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of Christianity's crosses and crucifixes.

**Four Elements**

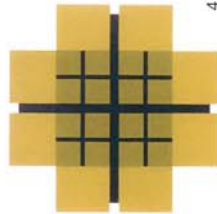
The use of four elements (3) in addition to the four arms of the cross occurs again and again in Christian art. These four elements were meant to convey the four Gospels or Evangelists (good news) which constitute the heart of the Christian scriptures.

In some cases, the elements were the traditional symbols of the evangelists: man or angel for Matthew, lion for Mark, ox for Luke, and eagle for John. Other elements such as smaller crosses, precious stones, and ornaments were used. Usually these elements were arranged around the intersection of the main cross, emphasizing that the Gospels were central to the Way of Christianity.

On the Jerusalem or Crusader's Cross, four smaller crosses (4) are positioned to represent the 'four corners' of the world, the ends of the earth. In the Cross Potent (powerful) or Epiphany Cross (Epiphany = Greek *appearing*) the four smaller crosses are joined at their bases and radiate outwardly (5) in the four directions of the compass. The symbolism is that of Christ being manifest to the whole world. The world was sometimes emphasized by incorporating its orb or circle symbol (6) into the design.

**Five Wounds**

Until the crucifix and the literal portrayal of Jesus on the cross, the rendering of his death and resurrection was often represented



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by his five wounds (7). These wounds were not only emblematic of his death but of his resurrection as well. For this reason, the wounds were frequently symbolized by precious stones or ornaments.

This emphasis on the glory of Christ's wounds (8,9) is dramatically set forth in the Easter Vigil Liturgy of Holy Saturday. At the beginning of the Vigil, the new Paschal Candle, representing Christ as the Light of the World (*Lumen Christi*), is decorated with ornaments containing incense. These are set into the candle and the priest says,

**1** 'By his Holy--  
**4 2 5** and glorious wounds--  
may Christ our Lord--  
**3** guard us--  
and keep us. Amen.'

**Creature Symbols**

The early Church had no interest in literal representations of Jesus on the cross. Instead, images of the Christ portrayed him as a lamb, the Lamb of God (Latin *Agnus Dei*), in the Book of Revelation and for centuries after its composition, the Lamb was the dominant symbol of the Savior. As late as the 16th century, artists portrayed the Savior as the Holy Lamb even though the human figure of Jesus on the cross had become common. Other symbols, such as the glorious wounds or the banner of victory, were frequently shown with the Lamb (10,11).

Christianity has used a variety of creatures to represent its Savior: mother



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hen, fish, lion, pelican, unicorn, etc. In the Book of Numbers, the people are saved from death by looking upon the bronze serpent which Moses made according to

the Lord's instruction. In the Gospel of John, the Son of Man is compared to the bronze serpent as the Savior of the people. Well into the Middle Ages, the serpent raised up on the cross was seen by the Church as an image of its Lord (12).



**Corpus Christi**

The crucified body of Christ does not appear with any frequency or general acceptance until the 7th Century. Early on, the figure was shown fully robed (13,14). Any representation of the Lord wearing a mere loin cloth or completely naked, as was the actual case in Roman crucifixion, would have outraged Christians (15).

Cross types other than the Greek and Latin forms were a common part of Christian tradition, e.g. the X Cross or Cross of St. Andrew. One of the earliest is the Tau Cross, so-called because of its resemblance to the Greek letter 'T' (16). Its form illustrates one of the methods of Roman crucifixion.

The condemned person carried the horizontal beam (*patibulum*) to the place of execution. There, the patibulum, with the victim's hands and arms nailed and roped to it, would be joined to the in-ground post (*stipes*) already in place.



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**Catholicity**

Images of the cross and crucifixion are as varied and universal, i.e., catholic, as Christianity itself. In this sense, they have



become metaphors of the Church. The catholicity of their forms and styles reflect the vast range of peoples and times and places which have composed, and continue to compose, the Church. For example, even through cross forms pre-dated Christianity, some of those so-called pagan signs were adopted by Christians who saw them as prototypes of their own symbols even as the early Church saw in the scriptures of their Hebrew ancestors, antecedents to the life, death, and raising of Jesus.

Other forms were adopted and/or reinvented by Christianity as it came into contact with the rituals and the symbols of



barbarians (*foreigners*). In other words, there is no single form or expression of the Christian cross anymore than there is only one way to be a Christian.

This is not to say that all crosses are



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