

## **Nathan R. Kollar**

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This paper describes how religious symbols change over time with a particular emphasis on times of liminality. It does this by first clarifying the major terms and principles associated with such a description as religion, institutional religion, liminal times, symbol, religious symbol, and culture; then by deciding and describing pivotal moments in Western culture in which this change occurs; and, finally by applying a model of symbol change to the dominant religious institutions during these times of transition. Tentative suggestions will be made as to the application of this model to understanding what occurs within the Anthropocene epoch.

Foundational to the description is the acceptance of a wholistic method of investigation that accepts patterns of symbols as constitutive to a person’s and society’s sense of meaning, well-being, belonging and justice. The symbols that constitute the pattern and the “senses” that are part of it vary in intensity and prominence in the pattern while always being part of it.

The paper begins in the present, and in the United States, for its clarification of terms and principles because that is the dominant culture for both the presenter and the audience for this paper. That means, for example, that since Christianity, in all its myriad forms, is the dominant “religion” it will be its patterns of symbols that will be our main interest; and since the term “religion” is still used in its sixteenth century meaning we will accept the presence of these symbols as significant and, to some extent separate, from the cultures we examine.

Consequently we will examine the deep shifts in the meaning of the Christian patterns of symbols as associated with the symbols of belief ( God), morality (usury), polity (community), and ritual (Sunday gatherings: worship/eucharist/communion/mass/liturgy). We do this for the purpose of describing how radical religious institutional change occurs over the centuries (Greco-Roman, Medieval, Modern, Anthropocene) while seemingly retaining the same symbols and symbol patterns. Evolution of religion will be shown, therefore, to occur through a series of transformative events which while dependent upon their past for identity in the present offer to its current adherents experiences very much embedded in their culture. The stimulus for continued evolution occurs in what is labeled liminal times. These occur when people’s religious experiences are found not so much in accepted religious institutions but in institutions slowly developing into new institutional religions.