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CELTIC CHRISTIANITY IN PAGAN ICELAND

Part I: Fundamental Ideas

1. The Sources

What you are about to read is a reconstruction of Celtic Christianity in Pagan Iceland, i.e. the type of Christianity practised by the first Christian settlers of Iceland during the period ca. 870-1000 A.D. As no direct historical accounts of the subject exist, one has to rely on the symbolism underlying those sources which do exist. The material here presented is based on fifteen hundred or so unpublished studies by this author on medieval literature and ideology. These studies were mainly conducted during the period 1955-1985. In addition to the unpublished material, six volumes on the subject "The Roots of Icelandic Culture" have been published by the same author, in a series named Rætur Íslenzkrar menningar.¹ Most of the ideas discussed in this paper have been explained in the abovementioned books. The reader should consult them on sources, quotations, registers etc. The name of the series is abbreviated for convenience: RÍM. The conclusions of RÍM are presented as hypotheses; this paper may be taken as a summary of what has been found without reasonable doubt to be correct on the subject under discussion. Where there is doubt it will be indicated by the wording.

The primary sources on which these studies are based are
a) the Eddas b) the Sagas of Icelanders (in particular Njála, Grettla, Laxdæla and related material) c) Fornaldarsögur, Biskupa-sögur, Íslendingabók and Landnámabók (different versions taken into account) d) Place Names and legends connected therewith
e) Folklore.

During basic research general principles were arrived at through the laborious process of observing particular mythical

components within certain Sagas and pagan lore and comparing them. Consequently, these are primarily studies in MEANING. Each unit, an idea, colour, number, weapon etc. was isolated within its setting and its implications determined when possible. After this process the same unit was identified in a different context, its meaning ascertained, and its usage in Icelandic compared with the usage in a wider field of cultural complexes. This study is an outline of general principles thus inferred.

It has been the rule in Icelandic studies to take a certain background of the settlers of Iceland for granted. This view stipulates a separate Nordic background for Pagan Iceland of the Goðaveldi, a pagan religion more or less divorced from the mainstream of Mediterranean culture. Such a view normally grants the settlers of Iceland little knowledge in the arts of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, astronomy, writing, law, calendar, mathematics etc. Celtic Christianity - well attested by what sources we have - is supposed to have had a very minor influence and is seldom regarded seriously within the context of the Early Icelandic State, its foundation and Icelandic culture in general. The conclusion of this study is that the above assumptions are largely in error.

In view of the already published works, provisos and cautionary remarks are here kept to a minimum. The writer discovered a medieval model of the world to have been an integral part of early Icelandic culture. To that Model one can refer a number of questions on Celtic Christianity in Pagan Iceland. The Model, basically a Circle 216000 feet in diameter, was a replica of the scientific Model of the times in question, obviously in accordance with the belief that the Sun-Circle was 216 diameters of the sun in breadth. This Model of the Universe has been found to accommodate a great many phenomena in our heritage, otherwise unintelligible.

Due to the vastness of the material here dealt with, it has to be broken up into sections. The Model itself will not

be described in this specific paper; the author hopes to follow it up in the English language with details of the various aspects here touched upon, as follows:

- I Fundamental Ideas (this paper)
- II Numerology and Geometry
- III The World Picture
- IV The Holy Grail
- V Origins of Celtic Christianity
- VI The Allegory of Brennu-Njáls Saga (Njála).

Much of this material has already been published in the six volumes of RÍM in Icelandic. Briefly, the Celtic Christian world view in Pagan Iceland is seen to have had unity of structure and to have formed a coherent whole. As far as the author knows - and his findings have not been challenged - the relevant phenomena observed and interpreted in the Sagas agree with the following exposition. The paper is congruent with the facts as known in Iceland - and as discovered by various scholars in the ancient world and medieval Europe. In this, our first paper, we try to relate the inferences of RÍM to such studies. The author's main conclusion is that there was no real rift between the culture of Medieval Europe and that of Pagan/Celtic Christian Iceland during the period ca 870-1000 A.D.

2. A Syncretistic Model

We know that in late antiquity some thinkers were involved in gathering together and harmonising views of the universe of differing origins, building a syncretistic Model not only out of classical concepts, but also out of combined Christian and pagan elements. According to the medievalist C.S. Lewis "This Model the Middle Ages adapted and perfected".²

The conclusion of RÍM is that in 9th and 10th century Pagan Iceland, Christian and Pagan alike enjoyed a common cosmology - a syncretistic Model. Divergent religious views

were brought close together by a common denominator - the world view of the Middle Ages. This Model was the framework, or the fundamental structure, of the Icelandic Priest-Chieftainship (Goðaveldi), usually thought to have been established in 930 A.D.

3. The Model as a Central Idea

On the Model of the Middle Ages C.S. Lewis has this to say:

I hope to persuade the reader not only that this Model of the Universe is a supreme medieval work of art but that it is in a sense the central work, that in which most particular works were embedded, to which they constantly referred, from which they drew a great deal of their strength.³

RÍM's conclusion closely accords with this view: the Model of the Universe seemingly created by Pagan and Christian in close cooperation, was the central and most important item of culture in Pagan Iceland. One can understand neither the constitution of Pagan Iceland, its laws, its settlement, its sacred localities or even such sagas as Brennu-Njáls Saga, Grettis Saga and Laxdæla Saga without constantly referring to it and considering its implications.

4. The Finite Geocentric Universe

The Icelandic Model was geocentric - the Earth was at its centre. While some "universes" seem to have been considered "unimaginably large" in other cultures, the Icelandic Model was, contrarily "unambiguously finite".⁴ The Model had coherence and harmony, it had length, breadth and height - it was a structured cosmos. Outside it the forces of chaos reigned.

5. Time and Space

In the Icelandic Model Time was inseparable from Space. A certain concept joined both ideas, combining them with the beginning of the world, divisions of time, divisions of space -

AND the numerology as well as the geometry of Pagan Iceland. The world was conceived of in terms of Number and Geometry. While one may say such a universe was static, it is also seen to be the source of all motion. The most obvious name for the Space/Time continuum was KÁRI, the "wind" or "spirit". Time flew like the wind; wind measured the earth on its wanderings. The medieval scholarly use of the Greek name KAIROS (Time or Moment) for the same or a similar concept, may have influenced the choice of that word.

6. The Circle, the Centre, the Nine Spheres

Like classical Models the Celtic Christian Icelandic Model was ninefold. It had nine spheres, or, more specifically, One plus Eight. The Earth was static. Seven spheres were bound to the Sun, the Moon and the five known Planets. The Icelandic Model was thus essentially the same as that of classical antiquity. It was spherical, the Circle was its most holy symbol. The static CENTRE, on the other hand, was an extremely important idea of the Model, much more significant and pregnant with meaning than generally realized.

7. Celtic Christian Cosmology

Although religious, the cosmology of Celtic Christians in Iceland was not primarily Christian. One might call it the World Picture of classical paganism adorned with Christian thought. At the same time, unexpected bits of earlier cosmological notions and paganism crop up in the study material. The pagan element of the Model involved conceptions of gods and spiritual beings. At the same time they involved scientific notions current in antiquity. The whole structure dealt with man's place in the universe. A sharp contradiction between paganism and Christianity is consequently hard to discover. Doubtless the subtler parts of Christianity are still undiscovered, but what can be reasonably deduced, points

to an unexpectedly close harmony between the two religions. C.S. Lewis has the following to say on the medieval Model: "During these centuries [3rd - 6th A.D.] much that was of pagan origin was built irremovably into the [Christian] Model".⁵ These words are amply borne out by RfM. Just as medievalists sometimes find it difficult to determine whether a given work was pagan or Christian, the Icelandic Model seems without question to be a hybrid - to correspond to both.

8. Christian and Pagan

It will thus be clear that Icelandic paganism and Celtic Christianity (of certain of the most influential settlers) did not differ as profoundly as previously supposed. The spiritual life of both parties found expression within the SAME UNIVERSE. Although the images and concepts of one party may have had certain distinct characteristics which made them incompatible with the other, both related to the same universe - the same Model.

No record has been found of a significant conflict between Paganism and Christianity in Pagan Iceland. Neither side seems to have used coercion when the Model was constructed. Our sources all indicated the SAME UNIVERSE was true for both religions.

Celtic Christians may have insisted on the uniqueness of their God, Christ and the saints. That, however, does NOT seem to have prevented the total integration of the Christian Model with that of earlier Paganism.

9. The Union of Christians and Pagans

The formative phase of Icelandic culture may be considered to involve the union of Christians and Pagans within a common framework before the establishment of Alþingi in 930-965 A.D. Only in this sense is it at all compatible with the facts to speak of a peculiarly "Icelandic invention" as regards the Icelandic constitution. The Icelandic constitution (the Goðaveldi) was not an Icelandic novelty. Its

prototypes existed in Europe and in the Middle East. Its hybrid character was the main cultural force in "pagan" Iceland. This would seem to account for the singular fact that after the formal conversion of the Icelandic state to Roman Christianity in the year 1000 A.D. the Goðar - the priests of the pagan order - retained their power and their offices. An end was not put to the Priest-Chieftainship of the early Icelandic constitution until that constitution was replaced by the king of Norway in 1262-64.

10. Sacral Kingship

Celtic kingship in Iceland was not a mere political institution. It can not be considered by itself only. Kingship had a sacral character; it was part of the total universe, spiritual as well as secular. The World Picture was intimately connected with sacral kingship. Thus Celtic kingship was firmly tied up with the institution of Alþingi. It was not only centred in local districts of Christian settlers; it was an integral part of the national community as a whole. Paraphrasing Henri Frankfort, it reached "into the hidden depths of nature and the powers that rule nature".⁶ It was the king's function to "maintain the harmony" of the integration between Man and the Cosmos. Such was also the nature of the pagan Priest-Chieftainship (Goðaveldi). Hence this singular correspondence.

11. Kingship and the Model

As stated, the Icelandic Model of the Universe was not only based on the holy Circle of Pagans, it was directly based on the institution of Celtic Christian Kingship. The religious implications of sacral kingship were tightly bound up with the Model. That Model, it should be stressed, was neither vague nor unstructured, it was a firmly knit web of ideas based on the science, the astronomy, the numerology and the geometry of ancient cultures. Presumably the First Day in ritual was equated with the accession of the "king". The Celtic "king's" throne symbolized his power, his origins, and

those of his people.

The Icelandic Celtic "king" partook of the divine essence. He may not have been "god incarnate" but he was the mediator between God and Man. In that sense he partook of the nature of Jesus - he, and not the Pope in Rome, was the "Rock", the keeper of the Keys of Heaven. As such he corresponded to the pagan Goðar who were charged with maintaining harmonious relations between human society and the supernatural powers.⁷ The Celtic Christian Icelandic "king" maintained a position as a leader in the Icelandic commonwealth. There is every indication that he was highly respected by Christians and Pagans alike.

12. The Grail Keeper

It would seem Celtic Kingship was conceived of as being coeval with the universe. The King's strength - his mandate from heaven, so to speak - lay in his being the impersonation of the forces of fertility in the world. There seems little doubt that the Celtic Christian "king" in Iceland was equated with the Keeper of the Holy Grail - of the chalice of plenty, spiritual as well as material. As such the Grail Keeper was in intellectual and intuitive charge of his creation. In fact, Celtic Christian Kingship in pagan Iceland seems to have been directly invested in the preserver of the Holy Grail. During the pagan era the Grail Keeper was not titular head of the country, nor, as far as can be seen, a functionary of state, but just as clearly he was considered the source of law and fertility in Pagan Iceland. Society was totally integrated with nature; certain prominent landmarks and abodes of settlers forming the framework of the Model of the World.

At the death of one Grail Keeper another took his place. The indications are, that while not necessarily becoming King in a formal Celtic sense, a new Grail Keeper had to be connected with the "place of Water" in the universe.

13. The Grail Keeper and the Priest Chieftains

As already stated, the exact nature of the Celtic Christian "king's" secular power in Pagan Iceland seems to have been based on spiritual influence, rather than that of a formal office. He was almost certainly consulted on matters of the Cosmos and of deeper learning, such as mathematics, geometry and astronomy.

But, although without formal power, the Grail Keeper seems without doubt to have been equated with all the 36 Priest-Chieftains; or, in other words, to have been the Christian counterweight to the power of the 36 Goðar. Both the Grail Keeper and the 36 Goðar seem to have been considered to be bulwarks against the onslaught of the powers of Chaos.

14. A Common Source of Law

Although the Celtic Christian "king" in Iceland was not a titular head of Alþingi, he was evidently considered its source of law. This corresponds well with our literary sources which state that the first Icelandic constitution was based upon the Gulapingslög of the CHRISTIAN king Hákon góði - fosterer of king Apelstan of England.

One has to assume that in Pagan Iceland Celtic Christians retained an unofficial bond between themselves, a Christian flock, so to speak, under the guidance of the Keeper of the Holy Grail. We have no record of any real friction with the pagan majority. Both factions believed in cataclysm, the end of the world by Fire and Water; to both the archenemy was Chaos, the pagan Loki corresponding closely to the Christian Devil. And, quite clearly, both had their natural places within the accepted order - the World Model. In that Model the source of Christian and pagan law was the same.

15. The Pagan Priest-Chieftainship

The constitution of Pagan Iceland during the period before the formal acceptance of Roman Christianity in the year 1000 A.D.

was not a "democracy" as often maintained. It was a "kingship". The main reason why scholars have not perceived this is that the kingship was divided into 36 parts. Scholars are used to defining kingship as the rule of only one person who embodies the state. In pagan Iceland the crown, conceived of as a Holy Circle, was divided into its 36 components. Assembled at Þingvellir, the central Alþingi, the 36 formed one body politic, one kingship. Each of the 36 Goðar was at the same time a secular and spiritual head of his domain. Power was divided equally between the four areas of the country, South, West, North, East, 9 Priest-Chieftainships being assigned to each quarter of the land. The established order was thus borne by chieftains who were virtual "kings". The Goðar maintained the harmony of the interaction between man and the Cosmos.

16. Water and the Zodiac

Law apparently was conceived of as having its mythological origin in Water. The power of the Goðar as well as the influence of the Grail Keeper was firmly bound up with this concept. A special sign of the Zodiac was considered the fountain of Water and Law, the sign known in classical astrology as Capricorn. That sign was connected with the primeval ocean. As a symbol of Time Capricorn stood for the pagan Yule and the Christian Christmas.

17. The Primeval Hill

Yule was not just a symbol of Time, it was also a symbol in Space. As the "origin" of the Icelandic World Model it was connected with a triple hill in the delta-area (Land-eyjar= "land-islands") of southern Iceland named Bergþórshvoll.

Bergþórshvoll seems a very close counterpart to the Egyptian idea of the Primeval Hill. It signified the "Risen Land", it was the mound above the waters of chaos where, in ritual, creation of the ordered universe was supposed to have started. Everything concerning the order of creation was related to that Primeval Hill. The Celtic Christian conceived of Bergþórshvoll in Gnostic terms,

the Pagan in such terms as are preserved in Völuspá and other pagan sources. Creation for both parties meant that Iceland became an indissoluble part of the World Order.

The Goðar presented certain segments of the horizon, three to each of the twelve houses of the Zodiac. The Grail Keeper seems to have represented the Zodiac as a Circle, but he was also the genius loci of Bergþórshvöll. Both Bergþórshvöll and the Zodiac of Landeyjar were firmly tied to the "Islands of the Men of the West" (Vestmannaeyjar).

The Grail Keeper was furthermore considered to be the spiritual power of Keldur á Rangárvöllum, a wonder of nature consisting of over two thousand wells or springs of water.

18. The Primeval Trinity and the Dynasty of Niall

The cosmology of Pagan Iceland presents us with some clearcut hypotheses as to the structure of the primordial Celtic "king". The "king" was - mythologically speaking - a Trinity but at the same time an Ennead (a 9-fold "God"). Furthermore the Nine can be elucidated in detail.

As in Egyptian belief connected with Ptah, the Trinity was bound up with the "risen land", the Primeval Hill above the waters of chaos.⁸ The "One" was all the others, and the sum total was the genius loci of Bergþórshvöll. The idiosyncrasy of each part is astonishing; much more intricate than previously imagined. That idea, of course, corresponds closely with the "Nine Worlds" of Völuspá.

The origin of the particular Celtic "kingship" in Iceland can be gleaned with fair certainty. The whole complex of ideas was connected with the dynasty of Niall, whose son Laeghíre (428-463 A.D.) was king in England when St. Patrick arrived there in 432 A.D. Celtic Christianity connected with St. Patrick and St. Columba (Kólumkilli 521-597 A.D.) was inseparable from the World Picture as discovered in Iceland.

19. The Triple Rock

The World Order of Pagan Iceland was tied to an actual

physical phenomenon, a Triple Rock named Þrídrangar (at that time the westernmost of Vestmannaeyjar). The Triple Rock became a corner stone of society as well as that of the World Order, the Cosmos, the Model.

The Triple Rock was inseparable from the Triple Hill, being a rocky island off the coast, and thus a visual proof of the emergence of the World from the waters of chaos.

The "king" Niall WAS the essence of Þrídrangar as well as that of Bergþórshvoll. Thus the Grail Keeper embodied the two major ideas of the origin of the cosmos: the Triple Rock and the Triple Hill. Perhaps the most interesting thing in that connection is the fact that Niall was androgynous, being male and female at the same time. As such the Trinity was split up into an original SIX features of creation, three male and three female. A "hidden" seventh was a further addition, standing for the Seventh Age of Man. What was expected was the Eighth Age, the Age of Harmony, the Age of Christ. The Seven were contained in the Ennead.

As far as can be seen the SAME order of Ages was inherent in the paganism of the Goðaveldi.

20. The Unity of God and Time

The Triple Sacral "king", Niall, seems to have been conceived of as not just the Creator of the Universe, but also that which was created. He seems to have BEEN the Model, the World Order. The indications are that the Grail Keeper was the self-created Creator. All other "gods" or "saints" were only aspects of this primordial fact of life. The pagan counterpart of Niall was named Nigrör.

Time was a manifestation of Niall. Time's most obvious name - Kári - signifies Wind or Spirit, but it also symbolised Space, that which can be measured. As in Egypt the "Word" seems to have been an important part of that essence. Word is breath. The movement of breath, wind, started the march of Time, the expansion of Space. Justice was an integral part of that same concept; correct

measure WAS justice. Hence justice was inseparable from the Time/Space continuum. The character of the order thus established became valid for all time; it came to a close only with the cessation of time. The final moment of Kári closed the Circle of the Goðaveldi and of the Grail Keeper; Time had run its circle. A new Circle, a new year, started at Yuletide. Although doubtlessly startling to some, the gods of paganism seem ultimately to be One just like the Celtic Christian divinity. Differing names of gods were conceptions of the original God's mind, ideas in anthropomorphic form.

21. The Son of God

Fertility was embodied in a "Son of God". The Christian name of that being as preserved in Iceland was Hęskuldr. His pagan counterpart was named Freyr. The most distinguishing feature of the Son of God was that he was precisely measured in terms which need a longer explanation than can here be offered. The Son of God was measured with the "mete-rod" of life and thus contained correct proportions. For that reason he became the embodiment of justice.

The Son of God sprang from Water and the other Elements. His blood was the fermented liquid of the fruits of the earth. His body was the grain of the fields.

22. Christ - Freyr - Osiris

The "polytheism" of Celtic Christianity was in many ways similar to that of Paganism. Among other things, Celtic Christianity retained the ideas of pagan gods for the days of the week. The ancient idea of the Ennead being divided into One and Eight was extant in both religions.

Celtic Christianity compared Christ with Osiris and the Virgin Mary with Isis. Icelandic Paganism seems to have directly equated Freyr with Osiris, Freyja with Isis. The "king" Niall was manifest in his Son Hęskuldr; the god Niqrör was manifest in his Son Freyr.

The correspondence between Christ and Freyr was close.

23. Gnostic Allegory

The basis of Celtic Christianity in Iceland may be said to have had a twofold origin: a) that of Sacral Kingship as connected with Osiris/Isis and other gods of fertility and b) the type of Christianity usually referred to as Gnostic.

Gnosticism had a fixed system of complicated hierarchies. Medieval feats of architecture - connected with such learning - in many respects paralleled the mathematical and geometrical ideas embedded in Celtic Christianity. This accounts for the fact that you can in certain ways compare famous medieval structures with the Model of the World as tied to the Icelandic landscape. Loose ends in these structural ideas have not been observed; most, if not all, the parts of the inherited picture were made to fit and to connect. Allegory was a potent vehicle of Celtic Christian thought in pagan Iceland.

24. Symbolism

Every single part of the World Picture of pagan Iceland seems to have been symbolic. Sometimes the symbolism appears manifold. The Model was significant not only as the thing it represented on one level, it was significant in hitherto unsuspected depth. Such items as points of the compass, physical objects and materials, celestial phenomena, colours and the like are generally seen to harbour many layers of meaning. The Model itself stood for sanctity as well as for secular authority. Icelandic pagan culture was no more cut off from the Mediterranean legacy which the rest of Europe enjoyed, than was Celtic Christianity.

25. Mathematics and Medieval Rules

E.M.W. Tillyard has the following to say on medieval learning: One is tempted to call the medieval habit of life mathematical or to compare it with a gigantic game where everything is included and every act is conducted under the most complicated system of rules.⁹

RÍM's conclusion is in direct agreement with the above statement. Mathematics was a central part of the imagery, the allegory and symbolical significance in Pagan Iceland. Yet that mathematics was the basis of medieval science. One thing seems without doubt: Celtic Christianity was not just complicated and inclusive; it was so in a distinctly mathematical manner of expression. The mathematical learning for which the Celts were famous was embodied in their Christian thought. The framework of Celtic Christianity in Pagan Iceland was directly based on mathematics, numerology and geometry.

26. Man as Microcosmos

The Celtic Christian Model in Iceland was based on Man as Microcosmos. RÍM's conclusion on this point corresponds to that of C.S. Lewis on Man: "Every mode of being in the whole universe contributes to him; he is a cross-section of being".¹⁰ The poet John Donne is said to have employed "the topos of man as the microscopic prototype of all beautiful symmetry and proportion"¹¹ If this be true of John Donne, it was no less true of the Celtic Christian settlers of Iceland ca 870-1000 A.D. The Microcosmos that was Man was considered the pure groundwork of symmetry and proportion.

27. Man as Measure

In medieval Europe certain buildings were supposed to "reflect the little world of man; but the representation of the human body itself, was supposed to be properly proportioned". Mutatis mutandis RÍM's conclusions agree with the above with the difference that not "buildings" but the Model built into the landscape of Iceland was so constituted. Just as in Lomazzo's words "the measure of Ships, Temples and other things were first drawne from the imitation of man's bodie", such was evidently the case in Pagan Iceland.¹² By studying Norwegian material, ships, churches and artifacts, the Norwegian student of culture, Else Christie Kielland, has arrived

at more or less identical conclusions as those which this writer had previously discovered in Iceland through studies of symbolism. The ideas and the period in question coincide.¹³ The point to be stressed here is, that these conclusions (on measure) do not seem to differ significantly from Celtic Christian ideas on the same matters.

28. The Model, the Zodiac and the Planets

The cosmological material of the Celtic Christian Model was the same as that of classical Mediterranean cultures: the Zodiac, the Sun, the Moon and the Five Planets as well as the Nine Spheres of the Universe. These were woven into, not just works of art, but into the very landscape of Iceland, representing what some might call "the plot of the universe". In this respect the Icelandic Model corresponded to the intricate symbolism of certain medieval cathedrals. The great operations of nature were, so to speak, reproduced in earthly mimicry.¹⁴ The central belief of "religious" Pagans was astronomical determinism. One may surmise that the greatest real difference between Paganism and Christianity lay in a different approach to this side of the workings of the universe: Christ presumably overrode the firm belief in Fate.

29. Division of the Human Body and the Four Elements

In Icelandic Celtic Christianity certain parts of the human body corresponded to the twelve constellations of the Zodiac. The Four Elements: Earth, Water, Fire and Air also played a vital role in the cosmology. The whole world - including the Human Body and the building blocks of the universe - was organized, codified, arranged into a system. Everything was in its rightful place. Consequently, parts of the Human Body and of the Elements, became deeper and more comprehensive symbols than hitherto thought at all likely.

Notions of belief in the World Model were not hazy. They were distinct and well defined. All major parts of the material and spiritual universe - material which would seem to be too

heterogenous to be reconcilable - were brought into unity. In fact, even the smallest details, until now undeciphered, seem to fit precisely into cosmogonic patterns, and, consequently, into the makings of a complicated symbolism.

The comparison in RÍM between a "temple", a "cathedral" and the World Model is not fortuitous. It is not a mere figure of speech. Certain temples and cathedrals would seem to be based on virtually the same mathematical premises and symbolic values as those discovered in pagan/Celtic Christian Iceland.

30. Numerology

Christopher Butler has the following to say of Sir Thomas More: "He treats numerological thought as being on the highest level throughout his work".¹⁵ If there is one thing which is quite clear about the Celtic Christian Model in Pagan Iceland it is this, that Numerology was of prime importance. A note of warning should be struck here: to the wise people of Pagan Iceland Numerology was not a trifling mystical speculation. It was more or less what we would call higher learning in arithmetic, applicable to measuring the vital aspects of material life and embodying the essentials in things spiritual.

31. Number Symbolism

To judge by this writer's experience, the nature of medieval Number Symbolism needs to be stressed. To quote Butler again, this time on Milton, he has the following to say:

We know from the poetic tradition immediately preceding [Milton] that numerology was not simply the province of mystagogues and cranks but part of the equipment of major writers We have in Paradise Lost too, just those features that lead to number symbolism; the projection of a complete universe, and a description of its creation¹⁶

It seems a favorite pastime of certain modern scholars to regard ancient science - numerology in particular - as the province of mystagogues and cranks. The Icelandic material indicates otherwise. Number Symbolism was used to define the universe, it was

in accord with the physical world and the science of its times. Furthermore: Number Symbolism of Celtic Christians was inseparable from their accounts of the Creation of the Universe. All numbers relating to Time/Space and the World Model may be considered part of Number Symbolism. Thus numbers are often used as ideas. The most interesting part is, that as far as can be seen, the Number Symbolism of Christians and Pagans was fundamentally the same. Where it "differs" as in such specific items as the "fifteen steps of Mary" and the "fifteen tops of Mt. Þríhyrningr" the comparison gives distinct and revelatory possibilities of projecting hypotheses for a common origin.

32. Numerological Tools of Thought

Certain scholars have, in the past, asked what exactly were the "aims" of numerological thinking. To judge by Icelandic sources one can hardly speak of an "aim" in that context: like the alphabet, numerology was primarily a TOOL. Numerology infiltrated so many spheres of knowledge that it is more apt to speak of it as a "language" than as an "aim". Many artistic works of the Middle Ages concerned with presenting "hidden truths" had numerological plans. Art, in this sense, would seem to have embodied beauty in the poetry of proportion. Such major components of art as the Golden Section will then have been considered inherently beautiful for the simple reason that it had a classical numerological structure. If it is true that "a Renaissance church is supposed to be a microcosm of the whole creation ..."¹⁷ then that fact simply coincides with the conclusion of RÍM concerning the Temple of the Universe, i.e. the World Model. The only difference is that the term Mesocosm (Miðgarðr) would seem to fit the Icelandic Model better; Man himself was the Microcosm. But, like a Renaissance cathedral, the Icelandic Model projected the world as a whole.

33. Proportion - a Fundamental Property

It can not be seriously doubted that to Celtic Christians in pagan Iceland PROPORTION was one of the most significant ideas of creation. Correct proportion extended to the human body as an idea: the universe was based on precise mathematical measurements - harmony WAS correct measure.

This conclusion would seem to be borne out by St. Augustine, to whom "physical objects participate in the forms that exist in the mind of God by virtue of their numerical properties".¹⁸ St. Augustine is here in accord with Plato, Pythagoras and many other great thinkers of the ancient world. And Number does not change with religion. Just as St. Augustine saw number as rhythm or metre - a fundamental property of movement - Celtic Christians found Number to be the fundamental property of Time and Space. And, like St. Augustine, they found everything in the bodily form in its place by number. Which, by analogy, extended to the whole universe - to MAN AS AN IDEA.

34. Harmony

Three central ideals were pursued by Christian and Pagan alike. These were Harmony, Order and a measured Cosmos. The world was rationally ordered; the Model revealed the divine plan on which it was framed for Christian as well as for Pagan. Sometimes these ideals are referred to by modern scholars as being "secret" or "mystic"; possibly they were in the sense that they were not to be imparted to all and sundry, but the overriding impact is not of anything supernatural but of a level-headed assessment of the world in terms of numbers and geometry. Harmony, Order and Cosmos embodied the main principles of the Míðtviðr ("measuring rod") of life, so important in Völuspá and other pagan sources. A Man was not an imprecise sloppy picture of an anthropomorphic God out of folk-tales; he was precise measure, an echo of the three principles outlined above.

35. A Musicalized Universe

A famous work by Sir John Davies in 1596 - the *Orchestra* - is said to be "treatise-like in that it projects a world picture, using the image of a completely musicalized universe."¹⁹ The "Music of the Spheres" was a very well known concept during the Middle Ages, it was inherent in the Icelandic Model of Christians as well as Pagans. In fact, such striking ideas on music have been found in Icelandic medieval material that one feels entitled to speak of precisely the image of Sir John Davies: a completely musicalized universe. The pagan side of this question is associated with the tale of *Heimir* and *Áslaug kráka*. Most scholars would term the Celtic Christian musicalized universe as "Pythagorean", the adjective "Neo-Platonist" having gained ground of late. The term used, however, is perhaps not so important as the fact that it existed.

36. The Intellectual Tradition

Speaking of Pico, Agrippa and Ficino, Christopher Butler has the following to say:

All the poets whose work is to be discussed were willing to combine their chosen myth with some discipline or disciplines expressive of order, and the art of reading them thus depends to a considerable extent upon our knowledge of the intellectual tradition described in this book.²⁰

The above remark is highly relevant for the literature of medieval Iceland; one can not possibly understand fully major literary works such as for example *Brennu-Njáls Saga* without exploring the intellectual tradition on which it rested. To erudite Icelandic writers, just as to many great medieval authors elsewhere, the universe was thought of as "ideally hierarchical and ordered".²¹ That concept was preserved by the Roman Catholics after the conversion of ca 1000 A.D.

37. The Model in Literature

Brennu-Njáls Saga is by far the most famous of those medieval writings which can under no circumstances be dissociated from the

World Model of pagan/Celtic Christian Iceland. One is reminded of C.S. Lewis' words:

The labours of men appear on Achilles' shield in Homer for their own sake. In the Mutability cantos or the Salome appear not only for their own sake but also because of their relation to the months and therefore to the Zodiac, and therefore to the whole natural order ... the artist rejoiced ... in the great imagined structure which gave them all their place. Every particular fact and story became more interesting and more pleasureable if, by being properly fitted in, it carried one's mind back to the model as a whole.²²

Njála related to the months and the Zodiac, to the whole natural order; presumably its author rejoiced in the great imagined structure which gave all his ideas their place. Njála's allegory is unintelligible if one's mind is not carried to the Model as a whole while reading it.

38. Allegory and Time

By definition the allegorical way of writing is essentially "timeless" while at the same time often referring to specific actual historical occurrences. Njála fits that category, its central theme being the conversion of Iceland in ca 1000 A.D. and Brian Boru's "last great battle of the West" (1014 A.D.). The question is, how much the writer of Njála knew of the technical aspects of astronomy. Did the last "author" of the story use them to impart a further allegorical dimension to his myth - or was such knowledge primarily inherent in his source materials for the great Epic? This part of the subject requires further study, but the writer of Njála certainly imparted a great allegorical dimension to his myth by tying his work to the settlers' World Model.

One thing has to be kept in mind: History was (then as now) "cyclic", time being measured in the years of a king, one Celtic king succeeded another. The science of antiquity can normally be observed in the background of medieval writings, not only in Time as hours, days, weeks and months but also of Time as Great Circles of Creation. And correct measure in time as well as in space signified "justice", i.e. LAW.

39. The Intuitive Side of Celtic Christianity

The early settlers who constructed the Icelandic Model knew a good deal about mathematics and geometry. Celtic Christianity was adapted to the cyclic successions of the seasons - which did not differ for Pagan or Christian - and the laws of Celtic Christian nature were the basis of the law of Man. The universe was seen as pairs of opposites; these hardly differed significantly; Cosmos and Chaos being the central concepts for Christian and Pagan alike.

What does seem to have been different was numerological notation, being bound up with a 16- and a 24-rune alphabet for Norsemen, a 20- to 25-letter ogham script for Celts. These have not survived, however, as actual written characters.

Much of the imagery of Celtic Christianity in Pagan Iceland still eludes us, although existing problems are constantly being cleared up and interpreted. What seems certain is, that at least some Celtic Christians believed in, not only a apocalyptic end of the world (Ragnarök) in the usual Christian sense, but also in reincarnation. For Pagan and Christian alike reincarnation coincided with Pythagorean ideas on the subject.

40. The Celtic Christian Settlers

The foregoing reconstruction of the fundamental ideas of Celtic Christian settlers and their kin in Iceland is connected with the following individuals and their respective settlements:

1. Hildir, Hallgeirr and Ljót (Landnámabók: S349, H308).
Settlement: Landeyjar.
2. Auðr djúpúðga, widow of Óleifr hvíti, king in Dyflinnarskíði (S96-110, H83). Settlement: Dalir.
3. Þórunn hynna, sister of Auðr (H184, S218). Settlement: Eyjafjörður.
4. Helgi bjátan, brother of Auðr and Þórunn (H14, S14).
Settlement: Kjalarnes.
5. Örygr Hrapppson, nephew of the three above named (S15, H15).
Settlement: Esjuberg.

The father of Auðr, Þórunn and Helgi was Ketill flatnefr, chief of the Hebrides (Suðreyjar). Thus all Celtic Christianity in Iceland connected with the World Model here described would seem to stem from - or to be connected with - the Christian Hebrides during the 9th century A.D.

In addition there is evident connection between the Model and the Celtic Christian missionary Ásólfir alskik with his twelve followers (S24, H21). But, as previously said, it is highly probable that all Celtic Christians formed a union of some sort during the time of the pagan Goðaveldi (ca. 870-1000 A.D.).

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