

BELOW IS AN ABSTRACT AND TABLE OF CONTENTS. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN BUYING THIS MANUSCRIPT CONTACT: PROQUEST AT 1-800-521-0600 EXT. 7044. ASK FOR IT BY AUTHOR'S NAME OR BY #3139693.

**LABYRINTHS IN AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY RELIGION:
RITUALS THAT ENGAGE A SACRED COSMOS**

Barbara Lilan Laishley, PhD

Copyright 2004

This manuscript is an examination of current trends in American religion as seen through rituals performed on the labyrinth. A key thesis is that people construct their idea of the cosmos through ritual, and by engaging in ritual they locate or place themselves within their world. Using an ethnographic approach I have documented labyrinth rituals by people with diverse religious beliefs and spiritual practices including those of Christian, Buddhist, Jewish and Pagan in a wide variety of settings including hospitals, churches, backyards, and beaches. I argue that this diversity is possible because the geometric form of the labyrinth – a circle with a path to the center – acts as a template upon which people overlay their beliefs of the spiritual world and engage in these beliefs through ritual. Since the beliefs that have been enacted in labyrinth rituals expand beyond the confines of institutional religion, I have referred to them as beliefs in a ‘sacred cosmos.’ A sacred cosmos is a socially constructed framework that explains and justifies the seen and unseen world and provides order, placement, and meaning. Beliefs in a sacred cosmos range along a continuum from highly complex theories articulated in doctrines, to general ideas found in folklore, to personally negotiated worlds of meaning. Using Christian liturgical rituals of Advent, Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, and Holy Week I

examine how the eleven-circuit Chartres labyrinth is used to purposely construct the sacred Christian cosmos. But many Americans, especially the baby boomer generation, are searching for a spiritual life outside of institutional religions. I observe this segment of spiritual seekers as those who are “spiritual but not religious.” To demonstrate that meaningful ideas of a sacred cosmos can exist outside of institutional religion, I explicate rituals performed in nature on the seven-circuit Classical labyrinth using the construct of “nature religion.” Ideas of time and space are central to any notion of a sacred cosmos and are examined fully as a method for people to establish a rhythm and place in the world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: The Current Labyrinth Movement in North America.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Overview	20
Chapter 2: The Labyrinth as a Reflection of Contemporary American Religion.....	26
The Labyrinth and American Religious Diversity.....	26
The Labyrinth as Popular and Lived Religion.....	38
The Labyrinth and America’s Quest Culture.....	47
Spiritual but not Religious.....	53
Conclusion.....	61
Chapter 3: The Adaptation of the Classical and Christian Labyrinth	64
The Classical Labyrinth.....	67
Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth.....	75
Hell.....	84
Heaven.....	88
Earth.....	93
Conclusion.....	98
Chapter 4: Rituals the Connect to a Sacred Cosmos.....	101
The Sacred Cosmos.....	103

Connection to a Sacred Cosmos.....	109
Time and Space in Ritual.....	112
Temporal Contexts for Ritual.....	115
Time as Cosmic Rhythm.....	119
Time as Communal Rhythm.....	121
Spatial Contexts for Ritual.....	123
Ritual and a Sacred Cosmos.....	129
Conclusion.....	140
Chapter 5: Church-based Liturgical Rituals.....	142
The Liturgical Calendar.....	143
Incarnation Cycle: An Advent Ritual.....	153
Reflections on Advent: The Recovery of the Feminine.....	163
An Epiphany Ritual – The Magi’s Journey.....	167
Reflections on Epiphany: The Three-Fold Path.....	169
Ordinary Time.....	176
Resurrection Cycle: An Ash Wednesday Ritual.....	176
Reflections on Ash Wednesday: Embodiment and Gestures.....	179
Holy Week Ritual – Stations of the Cross.....	182
Reflections on Holy Week: Procession.....	185
Conclusion.....	188
Chapter 6: Nature-based Labyrinth Rituals.....	190
The Labyrinth and Nature Religion.....	194
Environmental Trend.....	199
Trail of Tears Ritual.....	201
Canadian Relocation Ritual.....	206
Reflections on Environmental Trend: Improvisation.....	208
Metaphysical Trend.....	212
Dowsing.....	214
Trapped Souls Ritual.....	219
Mind/Body Healing Trend.....	225
Conclusion.....	230
Chapter 7: Beginnings and Endings.....	231
Appendix A.....	242
Research Background.....	242
Phase 1- Myself as the Researcher.....	243
Phase 2- Theoretical Perspectives.....	246
Phase 3- Research Strategies.....	248
Phase 4- Methods of Data Collection and Management.....	250
Phase 5- Data Analysis and Interpretation.....	252

Appendix B.....	254
N4: Non-Numerical Unstructured Data* Indexing Searching Theorizing.....	254
Document System.....	254
Index System.....	255
Interchange Between Document and Index Systems.....	258
Asking Questions in N4.....	261
Appendix C.....	265
Codebook and Index Tree from N4.....	265
Bibliography.....	273