 Fill thy hands, pronounce blessing upon this
34. cup. KOK [another ordinance]

H. Entering the Presence

Hail ye four winds of heaven!

35. Hail ye four corners of the earth! (the inhabited earth, oikoumene) 190
36. Hail ye hosts (stratia) of heaven (i.e. the stars)! Hail
37. thou earth (land) of the inheritance
38. Hail O garden (or power, authority) of the Holy Ones (saints)
39. [of] the Father! 191 One holy Father
40. Holy [Son] Holy Ghost
41. Amen.