

# Forcing Change



## THE LABYRINTH JOURNEY: *Walking the Path to Fulfillment?*

By Carl Teichrib ([www.forcingchange.org](http://www.forcingchange.org))

**“Symbols are keyholes to doors in the walls of space, and through them man peers into Eternity... Symbolism, then, is the divine language, and its figures are a celestial alphabet...”**  
— Manly P. Hall.<sup>1</sup>

**“...symbolical rites are the external expressions of man’s inward desire to unite with Divinity.”** — R. H. Lamerson, F.R.C.<sup>2</sup>

**“Whilst we cannot be exactly sure what the labyrinths were used for, they were clearly a symbol of the Christian way, representing the path of the soul through life.”**  
— *About Labyrinths and Mazes.*<sup>3</sup>



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Carl Teichrib, Editor.

**NOTE:** This article was originally penned in 2005, but never made it into *Forcing Change*. However, as mysticism in Christendom has only increased, I believe it is important to re-publish the piece. In that vein, I have re-edited it for clarity, added extra details, and wrote a new opening that puts the essay into context.

A few years ago my wife was asked to be a board member at-large for a Christian association in Western Canada. It was a term position, and the organization needed a woman from Manitoba to round-off its representation. Leanne accepted the offer, which required some travel as she would be working with a group comprised mainly of pastors from across the prairie provinces. She was excited and more than a little nervous about her role, and the responsibility it carried.

The finalized itinerary for her first meeting arrived a day before she was to fly out. As she worked through the schedule, excitement turned to dismay as she saw that time had been set aside to walk a labyrinth that was hosted in a member church. After discussing this situation, we agreed to pull together a paper outlining the history and meaning of the labyrinth, for we believed then, and still do, that many church leaders are unaware of its significance.

Those next twenty four hours were a whirlwind as research material was gathered and thoughts put to print, racing to have something in hand before her departure. And when Leanne left she had a rough draft to critiqued en route. More revisions followed as we emailed changes that evening, and when she arrived at the board room the next morning she was carrying a “hot-off-the-press” edition – complete with stomach knots as she considered how to tactfully broach the subject.

Her opportunity to open the topic came when the board sat down for supper. Ironically she found herself across the table from the pastor who was hosting the walk, and during the course of the meal the discussion turned to the labyrinth itself, which had now been cancelled due to time constraints.

“You need to read this article,” Leanne explained as she pulled the essay from her briefcase.

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"I've read it already," the pastor said dismissively.

Momentarily taken aback, Leanne responded; "No, you couldn't have. It was written yesterday" – and the paper slide across the table.

In that brief exchange it was evident that the pastor had been approached by someone else with a different article, but with similar concerns, and hadn't taken it favourably. Leanne also realized something else; all talk in the room had ceased. All ears and eyes were on her.

After supper one of the other pastors requested a copy, and soon all board members left with one in hand.

And that's where it ended.

Did it change anything? Probably not. The labyrinth remained in the church, and the board remained silent to the topic.

### **Encountering the Path**

As I prepared this essay, I was struck by the introductory quote, "Whilst we cannot be exactly sure what the labyrinths were used for, they were clearly a symbol of the Christian way..." An interesting position, especially given the fact that the authors of this particular piece admit, "we cannot be exactly sure what the labyrinths were used for..."

We live in a day and age where many "new things" are sweeping through Christendom. Some of these alternative directions reflect changes in style and format, particularly in the area of music, worship drama, and corporate church structure. And each of these areas of change has the potential to raise discussions and debate within any given congregation.

However, as Christian leaders try to build relevancy in a post-modern culture, it is imperative that doctrinal discernment and discretionary principles come into play. This is especially true as society rapidly embraces a plethora of spiritual practices, beliefs, and paths. Unfortunately, we as Christians often miss-understand the trends, and in that vein we may inadvertently open our congregations to highly questionable choices and spiritual experiences.

Paradoxically, while the Christian community talks about "spiritual warfare" and "putting on the full armour of God," many of these same churches can be found embracing that which they claim to counter. In seeking relevancy, we have become dangerously "experiential" in nature, and old forms of mysticism are becoming center-pieces in "experiences of faith."

The labyrinth prayer-walk, which follows a single winding path to a central location, is a case in point. Primarily jump-started by a UK-based Christian movement in alternative spiritual expressions and by an influential San Francisco cathedral, denominations around the world are embracing labyrinths as part of the "spiritual journey." But are labyrinths a part of the Christian encounter, as suggested by the third introductory quote?

My first experience with a labyrinth happened years before the idea become faddish in Christian circles. I was doing research work on occult philosophy at the Theosophical headquarters in Wheaton, IL, and after spending a better part of the day reviewing esoteric literature (Theosophy is a blend of mystical traditions, ancient mystery religions, and eastern philosophies), I went for a walk across the grounds to get some fresh air. There, toward the back of the property, was a labyrinth that had been set up as a place for spiritual release and expression.

I wasn't surprised by the fact that a labyrinth was set up at this headquarters for occultism. It made perfect sense.

Understand, Christians looking for ways of bringing new relevancy to the church did not "rediscover" the labyrinth as a "faith-building" device. It's an old spiritual tool, and as we shall see, it's been part of the esoteric world for a very long time. Which is why, today, labyrinth walks and "prayer journeys" are being promoted by Rosicrucian groups,<sup>4</sup> at New Age festivals and celebrations,<sup>5</sup> and throughout the neo-pagan world. Not surprisingly, one of America's largest neo-pagan assemblies, the Pagan Spirit Gathering at Wisteria, OH, held a night-time Summer Solstice Labyrinth ritual, which was described as a "transformative, walking meditation through an all night labyrinth formed by 1000 lighted candles."<sup>6</sup>

Labyrinth at the Theosophical Society headquarters in Wheaton, IL.



A candle-lit labyrinth at the Pagan Spirit Gathering during the Summer Solstice.

## Embarking on the Journey

Counter to the statement, “we cannot be exactly sure what the labyrinths were used for,” is a wealth of literature demonstrating something else. Some of this material is easy to obtain, and other items more difficult – with some that should probably be kept on dusty shelves. This body of work paints a picture regarding the uses and purposes of the labyrinth as a conduit for the mystical. But before we venture down this path, it’s important that we journey into the recesses of ancient mythological history.

The primary historical focal point for the lore of the labyrinth goes back to Cretan and Greek tales of Queen Pasiphaë, her induced and perverse sexual desire for a specific sacrificial bull, an abominable act of bestiality, and the resulting birth of a strange hybrid offspring – the dreaded Minotaur, which lived in a labyrinth built to cage him.<sup>7</sup>

Each year, King Minos, the husband of Pasiphaë, demanded that seven boys and seven girls be given as a sacrificial tribute to be devoured by the Minotaur. One year, a hero named Theseus accompanied the children. Taking a ball of twine, he unravelled the string as he went through the labyrinth, giving him a trail back out. Once inside the labyrinth, Theseus followed the maze to its center, where upon he battled with the Minotaur and eventually beat the creature to death.

The labyrinth containing this Minotaur has been viewed two ways: 1) As a seven-ringed pathway. 2) Or as a complex maze containing halls and chambers.

However the image is conceived, esoteric philosophers have long understood that the Minotaur maze directly corresponds to the ancient/modern spiritually-oriented labyrinth walk; the long soul journey with its many twists and turns, the ultimate arrival at the central point (convergence), the struggle with the inner monster – and the final victory over the forces of darkness and ignorance (which can only happen when one is illumined at the center), and the repeated journey back to wholeness and the light of day.



Remember, this Grecian/Cretan myth was immersed in the pagan religious context of the day. The esoteric interpretation has never been lost.

Other ancient examples of the labyrinth are found in many different cultures. David McCullough’s book, *The Unending Mystery: A Journey Through Labyrinths and Mazes*, touches on this fact, noting that the labyrinth image can be found on ancient tomb walls and rock faces – from America’s southwest to Spain, Ireland, and North Africa.<sup>8</sup>

Manly P. Hall, a Masonic historian and occult scholar, points to the Greco-Egyptian god Serapis (and cites Egyptologist E.A. Budge), stating that “Labyrinths were also a striking feature in connection with the Rite of Serapis...”

“In the labyrinth dwells the lower animal man with the head of the bull, who seeks to destroy the soul entangled in the maze of worldly ignorance. In this relation Serapis becomes the Tryer or Adversary who tests the souls of those seeking union with the Immortals.”<sup>9</sup>

### Following the Path

In following the path of knowledge concerning the spiritual uses of the labyrinth, one doesn't have to go to the Pagan Spirit Gathering or delve deeply into occult literature – although we will examine esoteric writings in order to grasp the occult context. Thankfully, plenty of information abounds in easily accessed reference works. Take, for instance, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*.

In discussing the labyrinth as a religious tool, the *Penguin Dictionary* associates the maze (read labyrinth) with the Buddhist Mandala – an aid in the spiritual initiatory journey. Consider the various other metaphysical interpretations of the labyrinth [Note: square bracketed comments indicate an explanation provided by myself]:

“In the Kabbalistic tradition [Note: the Kabbala is a series of texts which make up the school of Jewish mysticism] taken up by the alchemists, mazes filled a magical function which was one of the secrets attributed to Solomon. This is why the mazes in cathedrals, ‘those series of concentric circles broken at given points on the circumference to provide a strange and tangled pathway,’ came to be called ‘Solomon’s Maze.’ Alchemists saw them as images ‘of the whole task involved in the Work, with its major difficulties; an image of the path they needed to follow to reach the centre, arena for the two warring natures...’ This explanation would run parallel with that provided by one of the teachings of ascetic mysticism – focusing upon oneself, along the thousands of paths of feeling, emotion and ideas; overcoming all that stands in the way of unalloyed intuition, and then returning to the light without becoming lost in the byways. To enter and to emerge from the maze might be the symbol of death and resurrection.

The maze also takes one to the centre of one’s self, ‘to some hidden, inner shrine, occupied by the most mysterious portion’ of the human personality. This conjures up the *mens*, the temple of the Holy Spirit in the soul at a state of grace; or again, the depths of the unconscious. Both can only be reached by consciousness after making many detours or by intense concentration, when that ultimate intuition is attained and everything becomes

plain through some kind of enlightenment. Here in this crypt the lost oneness of being, scattered in a multiplicity of desires, is rediscovered.

To reach the centre of the maze, like a stage in the process of initiation, is to be made a member of the invisible lodge [Note: this is the high-calling of the Mystery Religions] which the maze-makers always shroud in mystery or, better still, have always been left to be filled by the finder's own intuition..."<sup>10</sup>

Jack Tresidder's *Dictionary of Symbols* explains:

"...many labyrinths are unicursal, having no traps but leading sinuously along a single path. These were often used in early temples as initiation routes or more widely for religious dances that imitated the weaving paths of the sun or planets. They reappeared in patterns on the floors of medieval Christian churches as 'roads to Jerusalem' – paths symbolizing pilgrimage."<sup>11</sup>

Other reference books on symbols – and a labyrinth is both a spiritual tool and a religious symbol – give similar definitions. For example, see *The Herder Dictionary of Symbols*. While the meanings are varied, they do pulse with a similar theme, even when associated with the early Roman Catholic cathedrals. And this theme is repeated and probed by esoteric philosophers and New Agers; it's the path of mysticism, esotericism, and occultism.

## **Mazes vs. Labyrinths**

Is there a difference between a maze, understood as a series of complex paths, and a labyrinth?

Yes. Simply put, a maze is a puzzle with multiple choices, and is meant to challenge one's problem-solving skills. It is constructed in a way that requires the participant to think through the dilemma. In its modern usage, mazes are designed for entertainment and challenge, and have no directed spiritual value.

A labyrinth, on the other hand, functions differently. Its meaning, as this essay relates, is to stir a spiritual experience meant to bring illumination. It does not require a puzzle-solving thought process, as there is only one path in-and-out.

The point of the labyrinth encounter is spiritual, whereas the maze is designed to challenge a person's intellect.

## Reaching the Center

If the labyrinth is a path leading to one specific point, what does the wayfarer expect to find when he or she arrives?

On the mystical journey to spiritual fulfillment, the middle eye of the labyrinth becomes a place of divine illumination. Kimberly Lowelle, the president of The Labyrinth Society – a network of labyrinth scholars and enthusiasts – recognizes this basic function.

“The labyrinth is an archetype of transformation. Its transcendent nature knows no boundaries, crossing time and cultures with ease. The labyrinth serves as a bridge from the mundane to the divine...”<sup>12</sup>

The promotional website for the Breemie Labyrinth in the UK gives an almost identical explanation,

“The labyrinth is an archetypal spiritual tool, found across many times and cultures. While a maze is a left-brain, rational puzzle, the labyrinth involves the right side of the brain, and helps us access our intuition, providing a portal to the Divine.”<sup>13</sup>

Kathy Doore, an author on sacred spaces, freely describes the spiritual implications of the labyrinth:

“Labyrinths are temples that enhance and balance and bring a sense of the sacred – a place where we can confirm our unity with the cosmos, awaken our vital force and elevate our consciousness. These structures are space/time temples where we can behold realities that oddly enough transcend space and time. The orientation, form and geometry of a labyrinth has symbolic as well as spacial [sic] importance. It is a mirror for the divine...

...Moving through a Labyrinth changes ordinary ways of perception connecting the inner and the outer, the right brain and the left brain, the involuntary and the evolutionary through a series of paths that represent the realms of the Gods and Goddesses. These realms are associated with planetary movement as a process that induces Union with the One.”<sup>14</sup>

Divine illumination is the end-goal of esoteric philosophy.

Manly P. Hall, one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s greatest esoteric philosophers, tells us that the labyrinth was symbolic of man’s search for truth.<sup>15</sup> Other occult scholars tell us that the labyrinth symbolized “the difficulty of finding the Path to God.”<sup>16</sup> All of this points to the same thing; the mystical realization of our own divinity.

As Hall states in one of his earlier books, “Man is a god in the making, and as in the mystic myths of Egypt, on the potter’s wheel he is being molded. When his light shines out to lift and preserve all things, he receives the triple crown of godhood...”<sup>17</sup>

Rosicrucian authority Christian Bernard explains this mystical goal as the building and unfolding of the inner Temple,

“The Temple of the Universe, the Temple of the Earth and the Temple of Life are only one in the Temple of Man. This is why the time has come to work towards rebuilding it, for the Messianic Light must emanate from the Heavenly Jerusalem which vibrates within us.”<sup>18</sup>

Laying it out plainly, Annie Besant – an early Theosophical leader – wrote, “Man is not to be compelled; he is to be free. He is not a slave, but a God in the making.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Different Paths, Same Meanings**

Part and parcel of labyrinth symbology is initiation, the mystical process of inner transformation. Robert Macoy’s *Dictionary of Freemasonry*, like much of the esoteric literature, connects the meaning of the labyrinth with this concept. Defining the labyrinth, Macoy wrote, “In the ancient mysteries the passages through which the initiate made his mystical pilgrimage.”<sup>20</sup>

As stated above, initiation is the process of inner transformation. To that end, esoteric societies employ initiation as a vital component to spiritual advancement. Indeed, initiation is the pathway – the journey – to mystical completeness. This is the occult metaphor of the labyrinth, one played out in a host of similes. Consider the following four examples, which have elements of circumambulation - the ritualistic circling of a sacred space or object. Keep in mind, each is replete with historical and religious connections to the Mystery Religions, of which the labyrinth is a component.<sup>21</sup>

**Freemasonry:** When the Masonic candidate undergoes his initiation, he is led on an invisible path from station to station throughout the Lodge room. Each point in this journey is given an exoteric explanation – that is, the real meanings are cloaked in allegory and symbolism. After completing the journey around the Lodge, he is led to the centre of the room where he kneels before an altar. The Worshipful Master asks what the candidate most desires, and the initiate responds with “Light.”<sup>22</sup> Know this, the light requested is not incandescent light or some other physical light energy, but *spiritual* illumination.<sup>23</sup>

Thomasa B. Ball, writing for the *The Scottish Rite Journal of Freemasonry*, connects Masonic circumambulation with labyrinth traditions. And in describing the labyrinths of the great European cathedrals, he elaborates; “Labyrinths were not trivial ornamentations, and the master mason often placed his nameplate in its center. Clearly it was an important symbol, and pregnant with meaning.”<sup>24</sup>

And in a 2012 talk given by the Deputy Grand Master of Prince Edward District, Grand Lodge of Canada in Ontario, we see this symbolic similarity emerge.

“Like all rites of passage and initiation ceremonies, walking the labyrinth is structured as a pilgrimage with three parts.

First comes the journey inward, toward the sacred space where change happens.

Next, time is spent at the centre, where the new life begins.

Finally, there is the journey outward, the return of the transformed person to the world, often with a new identity.

Like our rituals in Freemasonry, walking the labyrinth is a symbolic journey. It is a metaphor for life.

In a labyrinth there is only one path. The only decision you make is whether or not to start. The path has many twists and turns but it steadily and surely takes you to the centre.

...Most labyrinths make you walk in a general clockwise direction, just as we do in our perambulations. The winding path of the labyrinth is much like the journey of Freemasonry.

You can trust the path to take you to the centre eventually, no matter where you happen to be at the moment. Thus, the labyrinth is a powerful symbol of the unity of our life path and of the centre that awaits wherever we are on the path.

Alternatively, we might say that the labyrinth is a symbol of God, who is both the centre we seek and the path that gets us there.”<sup>25</sup>

Finally, in the *Candidate Guide: Entered Apprentice*, we read the following; “Circumambulation is an ancient practice following the same idea as the labyrinth in Crete. It equates the path of initiation to that of a physical journey...”<sup>26</sup>

**Order of the Golden Dawn:** Initiation rites such as the Ceremony of the Grade of Philosophus have the candidate embark on a spiritual journey, following an invisible yet tangible path throughout the Lodge room. This journey, like that of Freemasonry, is intended to elevate the candidate’s level of transformative enlightenment.<sup>27</sup>

**Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis:** In AMORC’s Temple ritual, Second Portal, the student partakes in an allegorical journey searching for light and knowledge. While engaged in the ritual, the student follows a path to each point on the compass, and returns to a central triangle. Again, like the two other illustrations above, this act is part of the mystical journey towards “light” and cosmic unity.<sup>28</sup>

**Order of the Eastern Star:** As a co-Masonic body, the OES engages in a series of ritualistic initiations. Unlike Freemasonry, the OES ritual work is performed on a giant pentagram (often a floor-rug). This pentagram, with an altar placed in its centre, is called a Labyrinth. Each of the various initiation rites – journeys on the path to greater understanding – takes place in and around this Labyrinth.<sup>29</sup> Beulah Malone, Past Grand Matron and Secretary of the OES explains:

“The winding in and out of the labyrinth symbolizes the human soul stumbling and struggling through life; learning by mistakes and experiences that the way leading to the supreme life and to God is not easy but is a way of testing one’s power and strength.

By following the examples symbolized in the lives of the heroines of our Order [Note: part of the OES Labyrinth journey], we may come into a full light of His Star and into wisdom and understanding. The great magnet of our Star as it shines forth in the world is missioned to bring Unity, the Truth of Fatherhood of God, and Brotherhood of Man.”<sup>30</sup>

And herein lies the core spiritual meaning of the labyrinth-walk that has become so fashionable today: It’s the symbolic journey of illumination, completely spiritual in nature, and dependent on our works – the “journey,” or the “testing [of] one’s power and strength.”

The path to the centre of the labyrinth is as the invisible but tangible path leading to the esoteric altar. It’s an initiation into the mystical.

**Below:** The Eastern Star labyrinth symbol.

**Right:** An Eastern Star lodge with the pentagram labyrinth on the floor.



## The Path of Completion: Returning from the Center

Hundreds of Christians have taken part in labyrinth prayer walks, and many churches across North America and Europe are embracing this tool as a means to expand their spiritual experience. The Rev. Jill Geoffrion, a “certified labyrinth facilitator” and author of such books as *Christian Prayer and Labyrinths* and *Praying the Labyrinth*, writes:

“We are currently in a period of historic labyrinth revival. Churches, retreat centers and Christian camps are placing these prayer tools inside and outside. Christians all over the world are installing labyrinths in their yards and gardens. Many are using the labyrinths as a ministry tool, bringing portable versions to prisons, national denominational conferences and church group meetings. It is conservatively estimated that there are over 5,000 labyrinths in the United States alone. God is blessing the use of the labyrinth; many are being drawn closer to Jesus, experiencing healing and gaining spiritual clarity as they pray on its path.”<sup>31</sup>

I must admit her pronouncement sounds appealing. But this particular statement by Geoffrion doesn’t paint the whole picture. On her labyrinth prayer website, Geoffrion offers suggested prayers for different labyrinth events. In dedicating a new labyrinth, she suggests that those in attendance form a circle on the pattern and extend “the energy that is in our hearts and minds through their hands towards the labyrinth.” Following this exercise is a meditative time when each person physically lays hands on the labyrinth and calls forth “the image of a loved one walking this labyrinth and receiving what is needed.” After more “imaging,” she recommends this responsive prayer:

**“Community:** We dedicate this labyrinth to spiritual awakening and re-awakening.

**One:** With hearts extending in many directions, Let us pray...Sacred Sustainer, Way to wholeness, Creator of possibilities, Supporter of change, Forgiving Releaser, Freedom, Honesty, Wisdom, Hope, Joy...we thank You for the beautiful spiritual tool on which we are standing...”<sup>32</sup>

Geoffrion suggests other meditations for the labyrinth, including prayers from the “Christian Tradition,” “Egyptian Tradition,” “Hindu Tradition,” and “Sufi Tradition.”<sup>33</sup>

For Christians holding to the exclusive message of Jesus Christ in John 14:6, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,” a serious rift is now encountered. It’s the dilemma that exists between what Geoffrion’s first quote described versus the religious pluralism that the labyrinth appears to propagate. And because of the esoteric and historical meaning of the labyrinth, this spiritual pluralism is inescapable. However, this ever-widening religious inclusiveness – which is the expression of the esoteric idea of the Fatherhood of God – shouldn’t come as a

surprise. After all, in the labyrinth experience every path is relevant, every road is right, every religion is valid.

Granted, Geoffrion is but one spokesperson representing the Christian labyrinth movement. San Francisco' Episcopal Grace Cathedral, however, carries more clout.

The role of Grace goes back to 1991 when a delegation from the church visited the famous French medieval Cathedral of our Lady of Chartres, located 80km southwest of Paris. Moving the chairs away from the cathedral floor, they revealed the now-famous Chartres Labyrinth and started walking its path. Describing this event, David McCullough writes,

"Moving the chairs became the dramatic turning point, the crossing of the Rubicon, the nailing of the thesis to the church door in Wittenberg. For the few who knew about it, Chartres's obscured labyrinth was all too symbolic. Out of either Gallic indifference to what was there or a conservative fear of 'cultism,' cathedral officials kept the labyrinth hidden by chairs, except for a few hours on the summer solstice."<sup>34</sup>

This French trip was the tipping point for Grace, which soon opened two labyrinths, and a movement was born. Thus, Grace was the midwife to a trend that touches hundreds of congregations, with the vast majority unaware of how the idea entered North American church life, or the meaning and intent behind the experience. Moreover, Grace, which meticulously copied the image from Chartres (shown below), has a global network dedicated to advancing the labyrinth encounter.

Consider Grace's website titled *Walking the Labyrinth: Reflections from Chartres*,

"A profound meditation tool, a metaphor for the spiritual path, a feminist Christian icon, a symbol of Mary or even all Christianity, even perhaps an almost cult-like centerpiece of a movement – the labyrinth is, most everyone can agree, a powerful inspiration."<sup>35</sup>

Here, Grace is open about the deeper meanings of the labyrinth. On the front piece to their labyrinth website, Grace states:

"The Labyrinth is an archetype, a divine imprint, found in all religious traditions in various forms around the world. By walking a replica of the Chartres labyrinth, laid in



the floor of Chartres Cathedral in France around 1220, we are rediscovering a long-forgotten mystical tradition that is insisting to be reborn.”<sup>36</sup>

And Grace points out that the labyrinth is a *shared esoteric tradition*:

“In Native American culture it is called the Medicine Wheel and Man in the Maze. The Celts described it as the Never Ending Circle. It is also called the Kabala in mystical Judaism. One feature they all share is that they have one path which winds in a circuitous way to the center.”<sup>37</sup>

The labyrinth exercise, Grace further explains, should be viewed in three parts:

- “- Purgation (Releasing) ~ A releasing, a letting go of the details of your life. This is the act of shedding thoughts and distractions. A time to open the heart and quiet the mind.
- Illumination (Receiving) ~ When you reach the center, stay there as long as you like. It is a place of meditation and prayer. Receive what is there for you to receive.
- Union (Returning) ~ As you leave, following the same path out of the center as you came in, you enter the third stage, which is joining God, your Higher Power, or the healing forces at work in the world. Each time you walk the labyrinth you become more empowered to find and do the work you feel your soul reaching for.”<sup>38</sup>

As an institution, Grace is no ordinary church. Not only has it been extremely influential in propagating the labyrinth prayer walk, it has been a hotbed for global interfaith work.

In the 1990’s William Swing was Bishop of Grace. During the 1995 United Nations 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Swing proclaimed that Grace would work towards the building of a global interfaith network. After an intense amount of travel and lobbying, Swing succeeded in forming the United Religions Initiative – one of the world’s leading UN affiliated inter-religious partnerships. Today, the URI is an active player in advancing global religious unity.

Why does this matter? Remember all the connections between various esoteric philosophies and the labyrinth concept? A parallel runs between both themes – Unity. As a spiritual interface, and as Grace Cathedral reminds us, the mystical labyrinth belongs to “all religions traditions.”

Remember the Eastern Star’s labyrinth? Unity, the Fatherhood of God, and the Brotherhood of Man was the proclaimed magnetism of their Star. Likewise, this triplite ideology is Freemasonry’s boast, a major claim that the Masonic candidate is to understand via the paths of initiation.

Manly P. Hall, speaking of the Masonic interfaith ideal of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, penned these words:

“The true Mason is not creed-bound. He realizes with the divine illumination of his lodge that as a Mason his religion must be universal: Christ, Buddha or Mohammed, the name means little, for he recognizes only the light and not the bearer. He worships at every shrine, bows before every altar, whether in temple, mosque or cathedral, realizing with his truer understanding the oneness of all spiritual truth.”<sup>39</sup>

This is the starting point of the occult concept of “the divine.” It tells us that every path on the journey is unique, yet each is true. In order for the mystic to move onward and upward, to return from the center of the labyrinth, he must accept his inner divinity. As Hall says, “...the way of salvation has been hidden within us.”<sup>40</sup>

Reiki Master Kate McManus, in her article *Walking the Fire Labyrinth*, tells of her friend’s spiritual journey.

“This year a friend mentioned an event that was to be held further out west a week after our winter magic festival. She described it as a fire labyrinth ritual in which a stone labyrinth would be lit at night to be walked with conscious intent and so mark the end of the year and begin a new one, a shedding of the old and birthing of the divine child.”<sup>41</sup>

Years ago Paul Clasper drew this religious inclusiveness into a completed package,

“The new mingling of faiths will cause a fresh interpenetration of ideas and customs. Out of the encounter some paring of outmoded encrustations will perhaps take place. The new intercourse will fructify in more inclusive, universal faiths, perhaps even a new world faith as a basis for the coming world civilization.”<sup>42</sup>

### **What Have We Learned?**

In an earlier quote by the Rev. Jill Geoffrion, she proclaimed that “God is blessing the use of the labyrinth; many are being drawn closer to Jesus, experiencing healing and gaining spiritual clarity as they pray on its path.”

On the surface this sounds great. But is God really blessing this “new thing”? Moreover, *can* God bless something that has its origins in esoteric doctrines and ancient pagan mythologies? Adding to its historical pagan significance is the fact that the labyrinth has never lost its occult meaning. As mentioned earlier in the article, labyrinths are still being used, and will continue to be used, as instruments of pagan spirituality.

If God is going to bless labyrinth prayer journeys, how is He going to deal with Deuteronomy 12:1-14, 18:9-13 and Exodus 34:10-17? In each of these Scripture passages God explicitly tells His people to refrain from anything used in pagan practices. Moreover, the entire book of Jeremiah is a warning against involvement in alternative religious practices.

If God is going to bless labyrinth prayer journeys, how is He going to excuse the inter-faith aspect that is common throughout the movement? John 14:6 clearly states that the only path to the Father is through Jesus Christ. There is no other way.

Yes, the majority of Christians would affirm that their labyrinth walk is completely focused on Jesus Christ. That may be true, but it doesn't excuse the fact that the labyrinth is, by its theological nature, an inter-religious and deeply mystical device. If God is going to bless the labyrinth experience, how is He going to deal with 2 Corinthians 6:14-16?

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?...” **FC**

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## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Manly P. Hall, *Lectures on Ancient Philosophy* (Philosophical Research Society, 1984), p.357. Hall was one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's greatest and most celebrated esoteric philosophers, founder of the Philosophical Research Society, eminent Freemason, and a respected lecturer on occult doctrines and the Mystery Religions.

<sup>2</sup> Roberta H. Lamerson, F.R.C. “Initiation,” *Rosicrucian Digest*, November, 1984, p.21.

<sup>3</sup> Kevin & Ana Draper, Steve Collins, and Jonny Baker, “About Labyrinths and Mazes,” *Prayer Path Online Labyrinth* <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/paradigm/discoverframe.html> (Accessed 2005). Website promoting labyrinths as an alternative Christian experience.

<sup>4</sup> The Toronto lodge of the AMORC Rosicrucian order is now hosting a labyrinth journey the first Sunday of every other month (September, November, 2005; January, March, 2006). Location: Rosicrucian Regional Cultural Centre, 835 Broadview Ave, Toronto, ON.

<sup>5</sup> See the Pagan Spirit Gathering 2005 labyrinth ritual at <http://www.circlesanctuary.org/psg/rituals> for an example. See also the Breemie Labyrinth Mid-Summer Festival at <http://www.sacredway.co.uk/Breemie%20main/mhaydenlabs.htm> for another example. (Accessed in 2005).

<sup>6</sup> See the first link in footnote 5.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Campbell, *Occidental Mythology: The Masks of God* (Arkana, 1964/1991), p.20. See also *The Dictionary of World Myth* (Facts on File, 1995), p.135.

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- <sup>8</sup> David Willis McCullough, *The Unending Mystery: A Journey Through Labyrinths and Mazes* (Pantheon Books, 2004), p.10.
- <sup>9</sup> Manly P. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages* (Tarcher/Penguin, 2003 – Readers Edition), pp.62-63.
- <sup>10</sup> Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols* (Penguin Books, 1969/1996), pp.643-644.
- <sup>11</sup> Jack Tresidder, *Dictionary of Symbols* (Chronicle Books, 1997), pp.117-118.
- <sup>12</sup> The Labyrinth Society, <http://www.labyrinthsociety.org> (Accessed in 2005).
- <sup>13</sup> See footnote 5.
- <sup>14</sup> Kathy Doore, *Myth and History of Labyrinths...*, <http://www.labyrinthina.com/path.htm> (Accessed in 2005).
- <sup>15</sup> Manly P. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages* (Philosophic Research Society, 1989), XXVII.
- <sup>16</sup> C.W. Leadbeater, *Ancient Mystic Rites* (Quest Books, 1986), p.51.
- <sup>17</sup> Manly P. Hall, *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry* (Macoy, 1923/1951), p.92.
- <sup>18</sup> Christian Bernard, *So Mote It Be!* (AMORC, 1995), pp. 87-88.
- <sup>19</sup> Annie Besant, *Esoteric Christianity* (Quest Books, 1901/1966), p. 220.
- <sup>20</sup> Robert Macoy, *A Dictionary of Freemasonry* (Gramercy), p. 215.
- <sup>21</sup> Historians and occult philosophers who assert this link between the Mystery Religions and today's esoteric societies include Manly P. Hall, Foster Bailey, Albert Pike, C.W. Leadbeater, Israel Regardie, Papus, A.E. Waite, Eliphas Levi, J.D. Buck, Albert Mackey, H.P. Blavatsky, Henry C. Clausen, George H. Steinmetz, Joseph Fort Newton, and many others.
- <sup>22</sup> See *Look to the East: A Ritual of the First Three Degrees of Masonry*. See also *Duncan's Masonic Ritual and Monitor* and Albert Pike's *Morals and Dogma*.
- <sup>23</sup> See Pike's *Morals and Dogma*, p.252 and Foster Bailey, *The Spirit of Masonry*, p.108.
- <sup>24</sup> Thomas B. Ball, "Meandering with a Mazy Motion: The Rite of Circumambulation," *The Scottish Rite Journal of Freemasonry*, Southern Jurisdiction, USA, March-April 2004.
- <sup>25</sup> "Walking the Labyrinth," presented by R.W. Bro. Leonard Bedford to Trent Lodge No. 39.
- <sup>26</sup> *Candidate Guide: Entered Apprentice*, Masons of California, Rev 5/08, p.10
- <sup>27</sup> See Israel Regardie's *The Golden Dawn* and *What You Should Know About the Golden Dawn*.
- <sup>28</sup> Rosicrucian Initiation, Temple Section, Second Portal, AMORC.
- <sup>29</sup> See Beulah H. Malone, *Let There Be Light*; Robert Macoy, *Adoptive Rite Ritual; Ritual of the Order of the Eastern Star*, published by the authority of the General Grand Chapter Order of the Eastern Star.
- <sup>30</sup> Beulah H. Malone, *Let There Be Light*, p. 97.
- <sup>31</sup> Jill Kimberly Hartwell Geoffrion, *Christian Uses of Labyrinths*, <http://jillkhg.com/christuses.html> (Accessed in 2005).
- <sup>32</sup> Geoffrion, *Dedication of Deep Haven Labyrinth*, <http://jillkhg.com/labreded.html> (Accessed in 2005).
- <sup>33</sup> Geoffrion, *Prayers from Varying Tradition to use at a Labyrinth*, <http://jillkhg.com/prayers4labusedifretrad.html> (Accessed in 2005). I give Geoffrion sarcasm credit; she includes a short prayer from the American Secular Tradition – "whatever!"
- <sup>34</sup> *The Unending Mystery*, p.165.
- <sup>35</sup> Grace Cathedral, *Walking the Labyrinth*, [http://www.gracecathedral.org/enrichment/forum/for\\_19981122.shtml](http://www.gracecathedral.org/enrichment/forum/for_19981122.shtml) (Accessed in 2005).
- <sup>36</sup> Grace Cathedral labyrinth homepage, <http://www.gracecathedral.org/labyrinth> (Accessed in 2005).
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid.
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<sup>39</sup> Manly P. Hall, *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry* (Macoy Publishing, 1923/1951), p. 65.

<sup>40</sup> Manly P. Hall, *The Mystical Christ* (Philosophical Research Society, 1951), p. 248.

<sup>41</sup> Kate McManus, "Walking the Fire Labyrinth," *About*, <http://healing.about.com/od/labyrinthspiritual/a/firelabyrinth.htm> (Accessed in 2005).

<sup>42</sup> Paul Clasper, *Eastern Paths and the Christian Way* (Orbis Books, 1980), p. 108.

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