

INTRODUCTION



Christianity is a magical tradition. This is not so controversial a statement as some might think, for all spiritual traditions are potentially magical by the simple fact that they contain myths, legends, lore, and symbols that enable the mediation of spiritual energies between levels of reality.

The term “magical,” then, refers to a power inherent in the structure of spiritual tradition—the power of *mediation*. And mediation by its very nature always involves or brings about some form of *transformation*. When we speak, therefore, of Magical Christianity, we mean approaching and employing the magical lore and symbolism preserved in the Christian tradition as a way of self-transformation and spiritual service. On one level this refers to a mystical transfiguration of the soul. On another it refers to an active and willing cooperation with the inner orders of beings under the Living Son of Light¹ in the transformation, redemption, or “christification” of the cosmos.

All this is implicit in the symbolic content or magical lore of the tradition itself. It will be useful, therefore, to begin our study by looking at the structure and import of magical symbols.

There are basically two types of magical symbols. There are *inner* or *imaginal symbols*, which are symbols built up or received through the inner senses, and *outer* or *material symbols*, which are symbols

INTRODUCTION

(occurring either by design or in nature) that are experienced with the outer senses.²

It is possible for either an imaginal or a material symbol to become a vehicle for the direct expression of spiritual energy. It is usual, however, for the two types to appear in tandem. A material symbol will often have an imaginal counterpart and vice versa. Because of the more fluid structure of imaginal symbols, however, these tend to take a superior role, acting as bridges or transformers between the physical symbols and archetypal energy.

When this is the case, a practical situation arises that is analogous to a kind of three-stage funnel (figure 1). This funnel could be visualized with the upper, widest part originating in the realm of archetypal essence, the lower and narrower section marking the condensation of archetypal power in an imaginal form, and the tip of the funnel being the symbol or point of manifestation on the terrestrial plane.

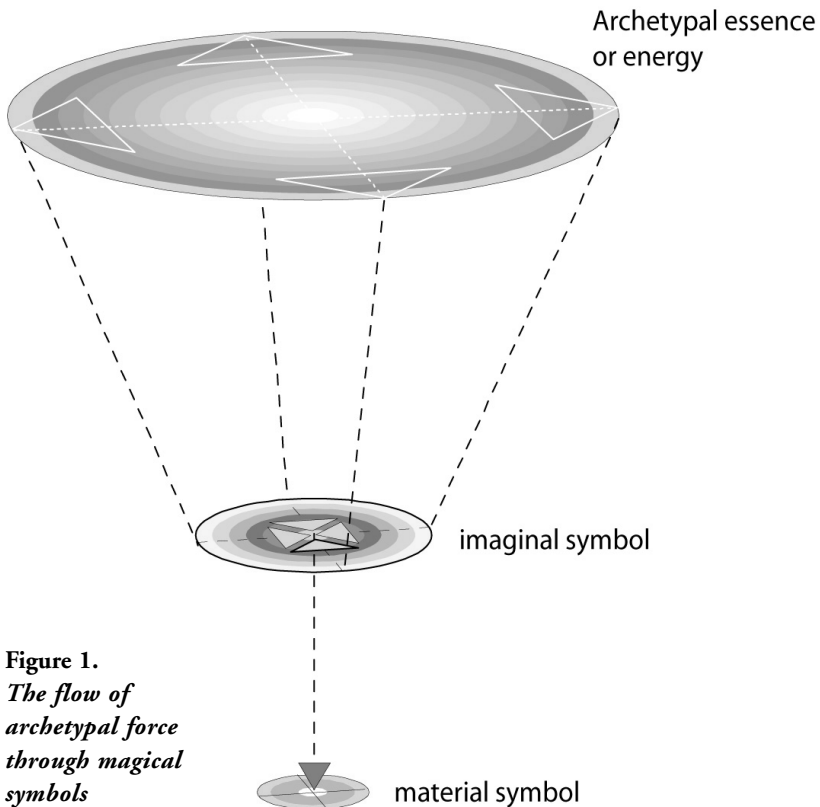


Figure 1.
*The flow of
archetypal force
through magical
symbols*

INTRODUCTION

Another useful analogy could be made with the stained glass windows of a church or cathedral. The pure light of the sun (archetypal essence or energy) passes through a translucent image (imaginal symbol), which transforms the light in such a way that it affects the physical environment and the consciousness of those who are in that environment (physical symbol).

This analogy is quite precise and is capable of considerable development. The position of the sun during the day and year, for instance, alters the luminosity of the window and hence the direction of light and emphasis of certain colors within the building.

Other factors worthy of meditation would be the play of light and darkness within the cathedral, or the fact that the light goes in from without during the day, yet out from within (assuming candles or other lights are present) during the night. Bearing in mind the two basic types of symbol and the roles they play in embodying archetypal energies, we make the following six statements about magical symbols in general:

1. Magical symbols are inherently appropriate.
2. Magical symbols always participate in a greater reality.
3. Magical symbols enable the translation of energies between levels of reality.
4. Magical symbols are transrational.
5. Magical symbols are polyvalent.
6. Magical symbols tend to assemble in groups expressing fields of energy.

Let us remark on these observations one by one.

1. *Magical symbols are inherently appropriate.* This statement simply means that a magical symbol is neither arbitrarily derived, nor the result of mere convention, for its innate form adequately expresses its meanings. Consider the image of a plant. Its roots are in the earth, its flower in the air; within its stem the life-bearing sap rises and falls. Because of its intrinsic structure, the plant is a symbol for the ideal spiritual life or growth of the human being. We live upon

the earth, with our roots in the land. We are nurtured by the soil on which we live. Yet, without losing our connection with the soil, our destiny is to rise above the land, to flower in the crowning glory of the light. This flowering comes about as a combination of our own directed efforts—analogue to the growth of the stem and to the flow of water and sap within it—and the activity of the light of divine grace. For it is in response to that light that the flower of the spirit develops and unfolds.³

Again note that we cannot *make* the plant into a symbol. It simply *is* a magical symbol by virtue of its inherent structure and its role in the rhythmic life of the cosmos.

2. *Magical symbols participate in a greater reality.* Magical symbols always participate in a reality greater than themselves. This property of symbols enables us to gain access to other levels of reality. Such access might entail, for instance, an expansion of awareness on a “horizontal” plane—an experience of the inner aspects of nature, of other worlds or dimensions and the energies to be found there. A similar expansion might also occur on a “vertical” plane, with symbols acting as transformers for higher spiritual, or archetypal, essences.

Taking again the image of a plant, it is not difficult to see how it participates in something greater than itself, that is, the cosmic cycles of the day and the seasons. As a magical symbol, the plant embodies the movement and rhythms of the life force within the universe. It therefore acts as a bridge to analogous cycles and energies within human life and consciousness. The yearly cycle of vegetation resonates with the life cycle of the human being, not only physically, but psychically and spiritually. It is in fact a well-known magical practice to align oneself to the rhythms of the sun, the moon, the seasons, and stars. In so doing, one attempts to align oneself to the circuit of life force within the cosmos, to become at one with nature in all its visible and invisible aspects.

On the other hand, the growth direction of a plant is vertical. This vertical or axial “destiny” is directly analogue to the spiritual destiny of humankind. Just as a plant is destined to rise between earth and sky, dependent upon the influence of both for its existence, so

does human consciousness stand between the elemental world and the realm of pure spirit. Ultimately, having aligned ourselves with divine will, it is our spiritual destiny to become participants in the restoration of a broken world, even to become coredemptors of all creation.

3. *Magical symbols enable the translation of energies between levels of reality.* Another thing we can say about magical symbols is that they always involve the translation of energies between one level of reality and another. Magical symbols are by nature the agencies of mediation. Among other things, magical technique involves interacting with symbols by using the inner senses: the inner vision, the inner sense of touch, taste, hearing, smell. These inner senses have a natural connection with the outer, physical senses (in fact, they are the same senses “inturned”) and hence with the physical body as a whole, the instrument of our outer experience.

What this means is that whenever the inner senses are used by a trained adept—every time one participates in a magical symbol on inner levels, every time one contacts energy inwardly—there inevitably occurs a translation of this energy to the outer world.

It is a misunderstanding and misuse of this principle of mediation that has given rise to the spate of books and courses that teach one how to obtain personal and financial success through techniques of visualization, “positive thinking,” and so on. And it is a dim intuition of this same process that has yielded the endless platitudes and semitechniques that revolve around the New Age maxim “you create your own reality.”

Rightly understood and applied, however, the principle of mediation transforms one’s daily experience, sanctifies it with meaning. A great portion of one’s life becomes a kind of spiritual exercise. This does not mean that one’s experiences are necessarily any different outwardly than anybody else’s. It is that they tend towards a holism, a totality, full-lived in spiritual significance.

4. *Magical symbols are transrational.* Our fourth observation about the nature and function of magical symbols is that they are transrational. On one level this simply means the significance of

INTRODUCTION

magical symbols cannot be grasped by purely intellectual means. They must be experienced, actually participated in, if they are to be understood.

A simple analogy could be found in imagining that you have been given the task of helping a blind person who has suddenly gained sight to cope with and understand the experience of seeing color.

Could you do this by reciting the scientific theories of optics or the refraction of light, or by describing the principle of a spectrum to this person? Would it not be far more effective if you were to proceed, for instance, by describing green as the color of grass, by having this person touch grass first, then identify its color as green? In other words, the path of the intellectual processes can yield very different results from that of actual experience.

Knowing the theories or explanations of color or of magical symbols is a far cry from experiencing of color or symbols.

The transrational property of symbols extends beyond consideration of the limitations of the intellectual function. It is important to realize that we are talking about a mode of apprehension and understanding that takes place on an entirely different level of awareness. Symbols often present paradoxical experiences or experiences of reality that are capable of being apprehended only *through symbols*. Two examples will suffice.

One of the esoteric traditions states that the way to the stars is through the center of the earth. Now, this statement is not logical, at least not in any merely intellectual or rational sense. Yet magical tradition holds that it is no meaningless conundrum but rather a paradox of profound significance—a significance that can only be grasped through symbols. True, on one level it does serve to convey an important magical principle, namely, that the deepest levels of reality are also the highest. But unless this principle is something we have actually experienced, the explanation merely replaces one paradox with another. The only way to fully grasp the meaning of this tradition is to approach it from an entirely different level than that of the discursive, rational mind.

Let me describe the kind of inner scenario that might enable this kind of experience. You could, for example, visualize yourself in

INTRODUCTION

a cavern deep within the heart of the earth. Looking down you see that there is a small hole in the floor. Through this hole you see innumerable stars spread throughout the reaches of space. By meditating on this vision, by feeling yourself in the cave, looking at the stars, it is possible to experience certain inner aspects of reality that cannot be grasped through the reasoning processes. These inner aspects may relate to the relationship between crystals and stars, to various levels of being or of the cosmos, or to something else entirely. The structure of this exercise itself provides the means by which a person may grasp, more or less directly, the reality behind the paradox.

The second example is an anecdote or legend about Alanus ab Insula, also known as Alain de Lille. Alanus is regarded as one of the really great poets of the Middle Ages, and he was known as *doctor universalis*, a master teacher who was conversant in all the known fields of learning of his time.

Ananus lived and taught in Paris in the latter part of the twelfth century. One evening he was walking along the Seine River mulling over the subject of his lecture to be given the next morning. He was to talk on the nature of Divine Being. As he walked along thinking of an appropriate approach to his subject, he noticed a young boy playing in the sand near the edge of the river.

The little boy had dug a small hole in the sand, and he was happily filling it with water, which he carried over from the river in a wooden spoon. Alanus stopped and, having mentioned who he was and what he was about, stood watching the boy's play for a while.

Intrigued by the strange activity, Alanus finally asked him what he was doing. The boy replied that he was going to pour all the water of the river into the hole he had dug. With a patronizing smile, Alanus remarked that this would be quite impossible. One could not possibly pour all the water of the river into that little hole! The boy seemed thoughtful for a moment, then looking the great doctor full in the face, replied that it would be equally impossible for Alanus to speak about the nature of God!

Ananus was totally shattered. Reeling from the immensity of the truth spoken by the child, he staggered off home without a further word. The next day he showed up at the lecture hall as expected. But

instead of beginning his lesson, he turned to the students, tore his outer robe from his body, and walked out, never to return. It is said that he eventually entered a monastery and there carried out the duties of a shepherd.

We can see how this story illustrates that symbols operate beyond the level of mere discursive reasoning. The image of the child trying to pour the Seine into a little hole conveys far more about the mystery of God, of Universal Being, about the relationship between Ultimate Being and human consciousness, than volumes of learned intellectual postulations possibly could. We see how a symbol can convey in a split second so profound a revelation that it radically transforms one's outlook.

5. *Magical symbols are polyvalent.* Our fifth statement about magical symbols is that they are polyvalent. The term comes from *poly*, “many,” and *valens*, which translates as “value,” “worth,” or “meaning.” In other words, a symbol cannot be fully understood by any single meaning, or on any one level of experience. A symbol always participates in a spectrum of significance, an entire range of meaning.

The characteristic symbols have of revealing several meanings at once suggests that symbols participate in more than one “system” or archetypal pattern at the same time. Take, for instance, the image of fire. As a symbol of the power of God, fire manifests both divine justice and divine illumination (it can blast as well as bless)—two essentially opposite meanings. But fire will also be found expressing many nuances of meaning between these two extremes: as a symbol of the divine presence (as in the burning bush, for instance), or of the warm, nurturing womb; the Blessed Heart or Cosmic Center (as in the hearth fire); or again as a symbol of wisdom, knowledge, passion, or purification. Magical symbols are thus like multifaceted jewels or many-branched trees.

In practical terms this quality enables us to experience a wide range of related inner energies simultaneously. To some degree also, the polyvalence of symbols accounts for the apparent differences in reaction among a group of people to any given magical or mystical working. There is a kind of protective or selective power operative in

the structure of magical symbols by which, for any of a large number of reasons, various levels of conscious inner experience may be closed to one person yet open to another.

6. *Magical symbols tend to assemble in groups expressing fields of energy.* In actual experience magical symbols rarely appear as single, isolated images. They are often grouped together in significant ways. Most magical workings make use of a certain range of symbolism, a certain group of meaningfully interrelated images and actions. We call such groups “symbolic fields” because the symbols used in any magical operation constitute a unique array of inner energies—a field—that has a specific effect on consciousness and matter. By this we do not mean to imply that there are rigid rules or recipes that can be applied mechanically to yield a desired effect. The practical development of a symbolic field (as in a magical journey or ritual) is rather like the creation of a painting, poem, or other work of art: It is the product of a balanced mix of technical expertise, intuitive perception, and inspired activity.

Symbolic fields are of two main types. First is the *magical glyph*, which consists of a particular dominant or central image together with a set of subsymbols that cohere through their shared resonance or “vibration” with the dominant image. Examples of magical glyphs might be found in any of the Tarot images, for instance, where a central figure is given certain accoutrements, is associated with a symbolic landscape, stands in a certain pose, and so on. Other examples are to be found in the icons and statuary of shrines and temples, in the structure of myth and legend, and in certain forms of inner journey.

The second class of symbolic field is the *magical pattern*. Magical patterns are of a nature more complex than magical glyphs and indeed are often composed of a set of glyphs arranged according to some archetypal pattern of relationships (usually in the form of numerical or geometric configurations).

They might well, in fact, be termed “master glyphs.” Examples are the Qabalistic Tree; the sequence of the Tarot trumps; sacred features in the landscape; certain temples, churches, and cathedrals; the magic wheel or circle; and the zodiac. Indeed, the inherent character

INTRODUCTION

of this latter symbolic field, the great round of the zodiac, provides a useful analogy for understanding the relationship among magical patterns, magical glyphs, and magical symbols: The individual stars are like magical symbols, the constellations are glyphs, and the zodiac as a whole is a magical pattern.

Meditation upon this analogy will be repaid with insight.

* * * * *

All theoretical knowledge regarding the structure and function of magical symbols is pointless unless given practical expression. In the Western mysteries such practical work is based upon the techniques of magic.

Many people are shocked by the use of Christian material for magical purposes. But this reaction is merely the result of a fearful misunderstanding of the Magical Way. Magic is a means of bringing about transformation (some would say transformation in consciousness) through the mediation of spiritual energies. A mage is above all a mediator. And in the Western tradition of the mysteries of the Son of Light, a mage is a mediator who in companionship with others—masters, saints, angels, mages, etc.—works to bring about the restoration or redemption of the world in both its inner and outer aspects. In this sense, magic is a specialized form of service to God and one's fellow creatures.

The Magical Way is universal in scope. Its practitioners, in accordance with the belief that Christ came not to condemn the old way but to fulfill it, work in many spiritual traditions and within many cycles of legend and mythology. These traditions function as doorways to the inner side of creation, portals to unseen energies and entities. Such matters are not undertaken with any sense of missionary zeal. Nor are there unbalanced attempts at “converting” others (whether they be resident on the outer or the inner planes). The true mage works in an attitude of selfless compassion, bringing healing and balance to little-recognized areas of creation. Indeed, many who work with the material in this book are not Christians, in the sense of being

INTRODUCTION

adherents of particular religious doctrines or belief structures. (Some, of course, are, and some even are clerics in religious organizations.)

Because of this inherent nonsectarian and universal spirit, what we have called Magical Christianity is really but one area of experience within the primordial tradition of the mysteries of the Son of Light. It is, however, the most important area of experience for most Westerners, providing a clear link to the universal mystery tradition through specific images and patterns that are deeply embedded in what the Renaissance mages termed the *anima mundi*, which might be roughly described as the “group soul” of the West.

Magical Christianity is not a new religion; it is not even a new aspect of an old religion. It is a specialized aspect of the universal tradition, which has been present within Christianity from the start. It may not have been always clearly visible, or readily identifiable or accessible, but it has always been present. And so it will continue, *mutatis mutandis*, as long as there are dedicated souls willing and able to take up the spark of inspiration, fan it into flame, and pass on the torch to others.

The purpose of this book is to present certain aspects of Christian magical lore. It has also been our intent to set forth a series of practical exercises that will provide a cornerstone of inner experience for those who seek initiation into the deep and fulfilling way of self-transformation and spiritual service that is the Magical Way of the mysteries of the Son of Light.