

Labyrinth Prayer: Sessions 15

Symbology and Chartres-style Labyrinths

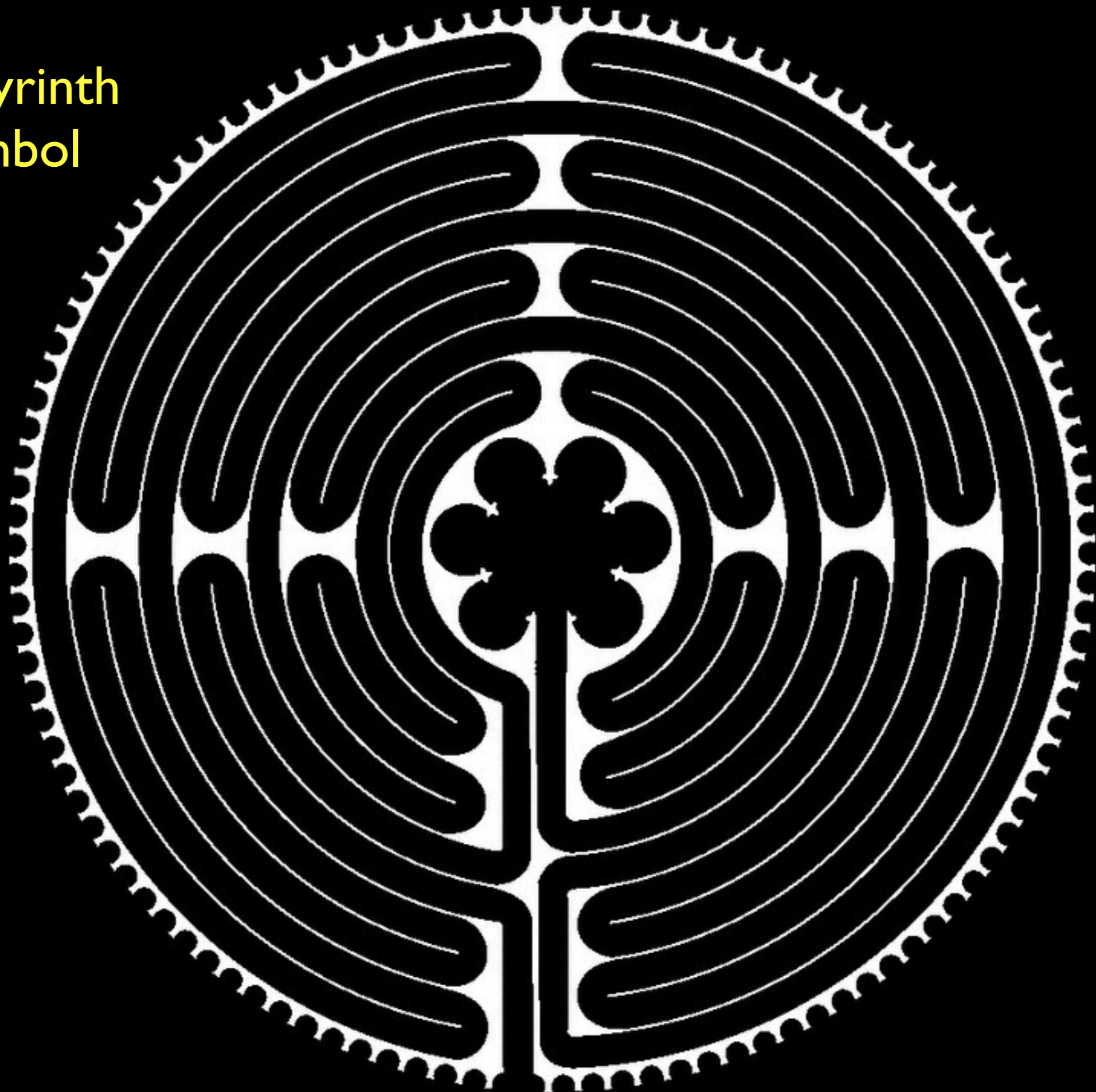
Myanmar Institute of Theology Yangon, Myanmar 2014



Song and
Prayer for
our Class



The labyrinth
as symbol



sym·bol

/ˈsɪmbəl/ 

noun

1. a thing that represents or stands for something else, esp. a material object representing something abstract.

"the limousine was another symbol of his wealth and authority"

synonyms: emblem, token, sign, representation, figure, image; metaphor, allegory; icon

"the lotus is the symbol of purity"

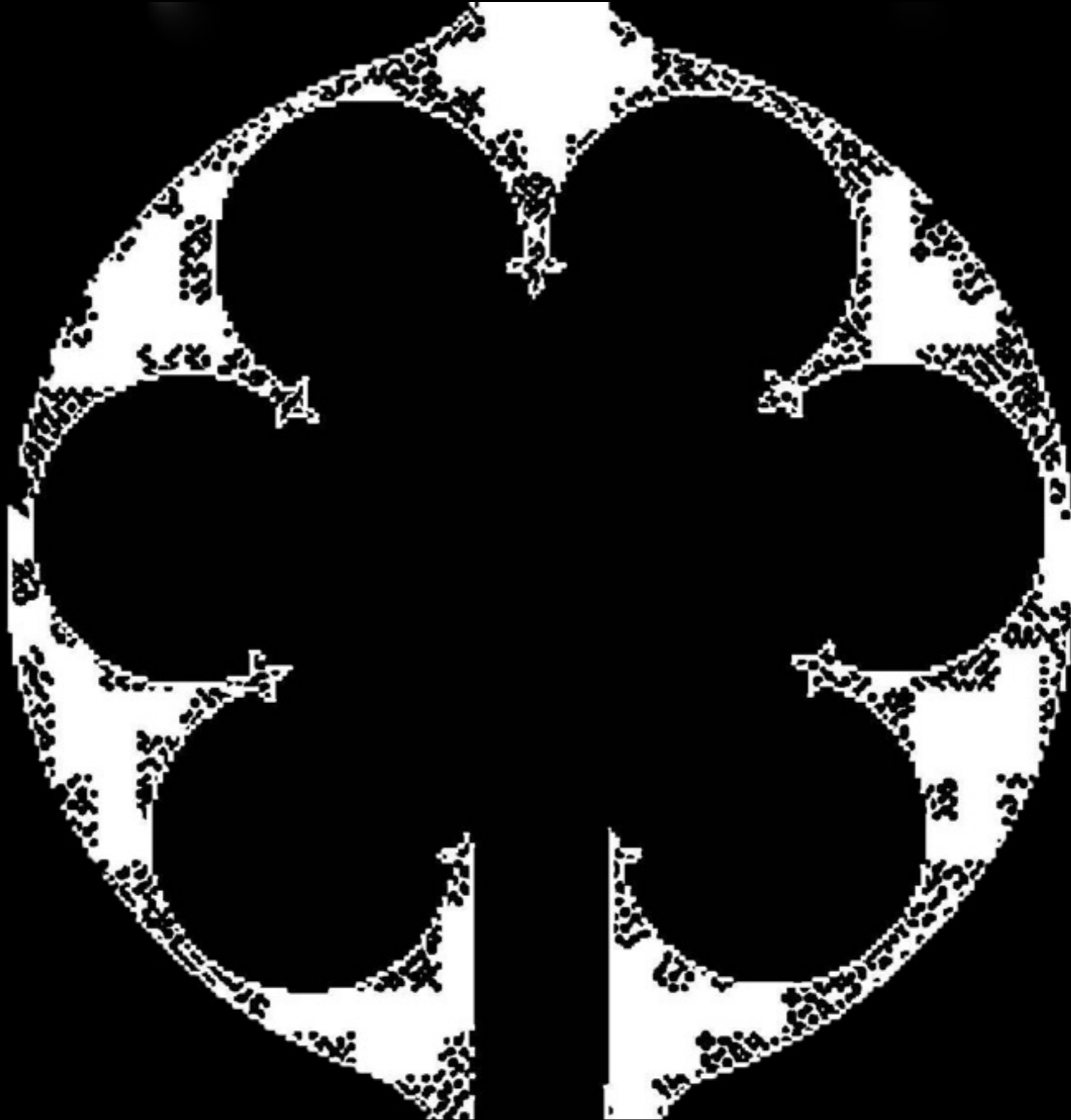


The cross
as an
example of
a symbol

(What does
it mean to
you?)



A symbol has many meanings, not just one.
It is suggestive, not definitive.



Symbols speak to different parts of us—
our minds, but also to parts of us that don't use words.

“Many people are surprised by the instant rapport they feel with a labyrinth. Its basic circularity incorporates a universal shape reflected throughout nature and the solar system. Three-dimensionally the circle becomes a sphere, the shape of atoms, the earth, the sun, and stars.”

Robert Ferré. “Ancient Symbol” in *Labyrinth Revival*.

“Symbol and metaphor are very important to human thinking, experience, and communication. They stimulate our imagination and serve as tools to enrich our ability to understand and interpret our experiences in life. **In our relationship with God, symbols and metaphors help us to grasp and remember what is most important.** Thus, we find the use of symbol and metaphor frequently in Scripture and in the Judeo-Christian tradition.”



From: Tim Geoffrion, *The Powerful Use of Symbol and Metaphor in the Judeo-Christian Tradition: Rich Symbolism in Labyrinth Prayer*. Used by permission.

Bead labyrinth created by Linda Campbell.

Symbols often have a paradoxical nature:
they may represent things that seem contradictory.



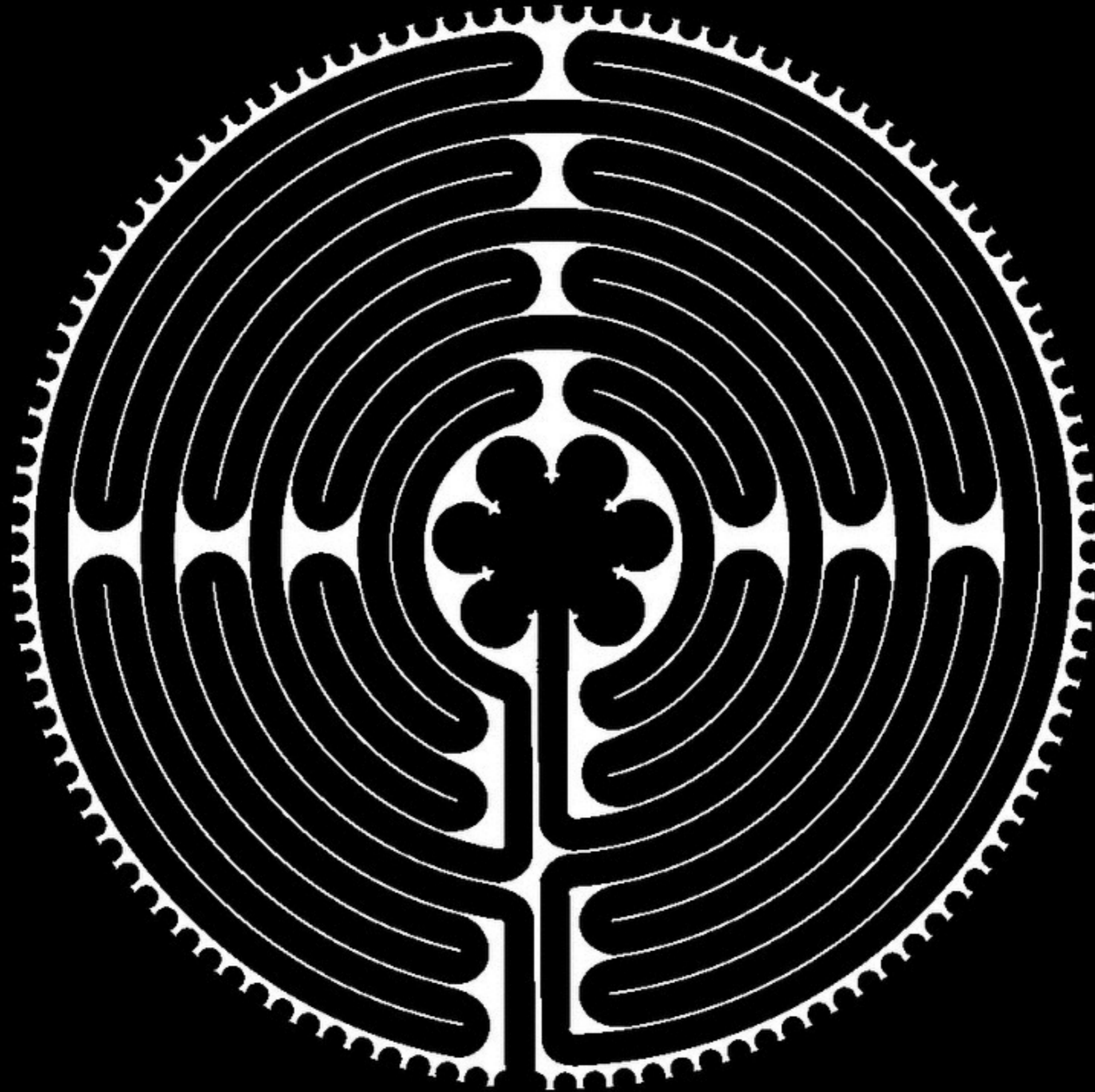
Order and chaos

Diagram by Jeff Saward, used by permission
www.labyrinthos.com

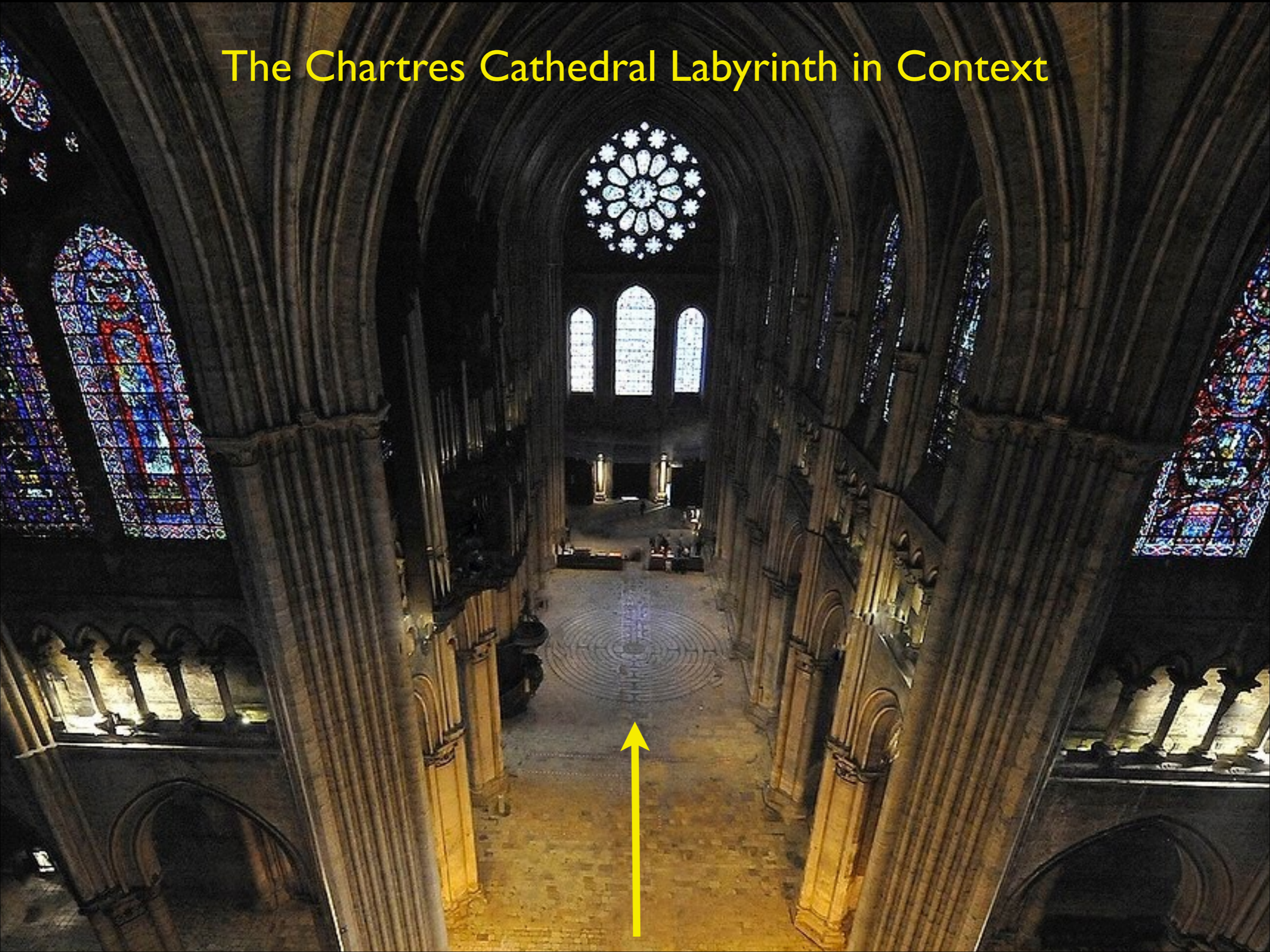


Joining of heaven and earth
Rendering apart of heaven (God) and earth (Jesus)

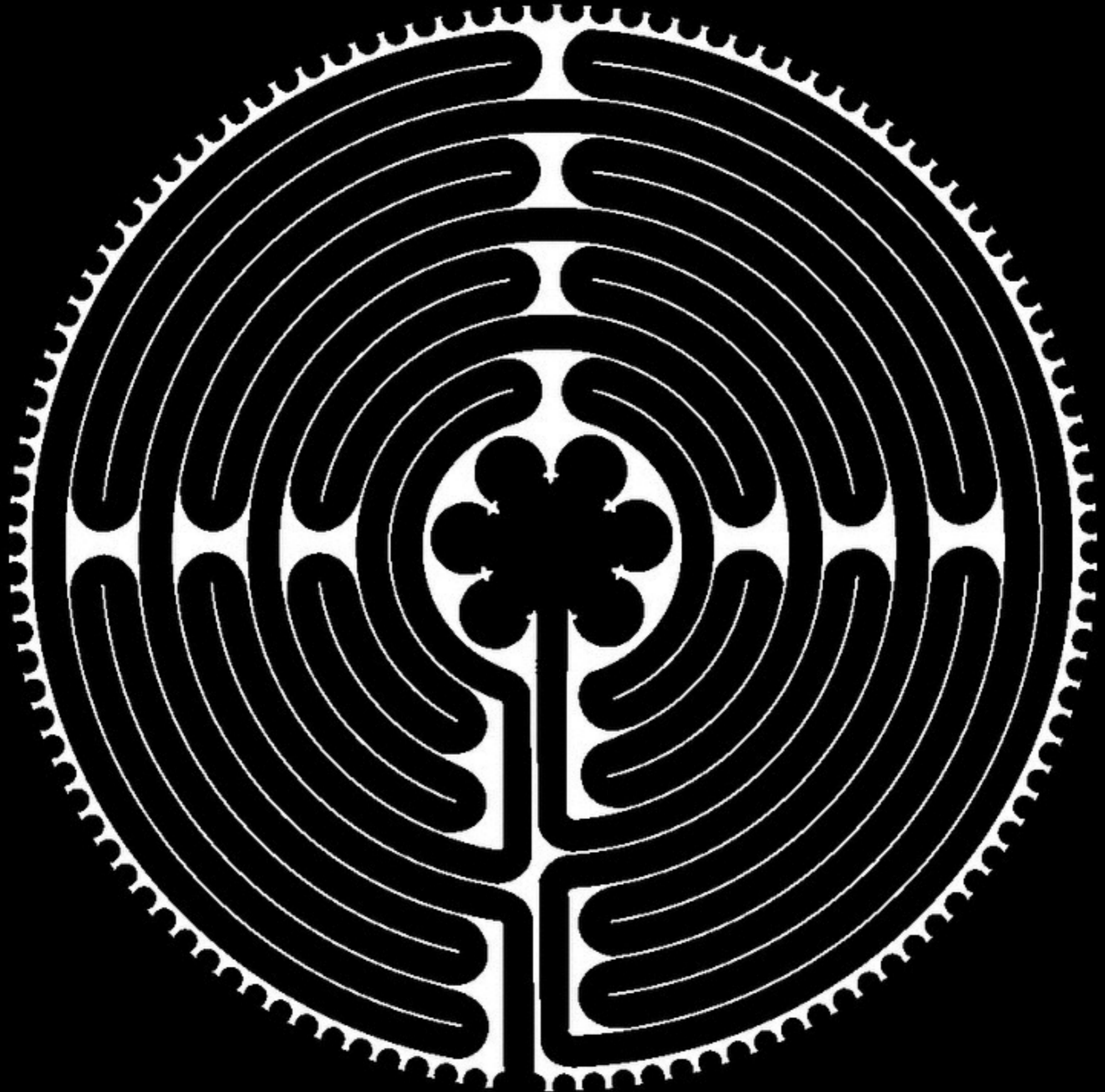
Exploring the symbolism of the Chartres Cathedral labyrinth



The Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth in Context



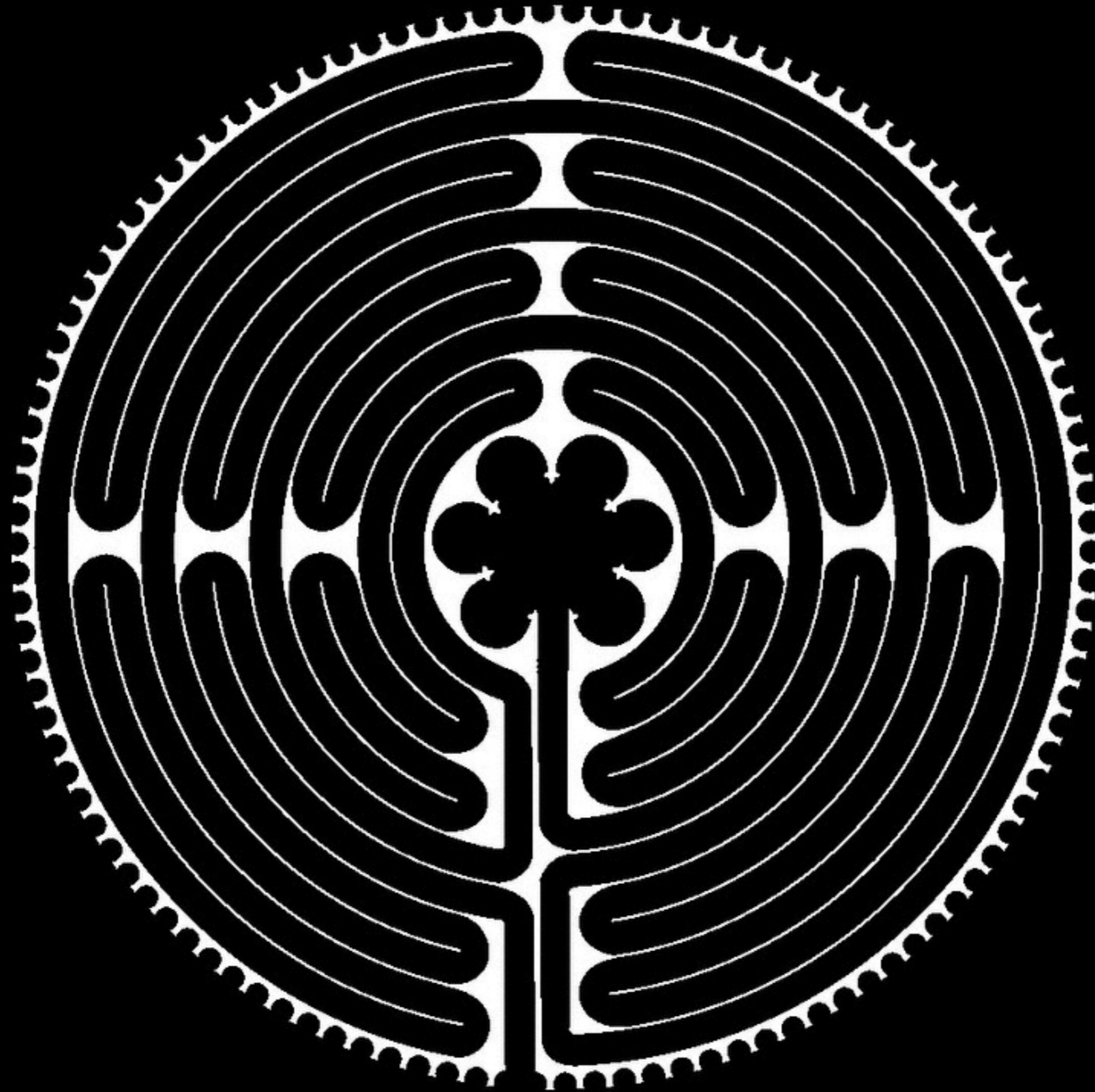
What
do you
see
when
you
look
at this
labyrinth?



What
feelings
does it
evoke in
you?

What else
does it
make you
think of?

The symbolism of protection: a prison and/or place of refuge



“Now the Labyrinth, that most enigmatic of all places,
is a prison and a sheltering, protective cave at the same time--
an interior space that opens to the external world
but also shuts it out.”

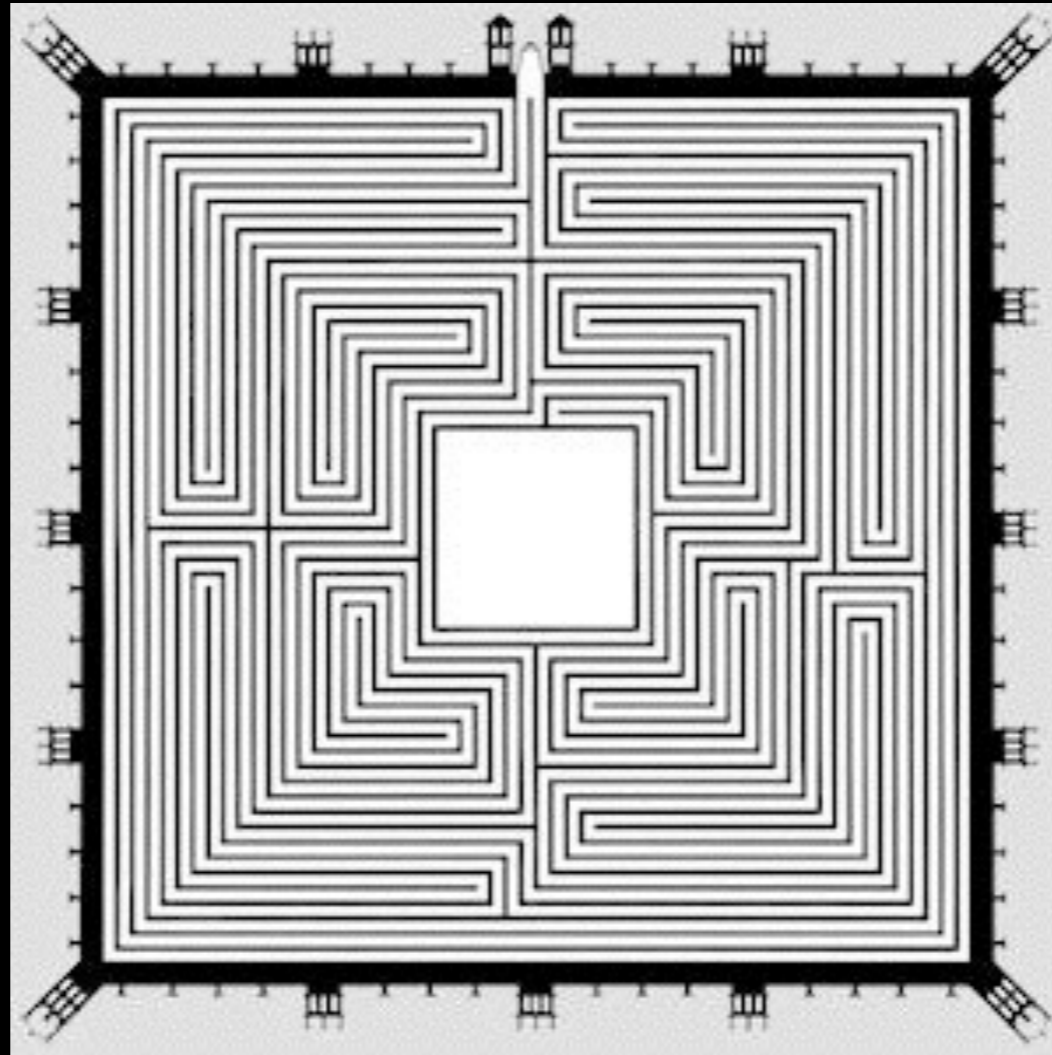
Jaskolski, Helmut. *The Labyrinth : Symbol of Fear, Rebirth, and Liberation*. Boston: Shambhala, 1997. Page 45.



Labyrinth tattoo
worn as a symbol of freedom.

“Throughout the years the labyrinth has often been employed as a symbol for the omphalos (center or hub) or sacred city..”

Jeff Saward, Editorial, Caerdroia 1992.

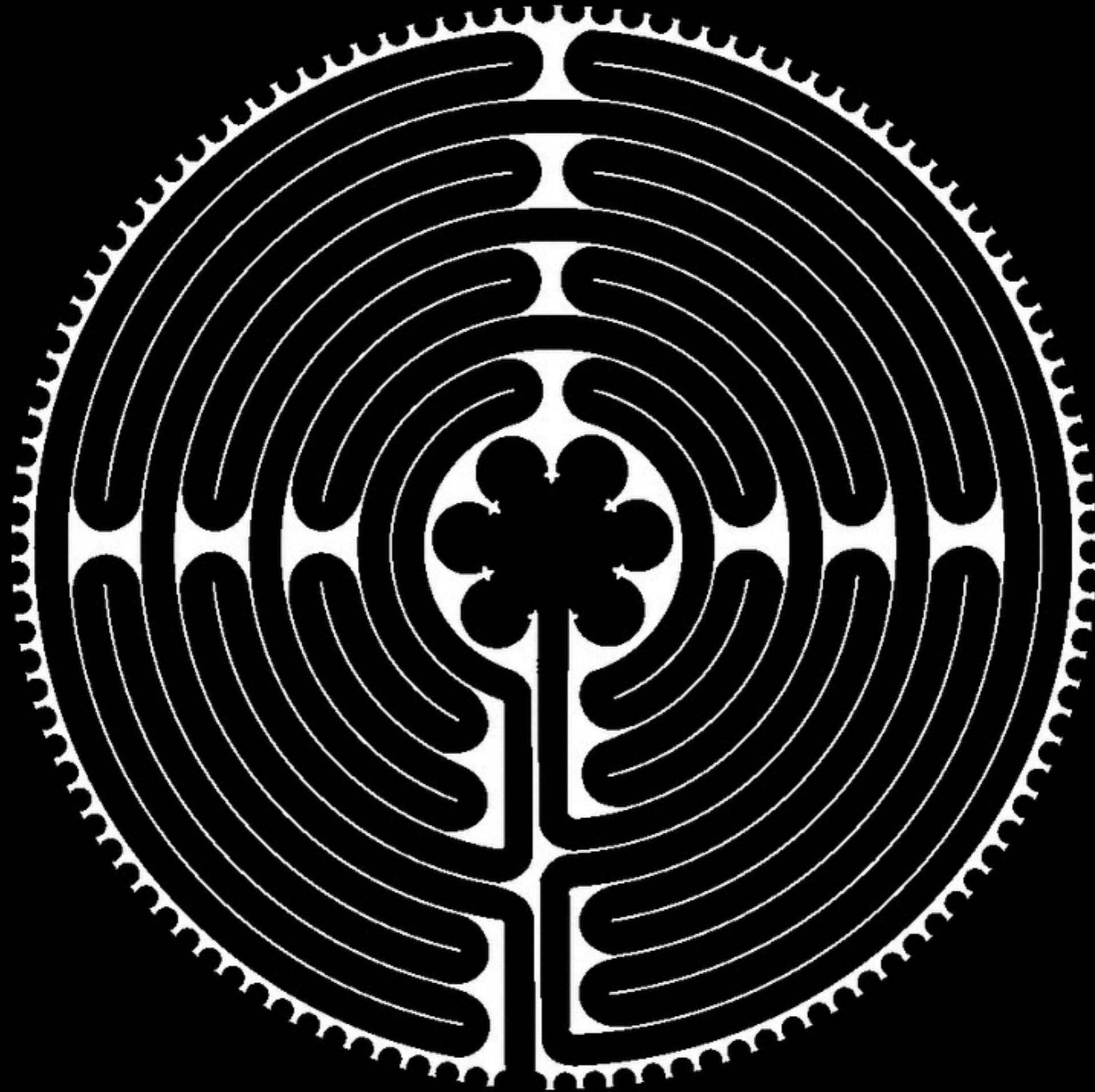


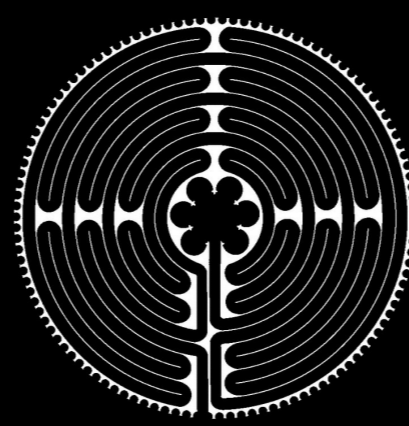
A place of safety and protection.

Mosaic, Pula, Croatia

Used by permission from labyrinthos.net

The symbolism of balance and harmony





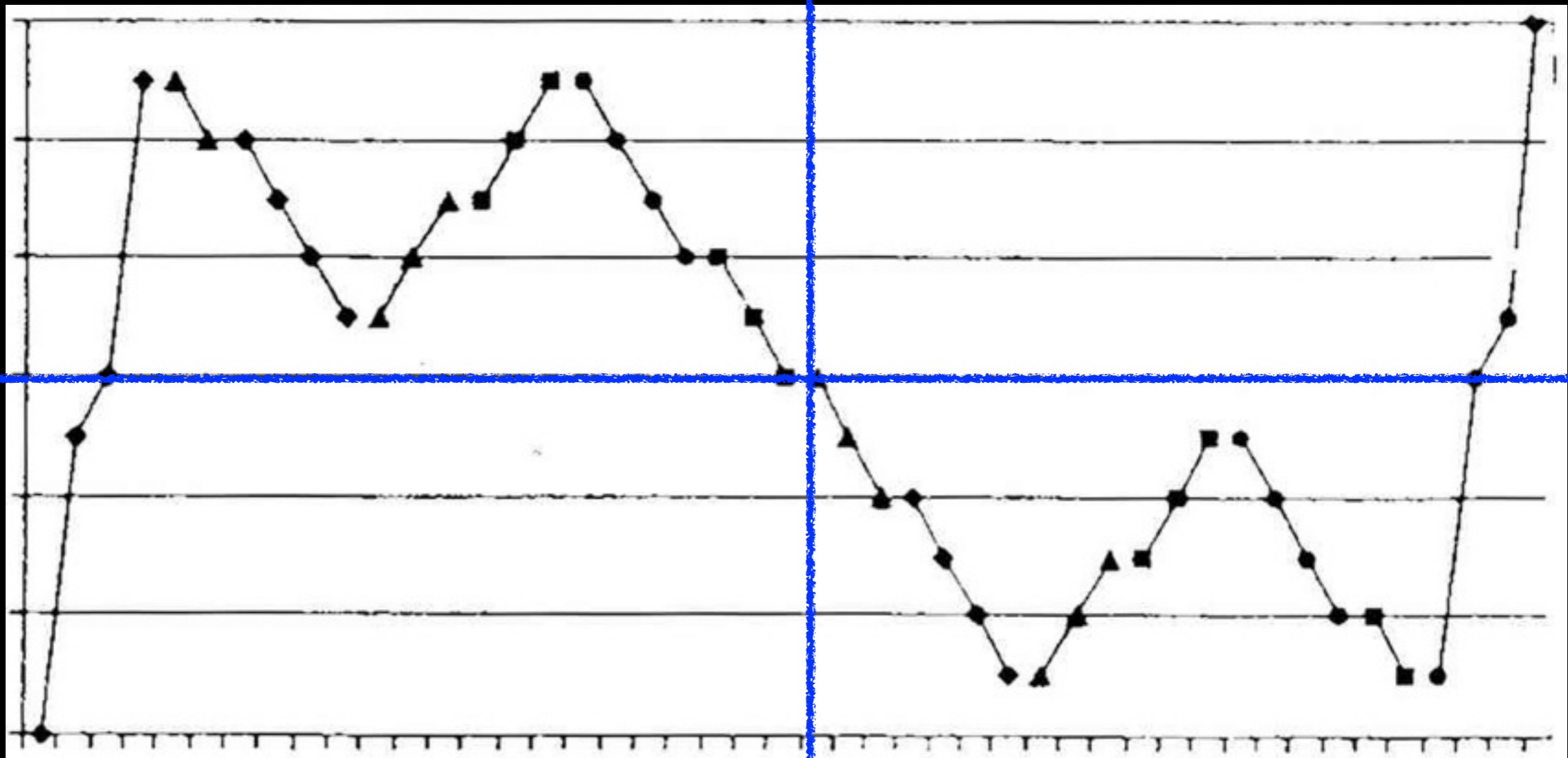
The symbolism of the Chartres Cathedral labyrinth: Balance

how far you go on the path towards or away from the center

12 Center

Which circle
you are in

0 Outside



See: Kuipers, Willem. 2000. Cadence Characterises Labyrinths. *Caerdroia*, 33-40.

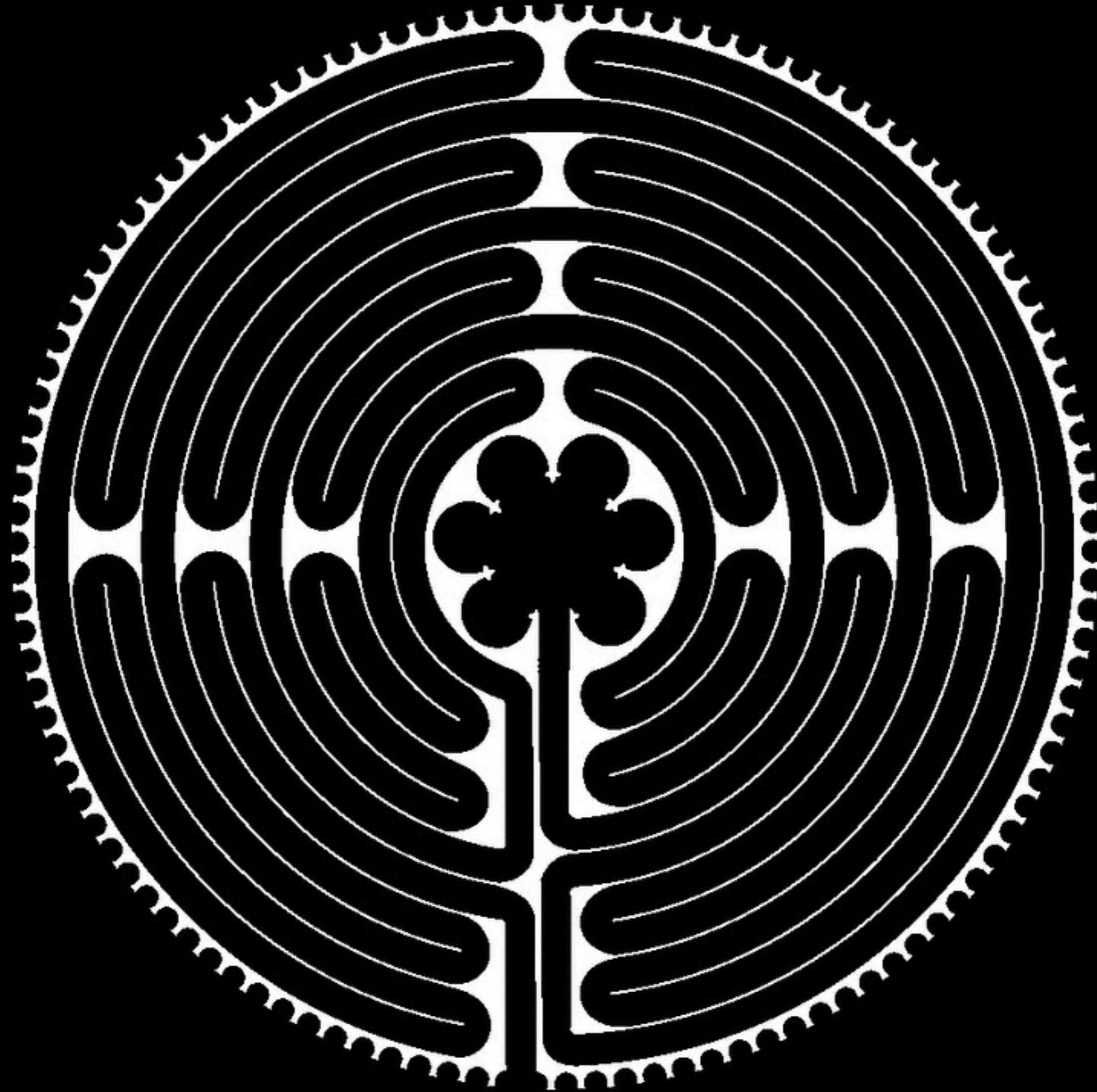


The labyrinth is also a dualistic symbol divided by left, or right-hand turns, or the journey inward, followed by the journey out.

At the heart of all these dynamic symbols lies a still center, the transcendent union of opposites where all motion ceases. 18-19

Jodi Lorimer. 2011. *Dancing at the Edge of Death: The Origins of the Labyrinth in the Paleolithic*. Queensland, Australia, Kharis Enterprises Publishing.

The symbolism of journeying (moving externally and internally)



Labyrinths may symbolize the passage of time as represented by the movement of the planets in the heavens. "...[there] may exist a cosmology, an ancient understanding of the cycles of time, all safely concealed within the labyrinth, locked up in numbers and movements." Jeff Saward, Editorial, *Caerdroia*, 1992.



Marín, Spain on a hillside above the ocean
Carbon dated to around 1,500 BCE

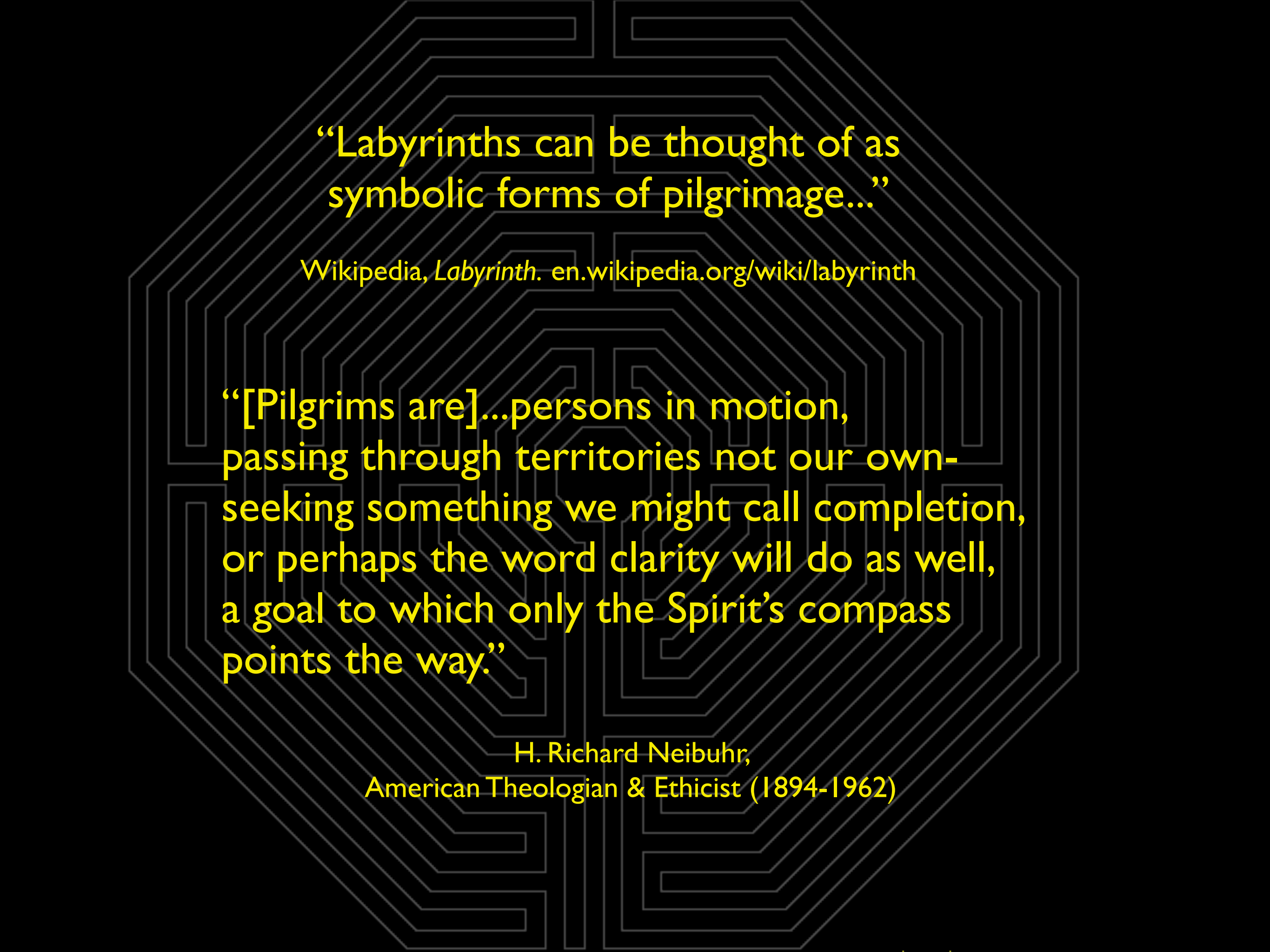
“...we see the labyrinth being understood as a [symbol] of humanity’s path through life.”





“..like life, labyrinths contain many twists
and turns but no dead ends.”

Neal Harris, Therapy Using Finger Labyrinths (Caerdroia
32:2001) 45.



“Labyrinths can be thought of as symbolic forms of pilgrimage...”

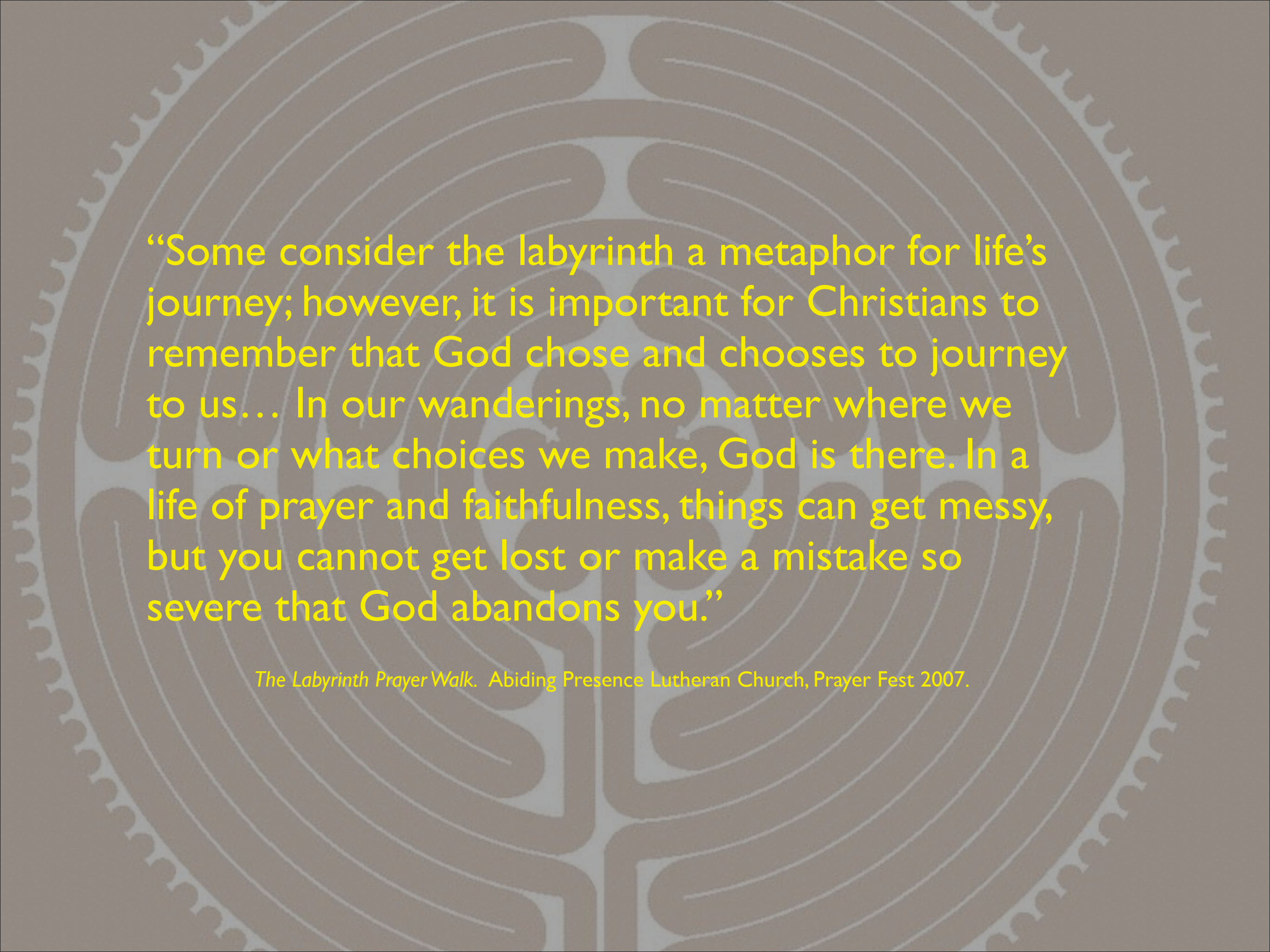
Wikipedia, *Labyrinth*. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labyrinth

“[Pilgrims are]...persons in motion, passing through territories not our own—seeking something we might call completion, or perhaps the word clarity will do as well, a goal to which only the Spirit’s compass points the way.”

H. Richard Niebuhr,
American Theologian & Ethicist (1894-1962)



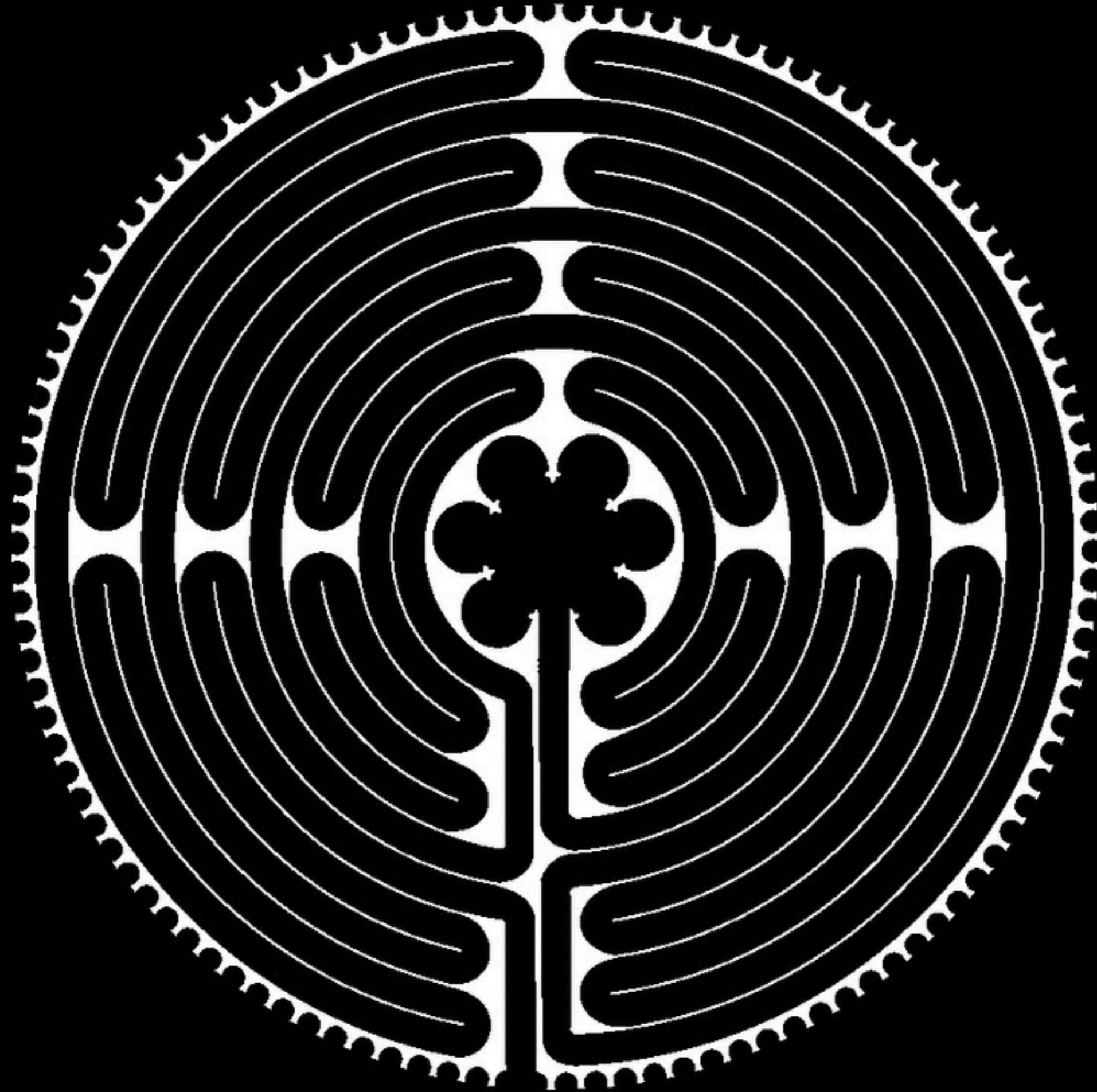
The symbolism of the
Chartres Cathedral
labyrinth:
The mysterious nature of
spiritual life:
when you think you are
close to God on your
journey of faith,
you may be far away,
but when you think you are
far from God's presence,
you may be close
to God.



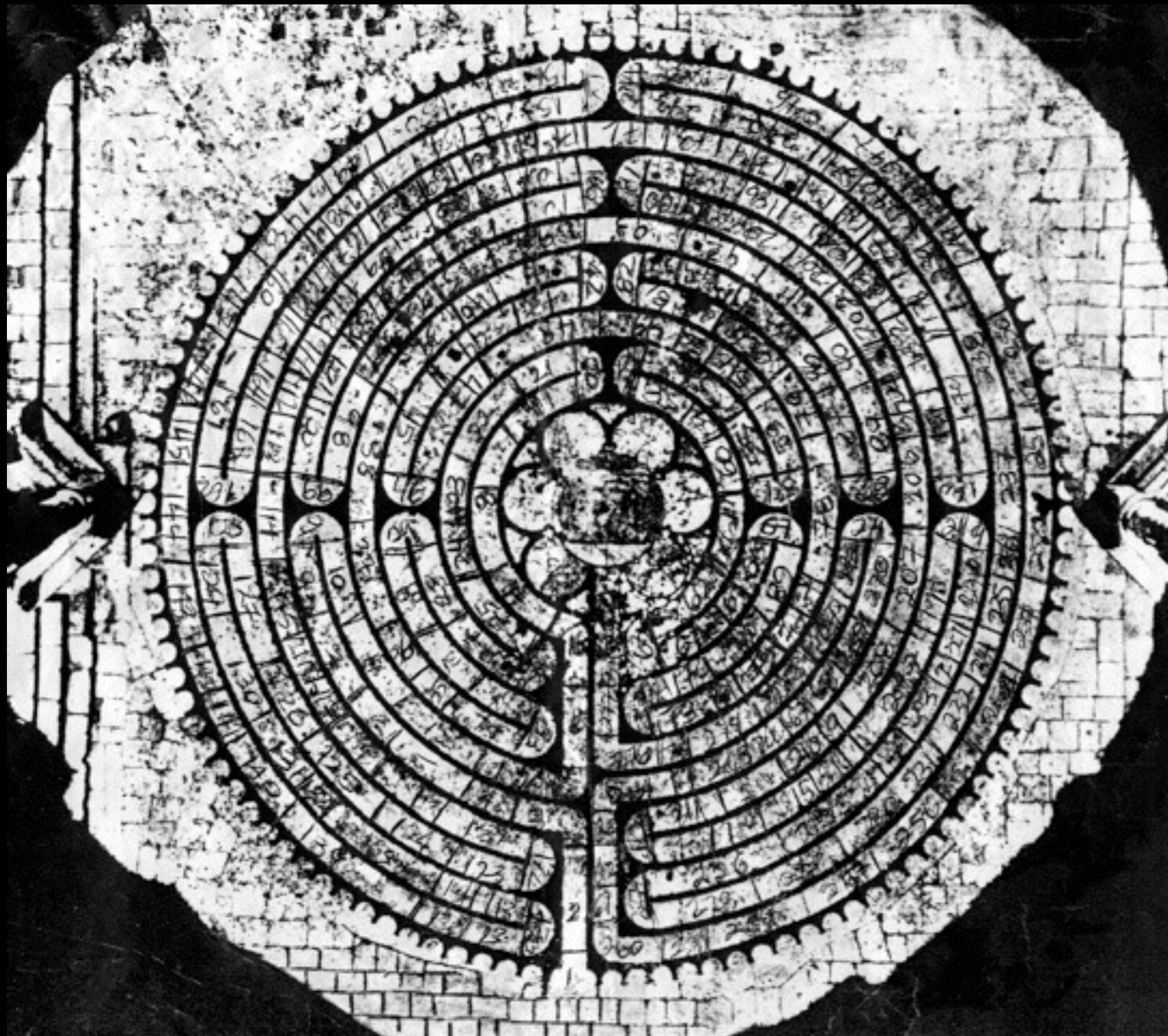
“Some consider the labyrinth a metaphor for life’s journey; however, it is important for Christians to remember that God chose and chooses to journey to us... In our wanderings, no matter where we turn or what choices we make, God is there. In a life of prayer and faithfulness, things can get messy, but you cannot get lost or make a mistake so severe that God abandons you.”

The Labyrinth Prayer Walk. Abiding Presence Lutheran Church, Prayer Fest 2007.

The symbolism of journeying: birth



**The Chartres labyrinth as a symbol of birth and life:
Shapes and sizes of the various 268-274 stones:**

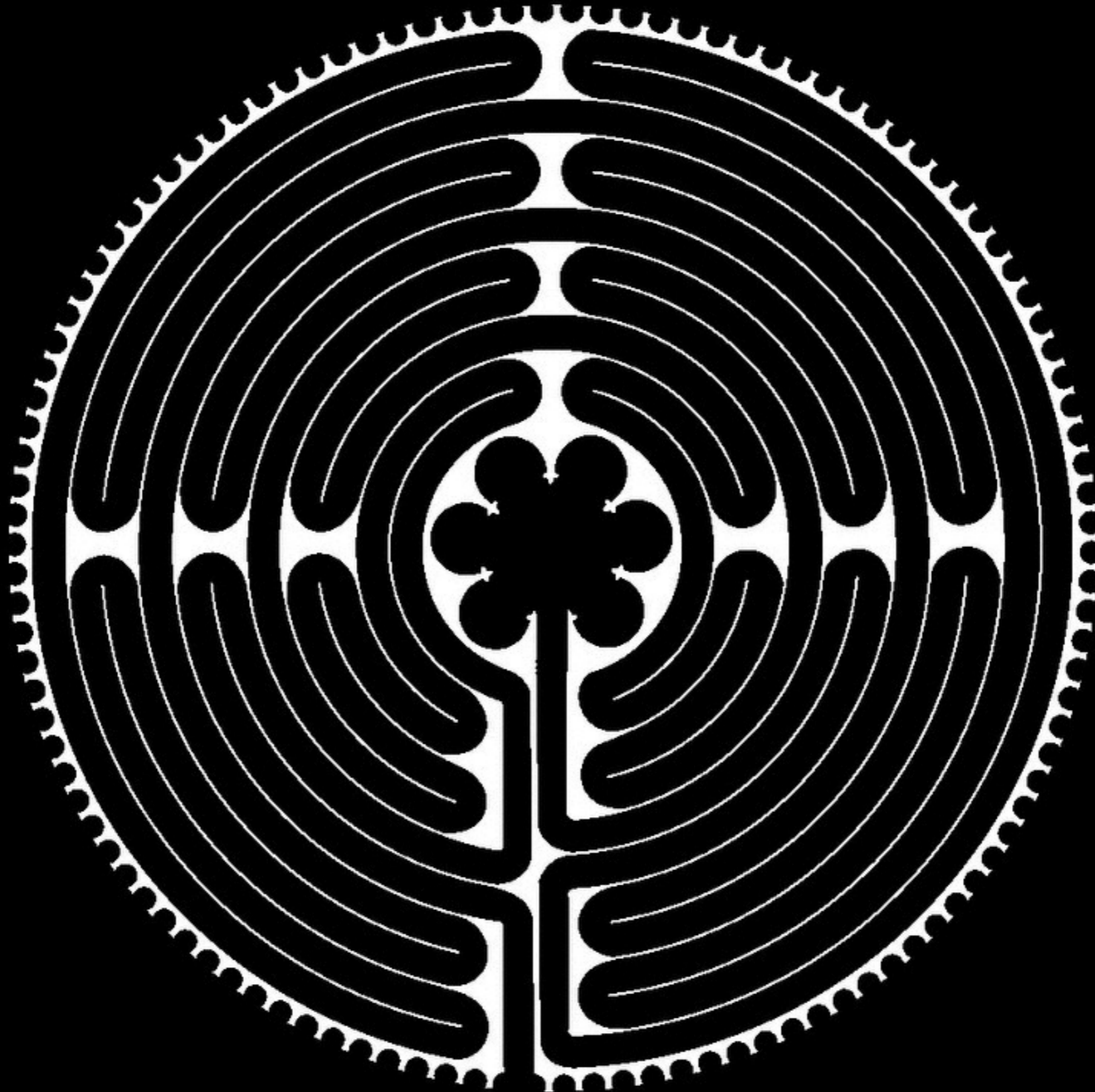


Some see a correlation between the number of stones and gestation of a human baby. There is no evidence of this, but it is in keeping with the theological messages of the rest of the cathedral.

The Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth. Illustration by Jeff Saward.



The symbolism of journeying: life, death, and resurrection
A passage(way)

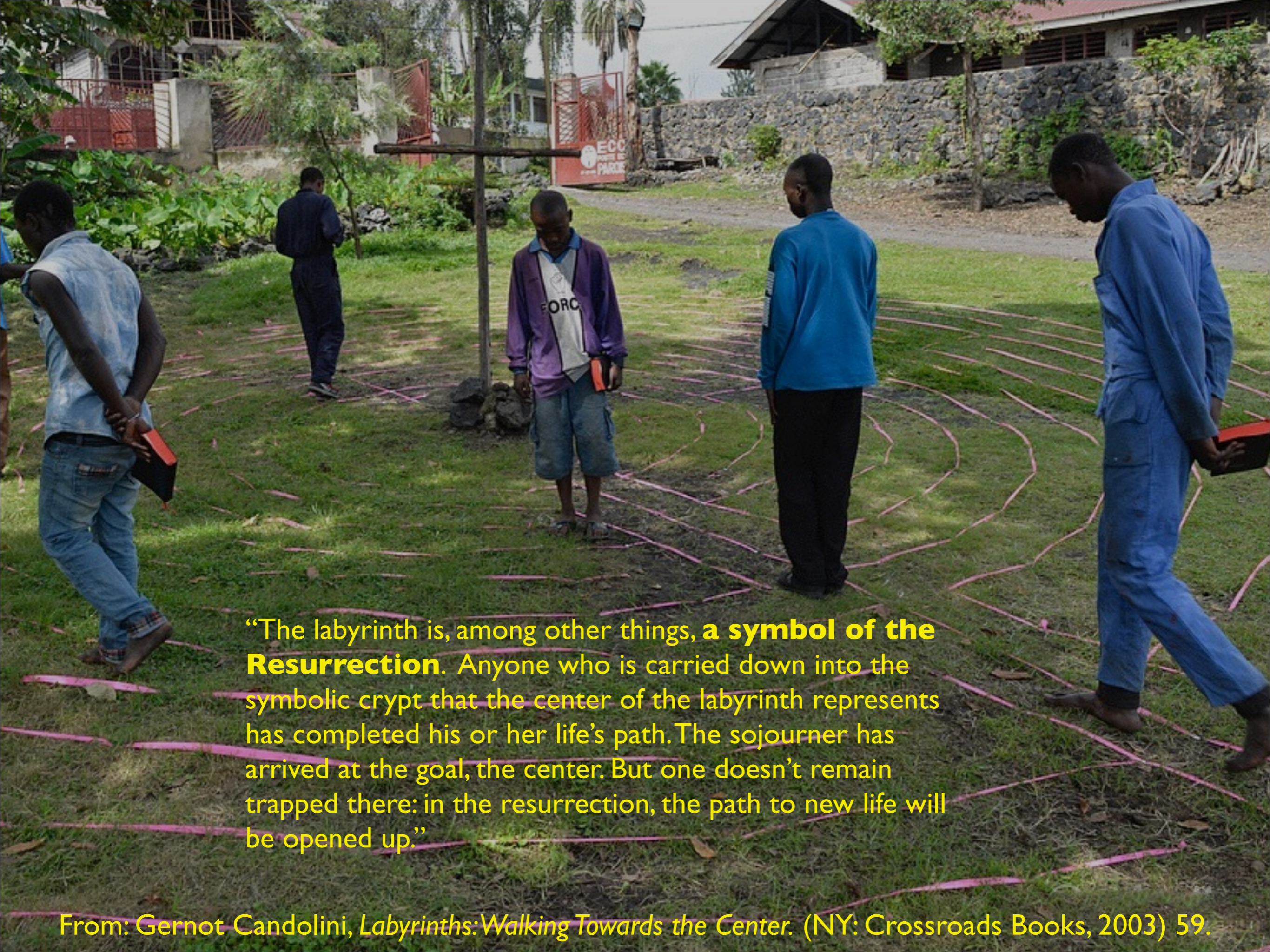


“Labyrinths were associated with tombs. Labyrinths represent a symbolic map to find a way through the underworld.” Robert Ferré. Lecture in 2004.



The Chartres labyrinth may have held an explicit symbol of Christ's victory over evil and death: Theseus and the Minotaur



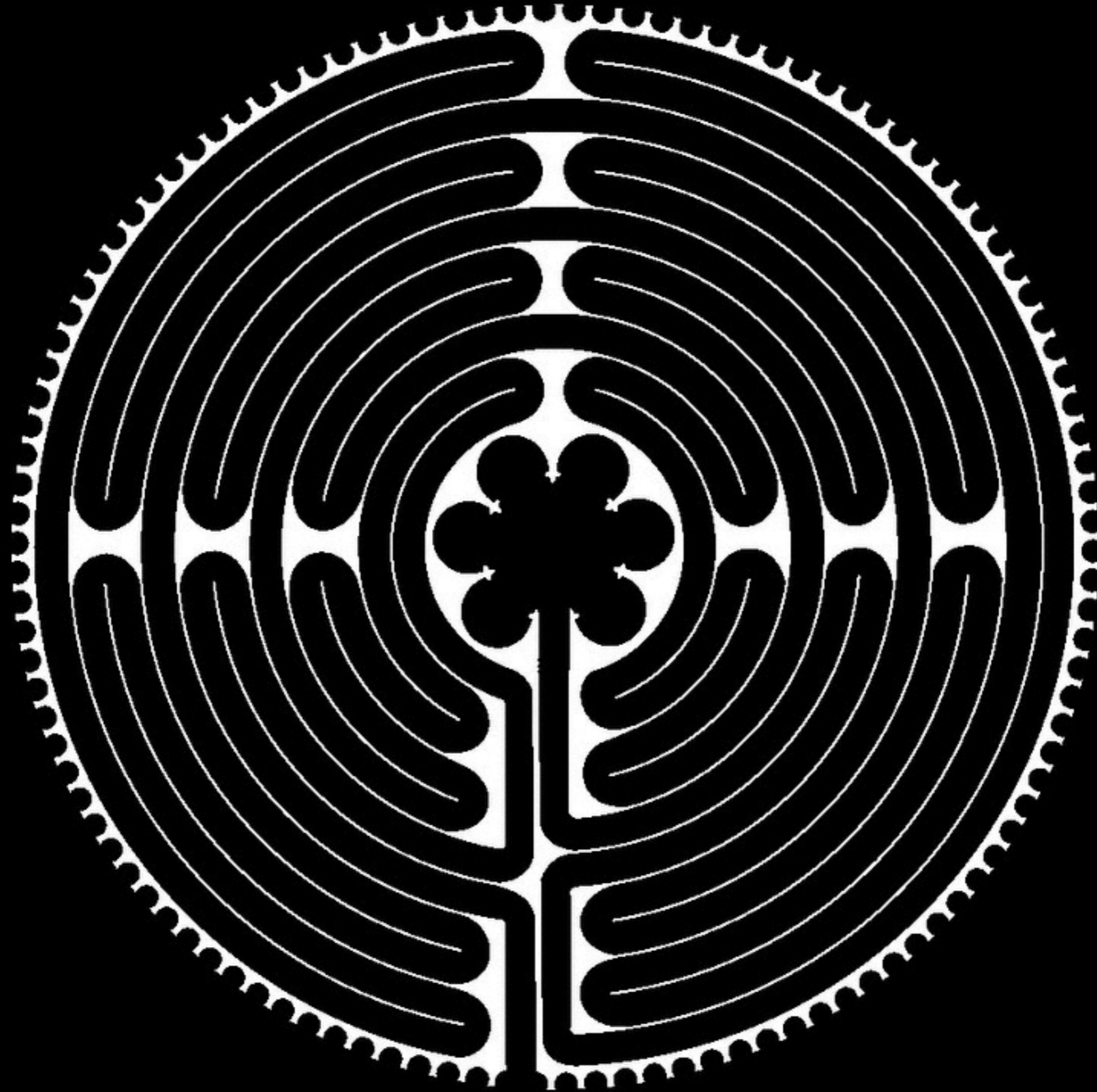


“The labyrinth is, among other things, a **symbol of the Resurrection**. Anyone who is carried down into the symbolic crypt that the center of the labyrinth represents has completed his or her life’s path. The sojourner has arrived at the goal, the center. But one doesn’t remain trapped there: in the resurrection, the path to new life will be opened up.”

The symbolism of the Chartres Cathedral labyrinth:
Christ's Victory Over Death (The Light Reigns)

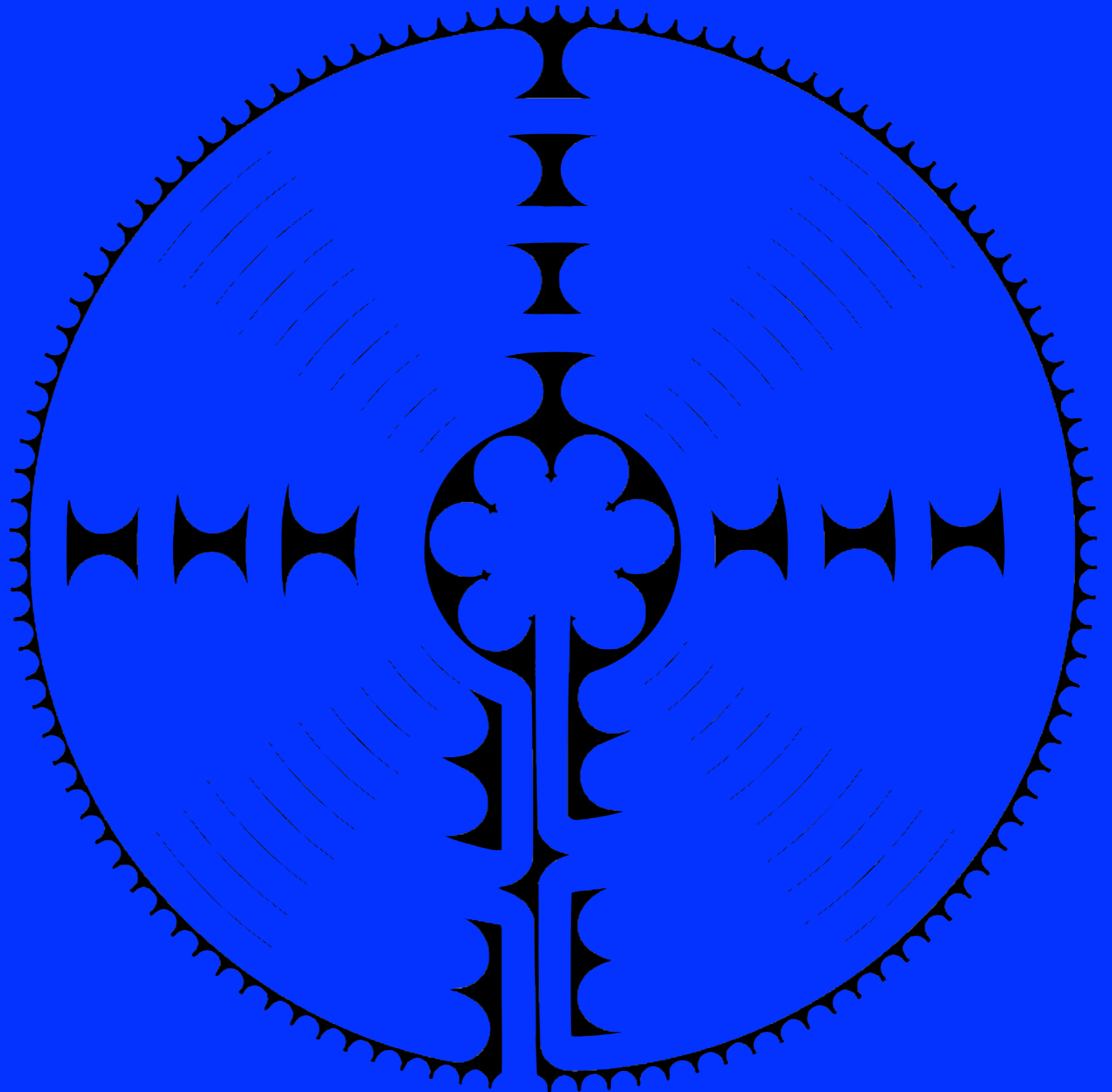


The symbolism of God's presence with us in Christ

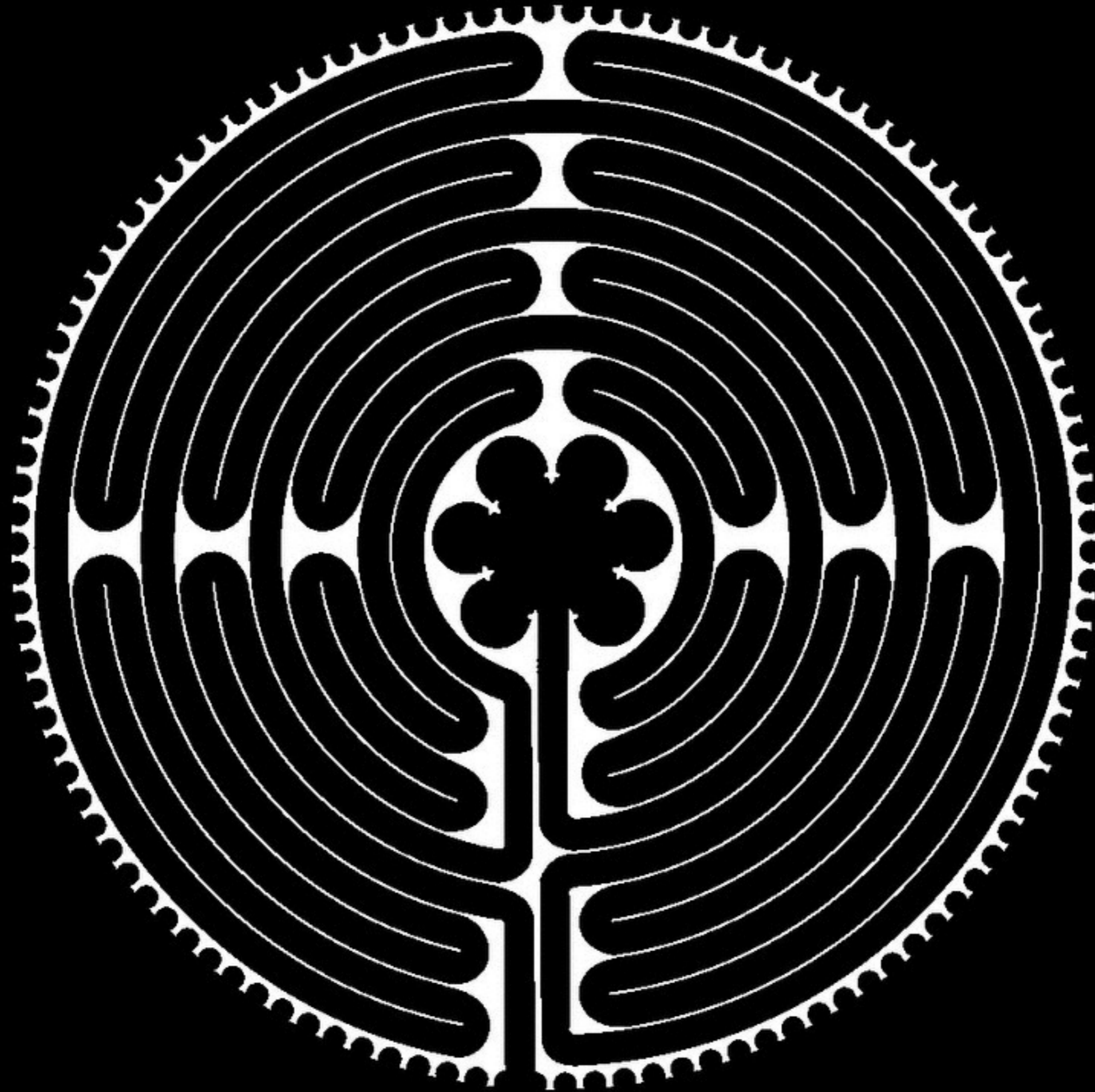


The cross, one of the central symbols of Christian faith and hope, defines the Chartres labyrinth.

It also defines the life of every Christ-follower.



The symbolism of seeking the Center

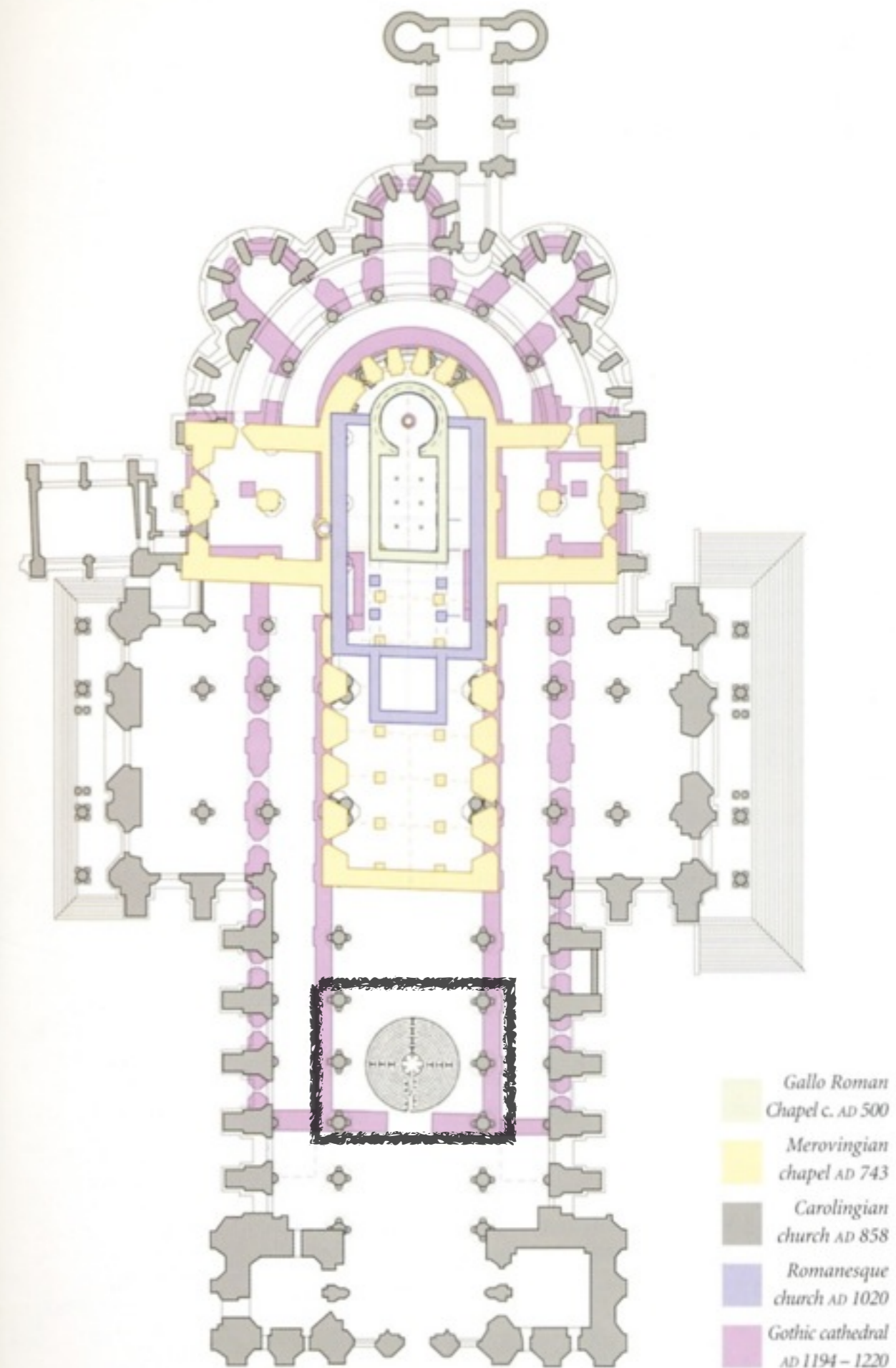


The placement of the Chartres labyrinth is symbolic. It is pointing to the truth of God's presence with us in in this world.

1. Fulbert's Cathedral (started in 1020): If a labyrinth existed, it was placed at the entrance to the cathedral. It would symbolize the transition from "outside" to "inside."

2. Gothic Cathedral (labyrinth between 1201-1220): placed between the 3rd and 4th pillars of the nave. A meeting place of heaven (3) and earth (4).

Diagram: Gordon Strachan. 2003. *Chartres: Sacred Geometry, Sacred Space*. Edinburgh: Floris Books. Page 8.



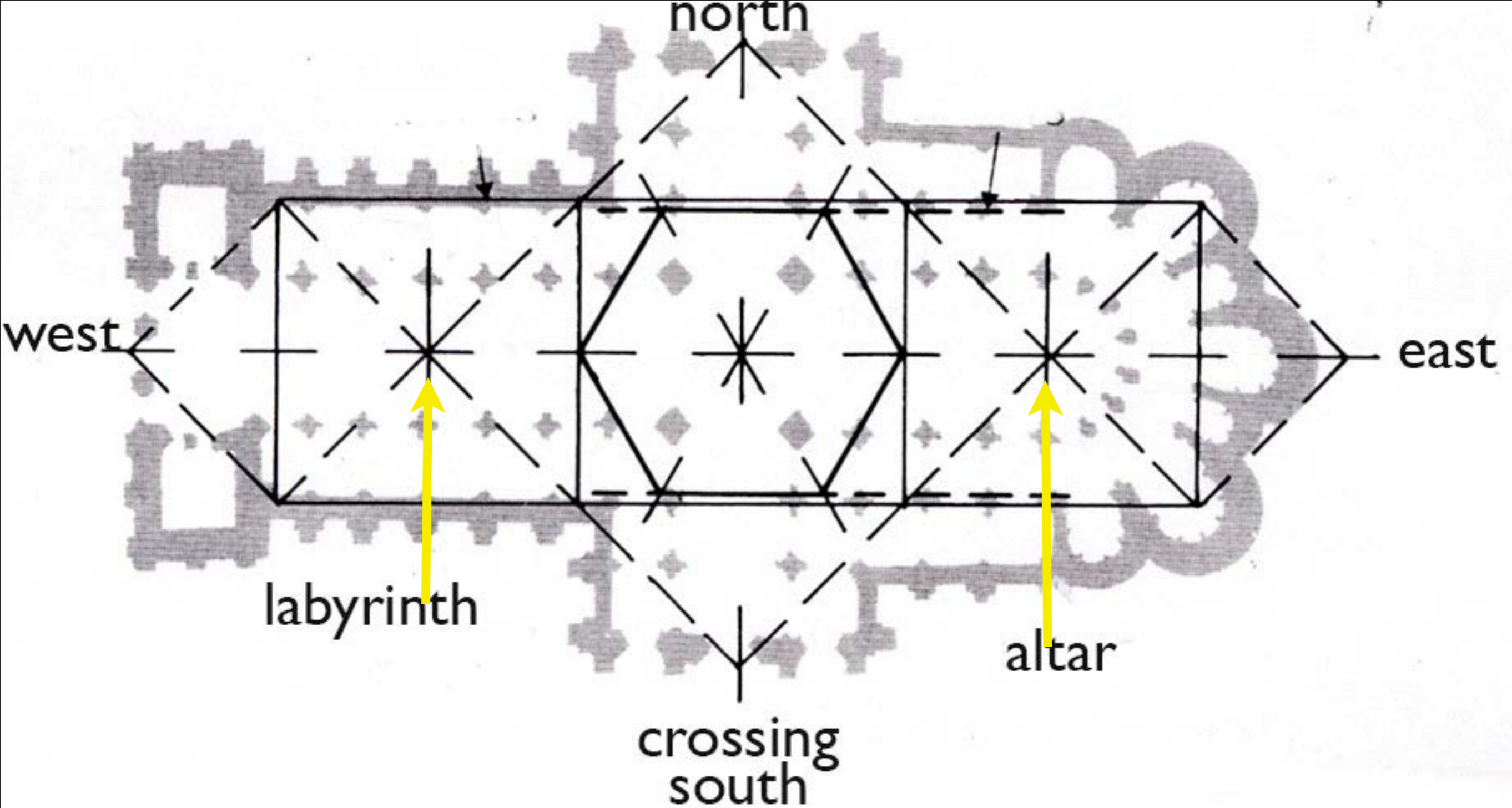


Diagram:


The symbolic placement of the labyrinth points towards God's ability to reach us with salvation.

The symbolism of the Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth: Jesus as the Center of all history: past, present and future



See: Helen Raphael Sands. 2001. *The Healing Labyrinth. Finding Your Path to Inner Peace.* New York: Barrons.

The numbers and ratios of the Chartres-labyrinth
symbolize the truths of the Christian faith



Sacred Geometry=
number symbolism
which includes shape,
mathematics,
philosophy,
theology, and
ratios (relationships of numbers).



During the medieval period in Europe (500-1500 CE) God was understood to be the Creator-Geometer. God created everything in a methodical way using numbers and ratios. Each number and ratio was understood to have a symbolic shape and meaning. Scholars in the Church tried to use the same numbers and ratios as God had when they designed and built churches.

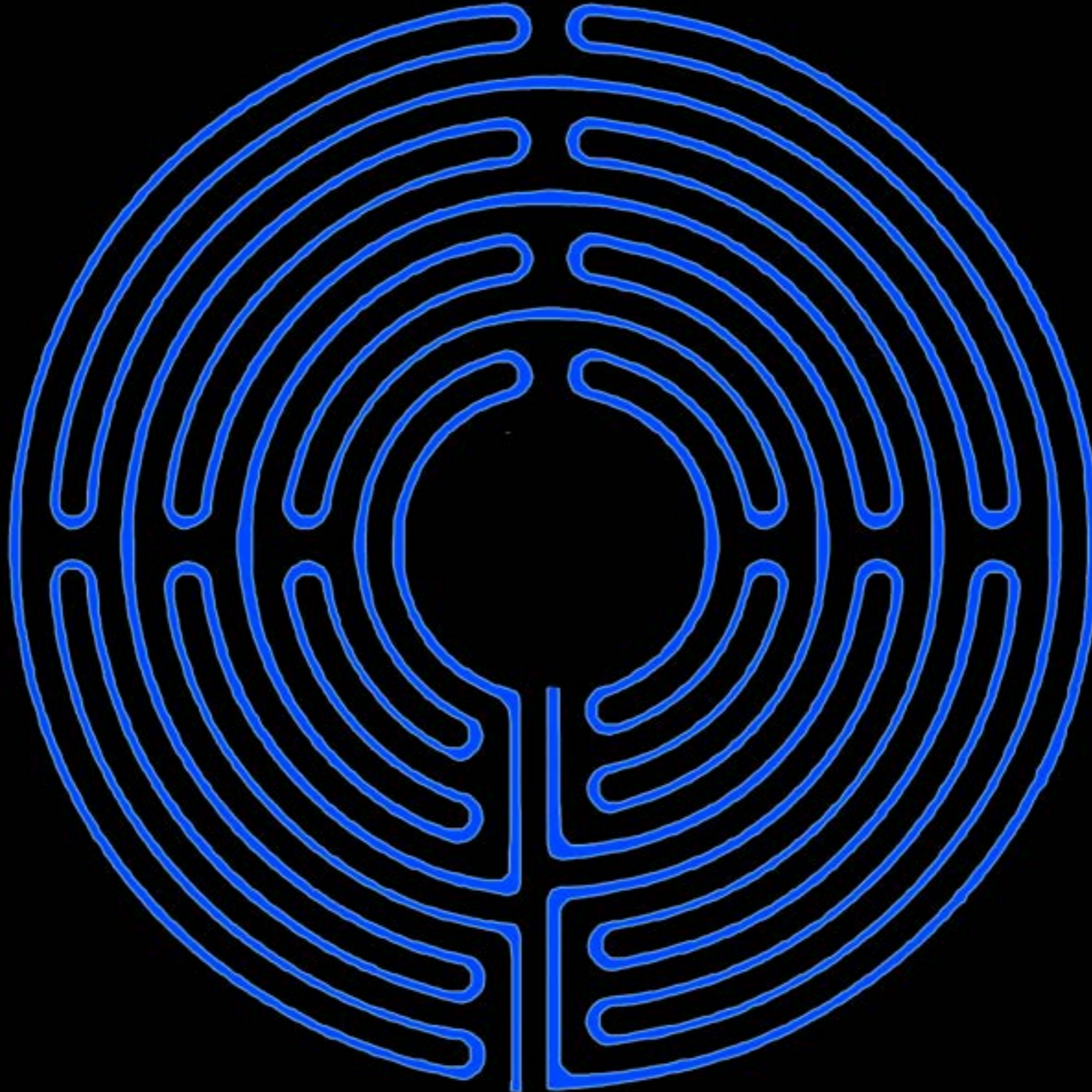
- 1: unity of all things: (circle) [God]
- 2: duality out of which all creation is possible (line)
- 3: creativity, stability, balance (triangle) [Trinity]
- 4: earth, groundedness (square)
- 5: patterned growth, beauty (pentagram)
- 6: divine order on earth, balance of heaven and earth; stability of structure (6-sided star)
- 7: complete yet ongoing process, transformation, union of heaven and earth (heptagon)
- 8: Renewal (octagon)
- 9: The ultimate, horizon (9 pointed star)
- 10: new beginnings, recapitulation (decad)
- 11: Passageway, often associated with sin (hendecagon)
- 12: wholeness, completion of a cycle, infusion of matter with spirit. (Dodekad)

13th century illustration of Jesus-Geometer creating the universe.

The Circular Nature of the Chartres Labyrinth: The Number One

A Symbol of God, Eternity, Wholeness, and Never-ending Love

The circle--a line
without a
beginning or
end--is a symbol
of eternity.



The symbolism of the Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth: A Circle: Represented by the Number One: God's Presence

One
represents:
Unity
Eternity
The All
=
God



The Chartres labyrinth is made of at least 145 circles including:

- Overall shape
- Center based on 7 circles
- 6 circular petals
- circular nature of paths/lines
- The outer "teeth"
- The circle around the whole center

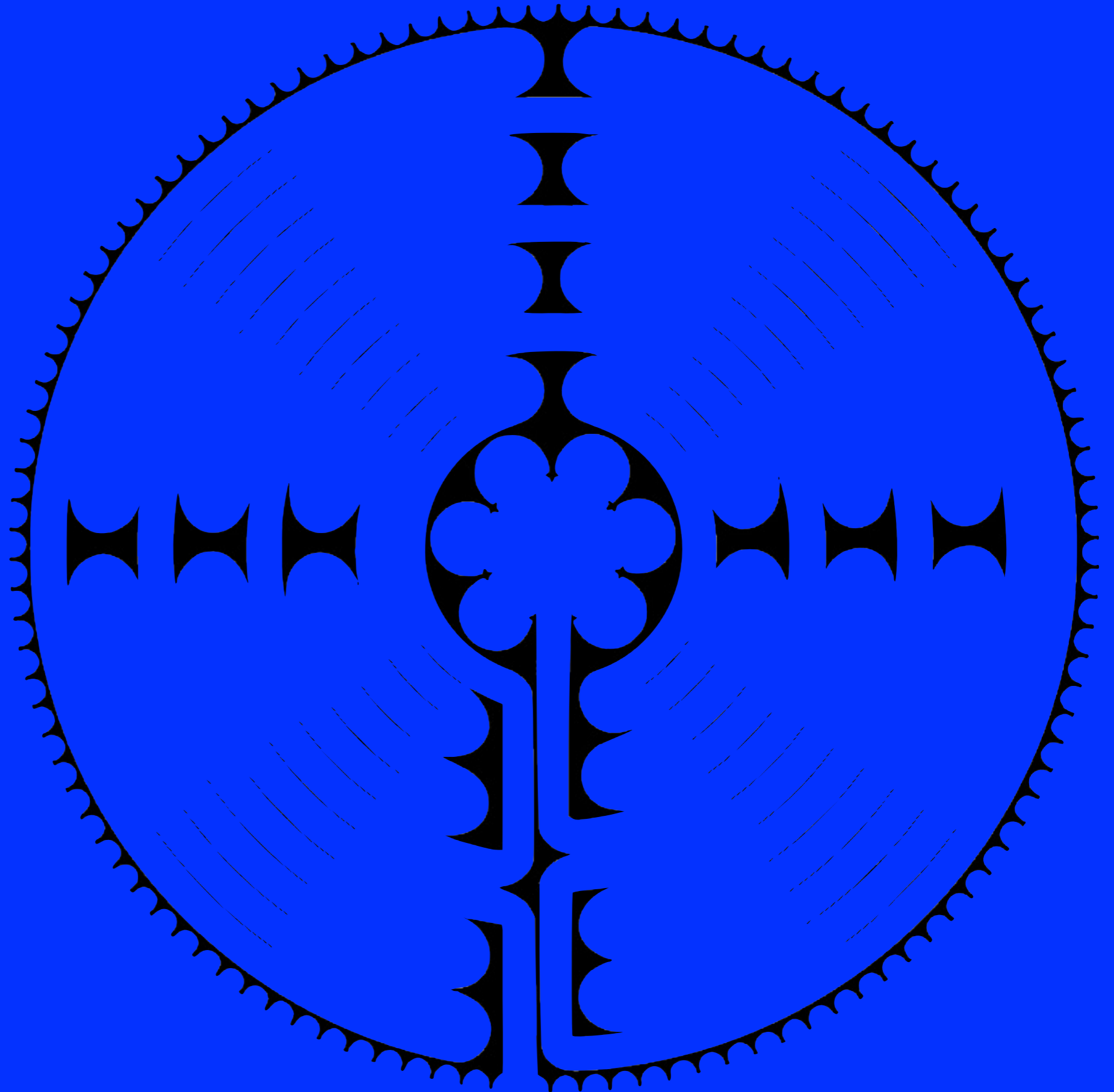
The symbolism of 4 in
the Chartres labyrinth:

The cross is
represented by 4
“arms.”

4 represents the earth.

Our walk through the
labyrinth is defined
by the cross.

We are reminded that
our life on earth is a
walk towards God/
eternal life
(represented by the
center).



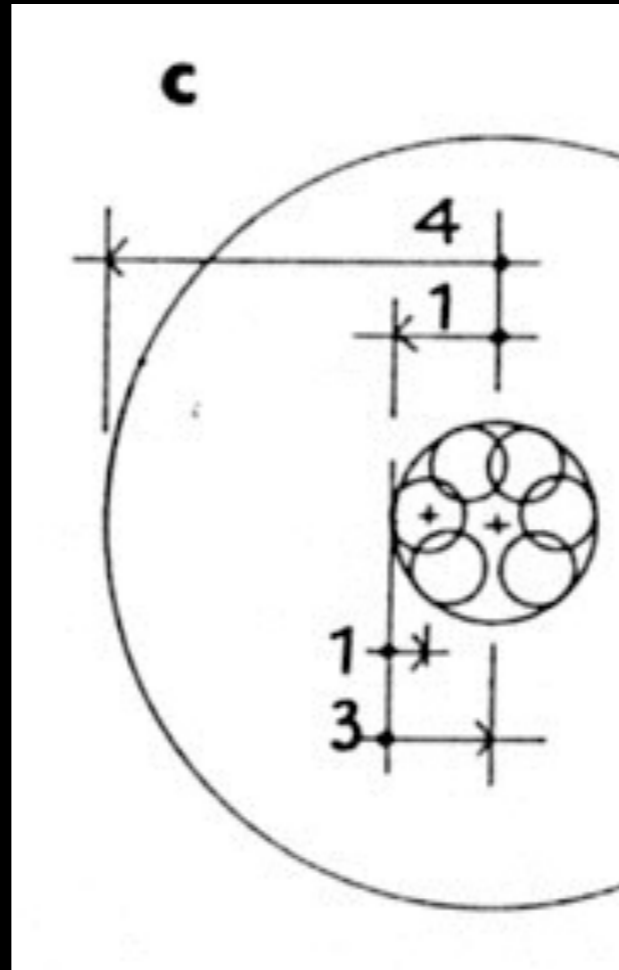
The symbolism of the Chartres Cathedral labyrinth: The Cross



The cross is also represented 5 times in the center of the Chartres Labyrinth. These “crosses surround the inner and unseen circle that defines the center (Jesus). They are also linked to the 12 areas (disciples) surrounding the center- a reminder of Jesus’ words: “whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” Matthew 10:38 Since five represents growth, one message is that following Jesus will lead to growth.

The Labyrinth symbolizes God's presence with us here on earth

Center &
Diameters:
Proportions
of Import



1: Unity of all (God)

3: Trinity, Spirit Stability,
Balance, Heaven

4: Matter, Ground, Earth

Diagram and Geometry
by John James

The ratio of the diameter of the center to the diameter of the labyrinth is 1:4.
The ratio of the diameter of each "petal" to the diameter of the center is 1:3.

Symbol of Jesus Christ As Represented by Six Six Petalled Flower in the Center of the Chartres Labyrinth

“The motif [of the six-lobed rosette belongs to an old and widespread family of stellar symbols, the origins of which reach back into antiquity. Eight-or six-lobed rosettes, as symbols of the stellar nature of God, are a common occurrence in Sumerian, Babylonian, Jewish and Roman art. The motif was quickly absorbed into the Christian cult, as a reference to the celestial nature of the new god, and subsequently became so closely associated with the cross of Christ as to be practically interchangeable with it. Walter Horn and Ernest Born



Center of West Rose Christ at the End of Time



The labyrinth as a symbol of God's presence with us

12 in medieval Christian thinking and practice

1. Wholeness completion of a cycle

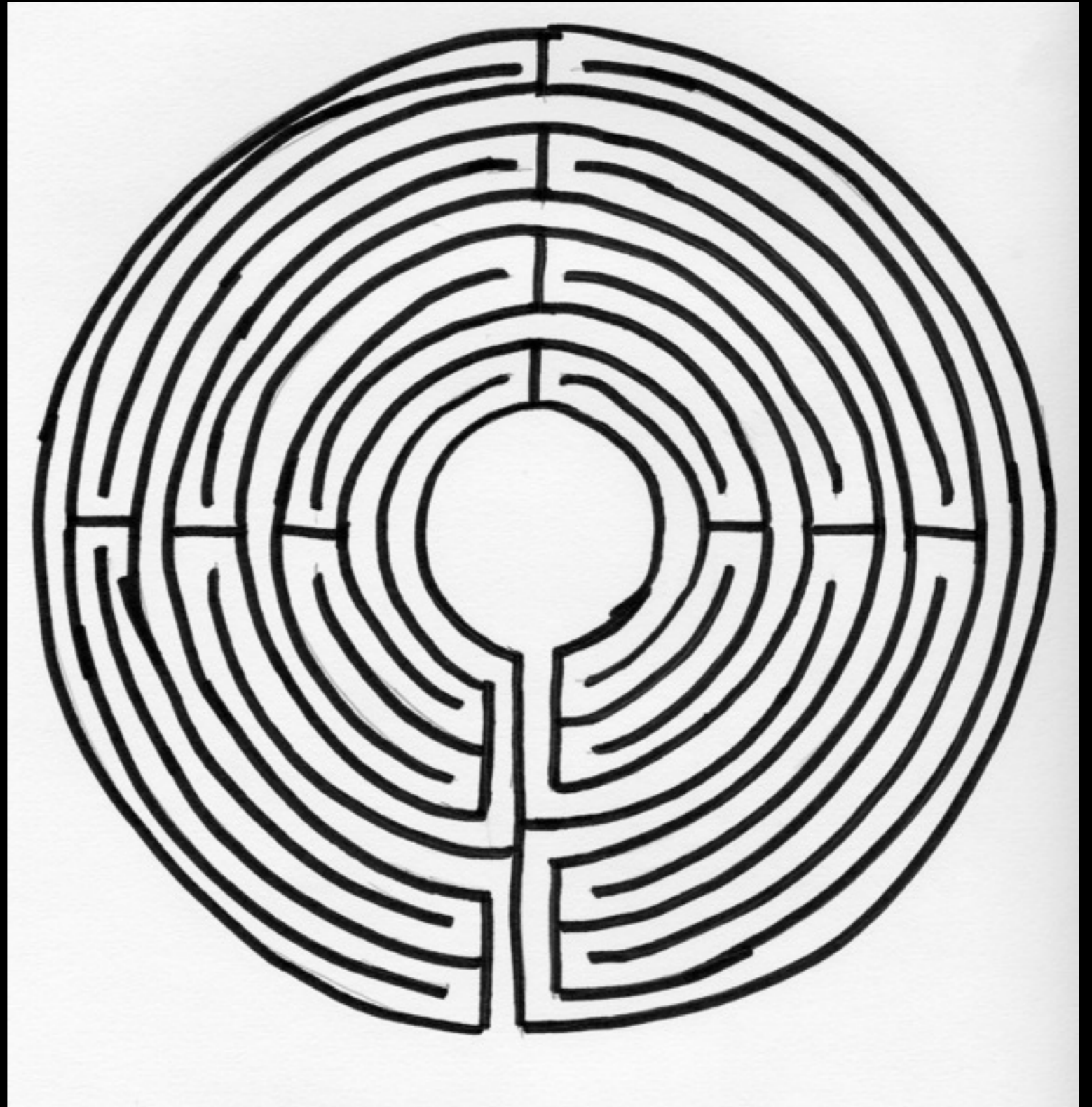
2. Infusion of matter with spirit

$$4 \times 3 = 12$$



The Chartres labyrinth
is composed of 12 circles.

It has 12 divisions in its center
flower.

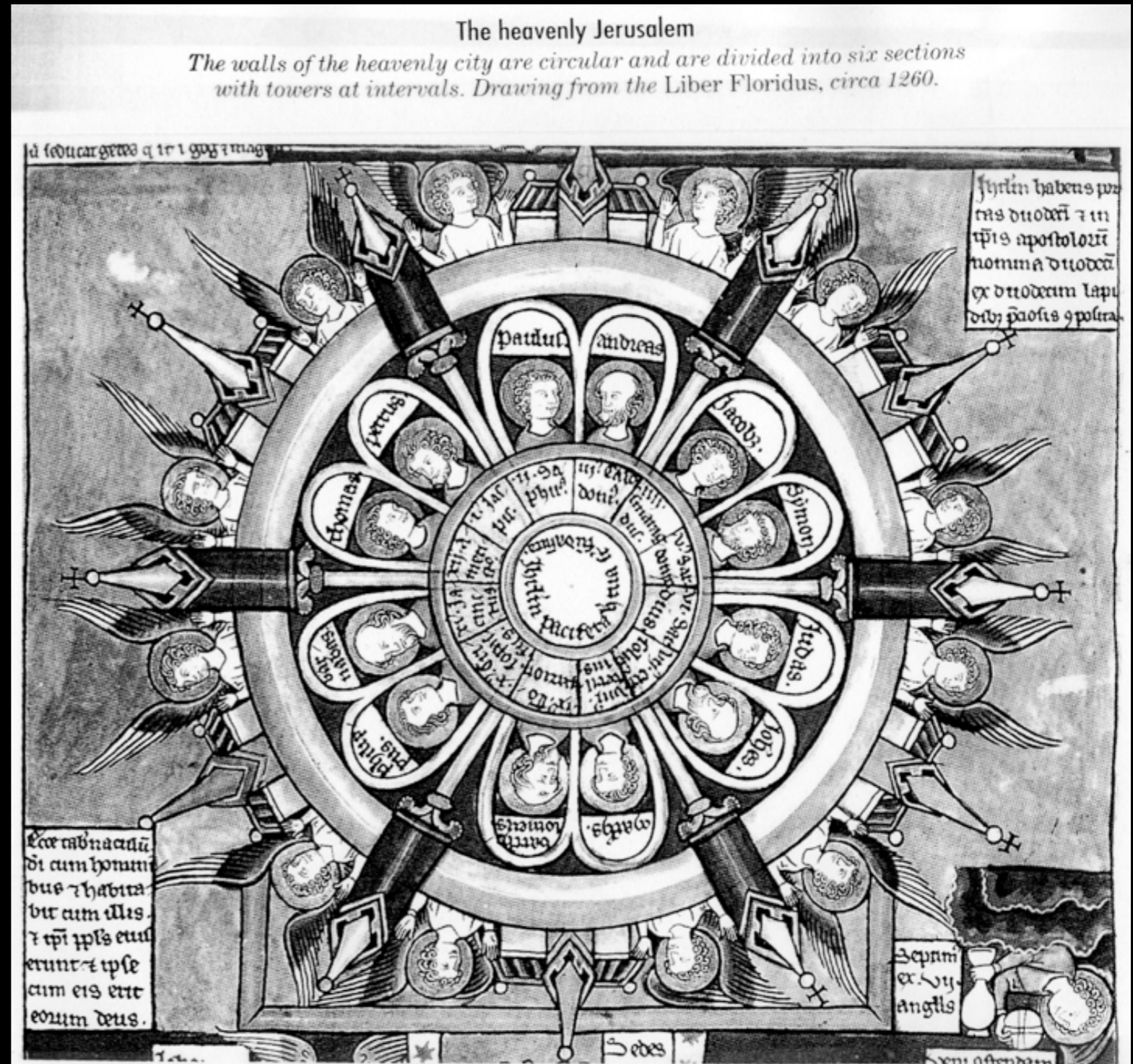


12 in medieval Christian thinking and practice: symbolism of God's ultimate reign

The new (heavenly) Jerusalem

12 walls, gates, angels,
foundations with the names of
the 12 apostles

Revelation 21



Prache, Anne. *Chartres Cathedral. Image of the Heavenly Jerusalem*. Translated by Janice Abbott. Paris: CNRS Editions, 1993. Page 9.



7: 3 +4: Place of God and humanity meeting each other

7: Number that relates to Mary

6: Number that relates to Christ, days of creation

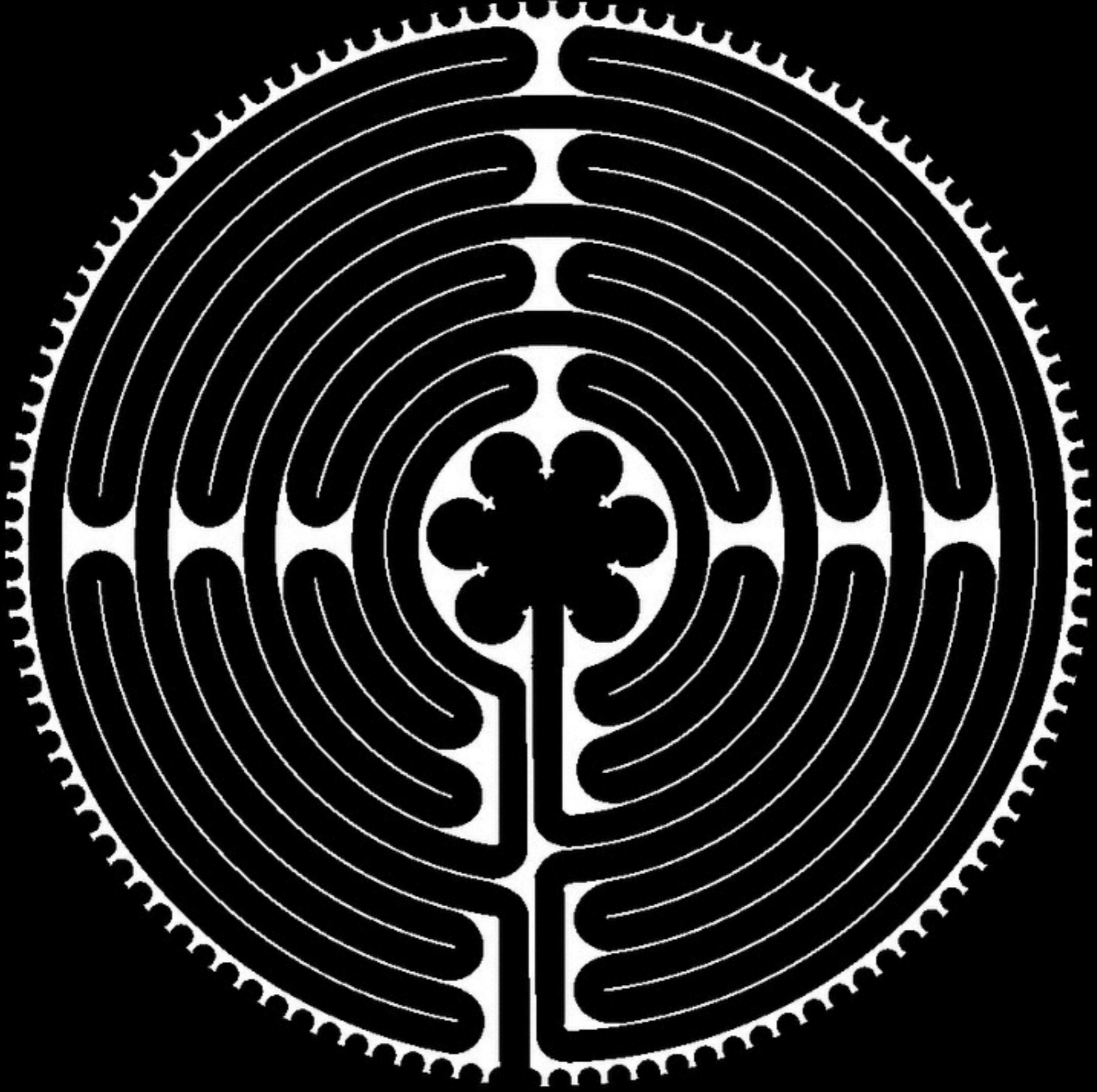
5: Growth/2 Duality—struggle in the face of sin

1: 12 Jesus and his disciples

1:4 God's presence in this world

1:3 God is both Unity and Trinity

The symbolism of the shapes found in the Chartres labyrinth: Christian theology without words



The labyrinth as a symbol of the path of suffering
we all walk.

First stone of the
Chartres, France
labyrinth
shaped like a
chalice.



**There are
eleven
other
chalice-like
forms in the
labyrinth.**



Christ as the passageway to God

I am the Door/Gate;
whoever enters through me
will be saved.
S/he will come in and go out,
and find pasture.
- Jesus (John 10:9)



The symbolism
of the windy
pathway:

One is being
led safely to
the “goal”/
center—
but not
directly!

Following
Christ involves
a winding
journey.



**The turning path symbolizes
the twists and turning nature of human existence.**



The symbolism 180 degree turns (28) bring to mind the need for repentance (metanoia in Greek)





**Partial-circles around the outside of the labyrinth:
symbol of the monastic cloister?**



The symbolism of a cloister walk

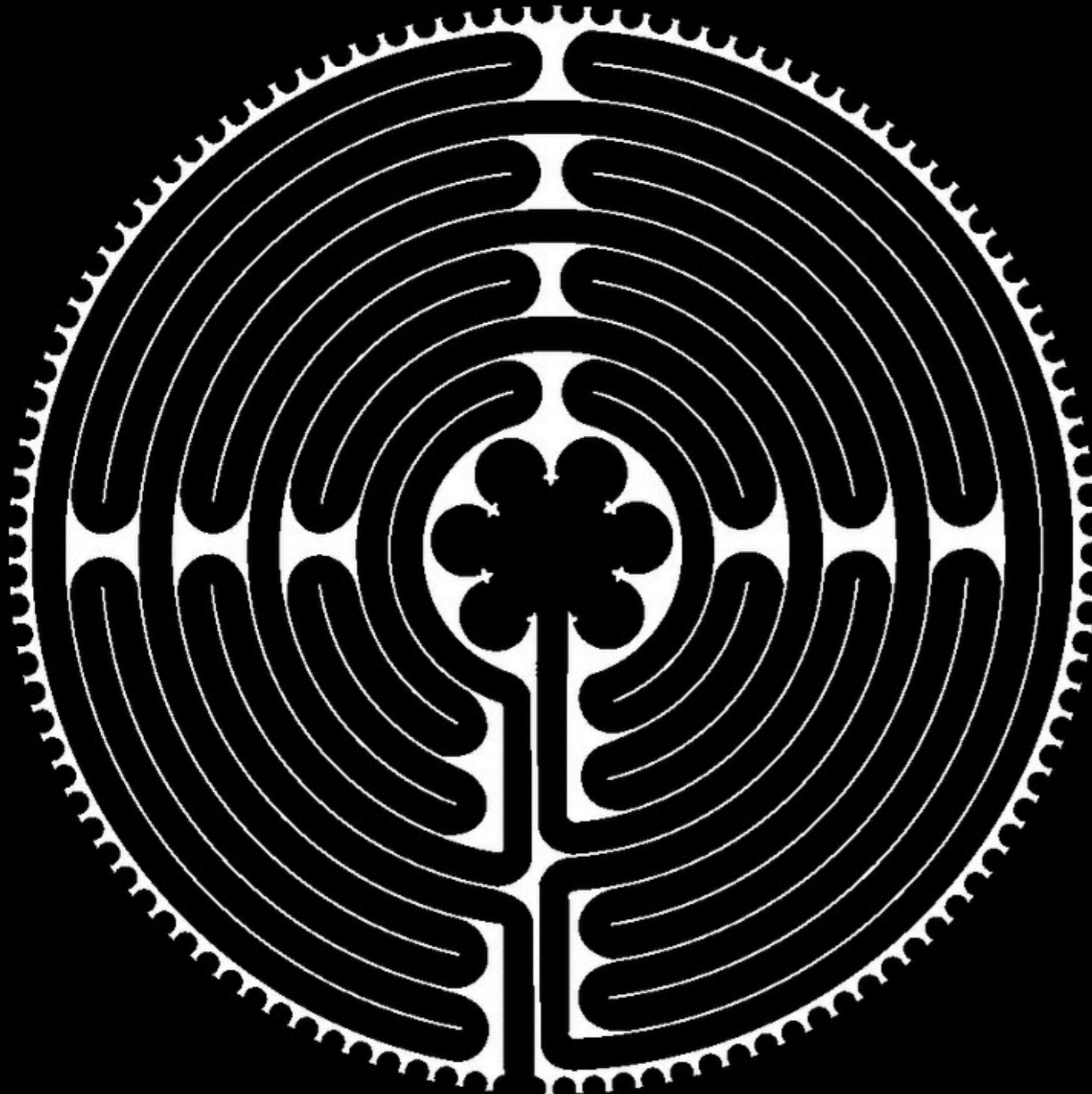


Monastic walkway
for prayer & reflection: a
sheltered environment
for study and meditation.

The cloister often housed
a well in the center
and sometimes included a healing
garden full of medicinal herbs.



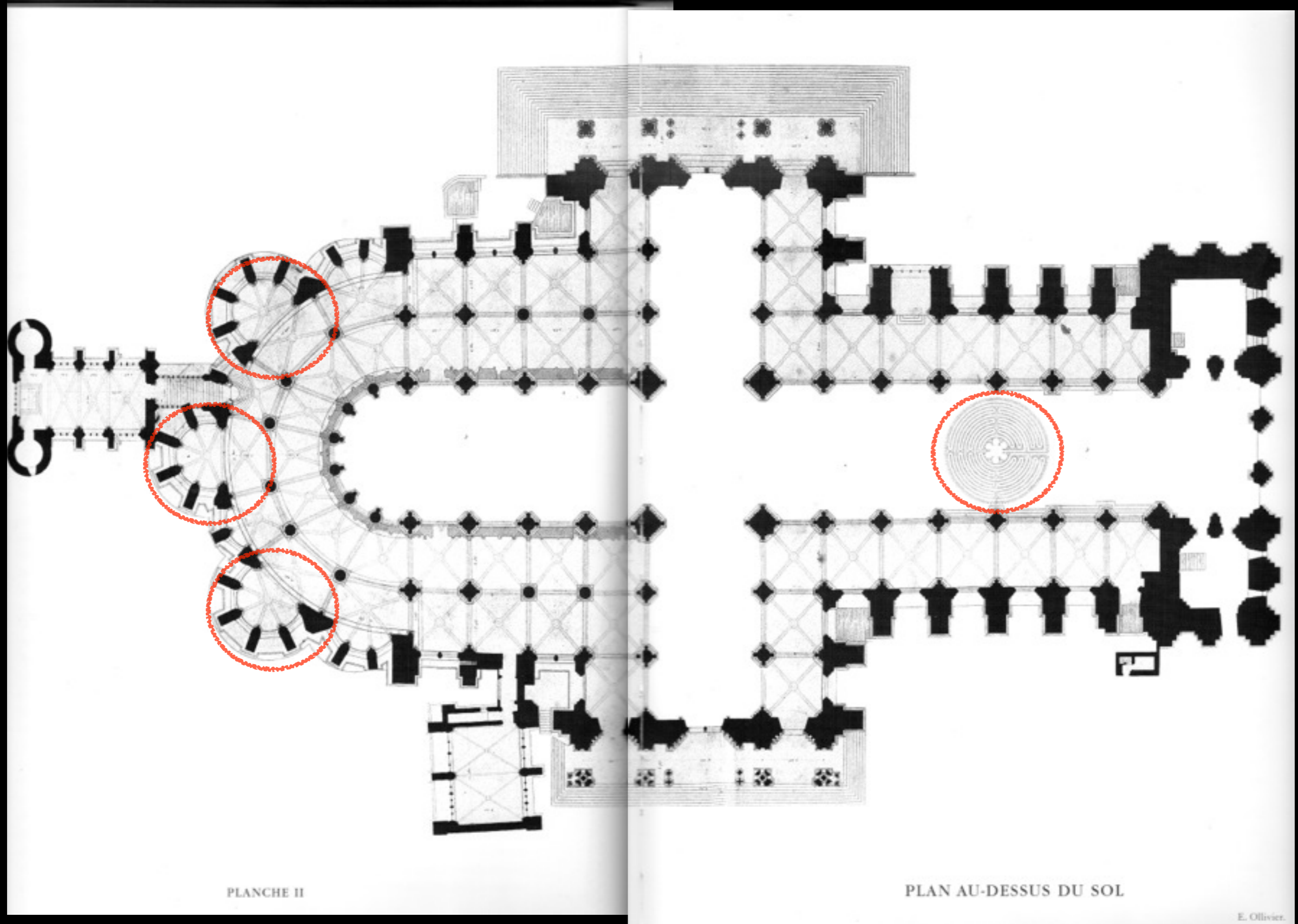
The outer “teeth” as Jesus’ crown of thorns.



...and after twisting some thorns into a crown, the soldiers of the governor put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!”

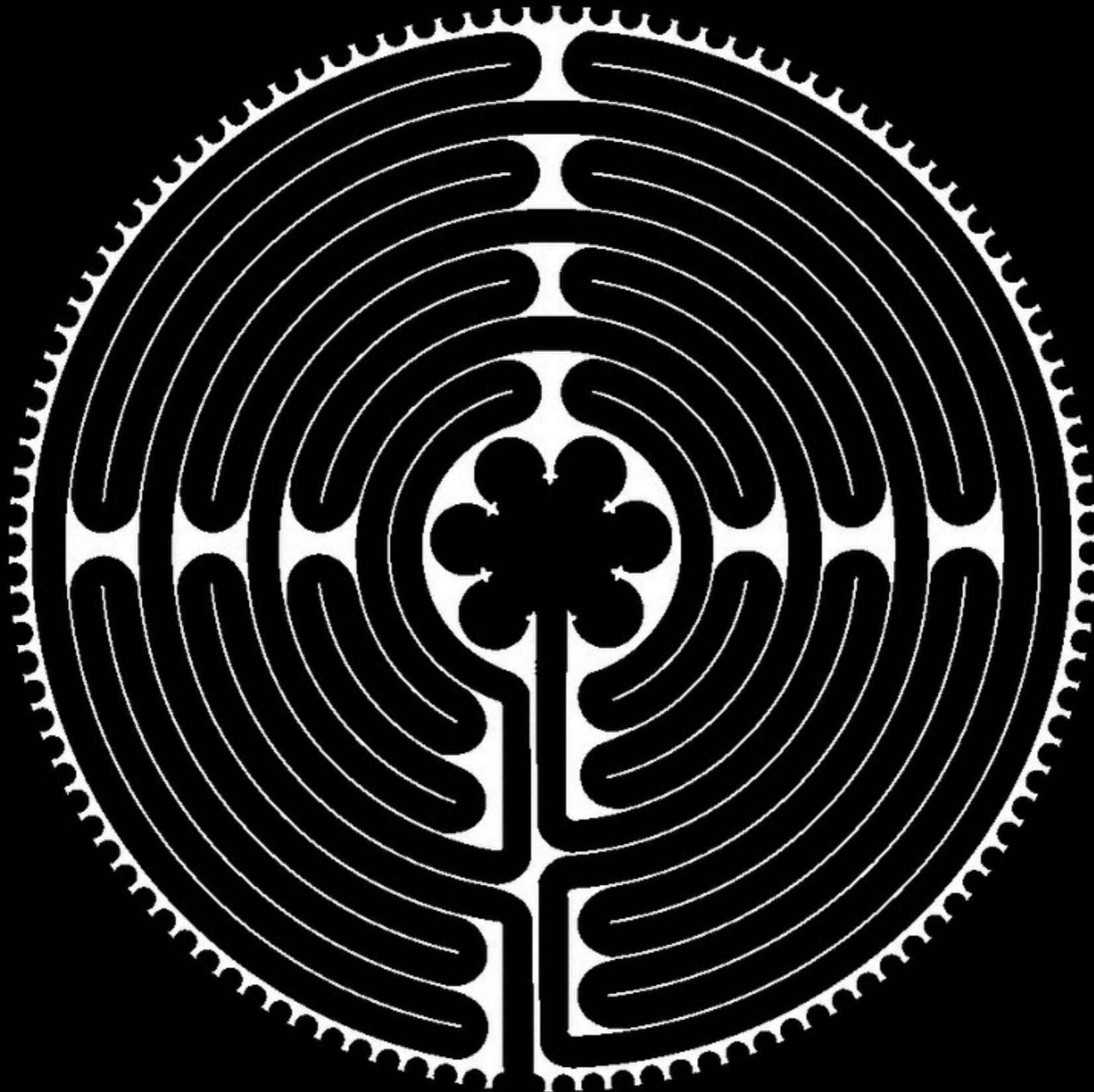
Matthew 27:29

The circular labyrinth as a parallel symbol of a the circular chapels in the east of the cathedral:
A spacial (symbolic) echo of Christ's victorious presence with us.



Durand, Paul (2006), Notre Dame De Chartres (France: Editions Molière).

Other symbolisms of the Chartres labyrinth



“The circular, cross-containing [labyrinth] is a simple map of the path to sanctity, a wordless image of the New Testament. Its message: Follow the path of the gospel and the mercy of God will finally bring you to the heavenly Jerusalem, the kingdom of God, no matter how many turns you make along the way or how many times your goal may seem to recede. Along the way you will discover, and even carry, the cross, but the cross contains the resurrection--life with Christ and all the saints in the new Jerusalem.”

Jim Forest. 2007. *The Road to Emmaus: Pilgrimage as a Way of Life*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis. 45.



Assignment for last session: Week 16

Integration of Learning from the Semester and Contextualization of Labyrinths in Myanmar

1. Hand in your labyrinth journals with 32 completed entries.
2. Pray the labyrinth at least once (hopefully more!) before our next class and reflect on your walk using the labyrinth journal page.
3. Ponder what God has been teaching you and how God has been forming you through your labyrinth prayer this semester.
4. Think about contextualization of labyrinths in Myanmar; we will discuss this in class.
5. Please complete the class evaluation form. Your thoughts will help make the class better for future students. I will not read the evaluations until after I have turned in the grades.

Prayer at the end of class





I would like to express
my gratitude
to God
for this ministry of
healing,
to all the donors of
Faith, Hope and Love
Global Ministries,
and to all those
who use the labyrinth
as we seek the healing
that is needed in our lives
and in the world.



Ministry website www.fhlglobal.org

Labyrinth resources by jill www.jillgeoffrion.com

Photo travel blog by jill www.throughjillseyes.wordpress.com

Journey blog by jill jillgeoffrion.wordpress.com

