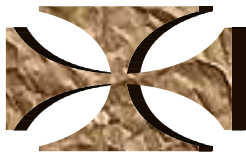


The POWER of the



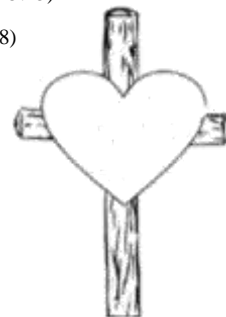
SIGN of the CROSS

“For he must reign, till he has put all enemies under his feet” (1Cor 15:25)

“For the preaching of the cross ... is the power of God” (1Cor 1:18)



**The most powerful *Mini-Creed* in three words
The Badge of Christians ... The mark of Discipleship**



*“Put on the whole armor of God,
that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11)*

“The devils also believe, and tremble” (Jam 2:19)

“Wherefore God also has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phi 2:2-11)

*“And they shall come and see my Glory. And **I will leave a Sign upon them**” (Isa. 66:18-19)*

*“Set me as a **seal** upon your **heart**, as a **seal** upon your **arm**: for love is strong as death” (Songs 8:6)*



The monographic

“CHRISTOGRAM”

The earliest symbol of the Cross ... Also known as St. Andrews Cross

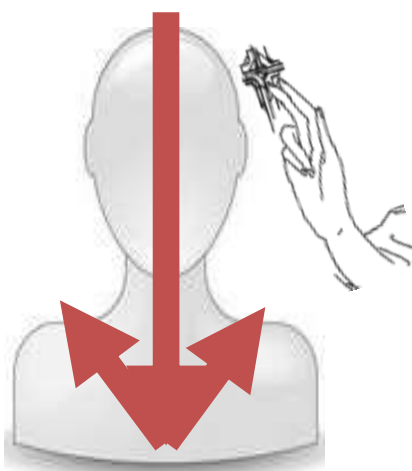
“IC XC”

(Iesous Soter... Christos Soter (Jesus Christ ... Christ the Savior)

The first and last letters of our Lord's Name in Greek.



Catholics & their camps



Orthodox & their camps



Sign made
With the **TONGUE**



Blessing
Others



Sign made
With the **THUMB**



Sign made by
Old Russians



Sign made
With the **HEAD**

PRELUDE

“Christ redeemed us from **THE CURSE OF THE LAW**, having become a curse for us; for it is written, “**CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE (CROSS)**” (Gal 3:13).

“Jesus said: “Take up your **CROSS DAILY**, and follow me” (Luk 9:23).

“Cast your burden upon the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never allow the righteous to be shaken...” To accomplish that with confidence in his providence: “**Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God** (and the **CROSS**), that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert, for your adversary, the devil (the evil spirits and humans, the envious eyes, all divinations and curses, etc.), *prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour*” (Psa 55:22; 1Pet 5:6-8).

“**The Lord himself will give you a SIGN:**
“**Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son,**
And she will call his name IMMANUEL (God with us) ... **If God is for (and with) us, who can ever be against us?**” (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23; Rom 8:31).

And finally, the power of the cross is manifested in this promise: “**Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of ages**” (Deut 31:6; Matt 28:20).

This is a very controversial subject and I have no intention to prove or disprove the many claims and counterclaims. I am just citing the historicity of this study, including but not limited to its aspects, facets and practices as well as the doctrines, the dogmas and the canons of faith, conviction and the dissent.

- 1- The number of Catholics and Greek Orthodox adherents and various Eastern and Western camps is nearly one billion five hundred million believers and about one billion of Protestants to include all their denominations, cults and rites. While the Greek Orthodox and Catholics trace the sign of the cross on themselves and a priest on them, Protestants are wary to use it or to approach the subject.
- 2- The tracing of the sign of the cross has been used since the early centuries of Christianity and the traditions were entered into evidence at the command of Christ, praise his name, when he said: “Go you, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit**” (Matt 28:19), in line with the writing of the Fathers of the Church to include many interpretations of the principle of the use and measurement of the importance of such use. There is no difference between Catholics and Orthodox in the target and the significance of this tradition, where the goal is one, the meaning is one, the intention is one and the ethical conscience is one too: Be blessed, be protected and be at peace by the sign of the Cross.
- 3- “The cross as a Christian “**symbol**” or “**seal**” came into use at least as early as the 2nd century (see” Apost Const “iii 17;. Epistle of Barnabas, xi-xii;. Justin” .. Apologia “i. 55-60 Dial Tryph cum “85-97”) and tracing a cross on the forehead and the chest was regarded as a talisman against the powers of demons (Tertullian, “Corona...” iii;. Cyprian “Testimony,” xi 21-22;. Lactantius, “Divinae Institutiones,” iV 27, and elsewhere) ... As a result, the Church Fathers had to defend themselves, from the 2nd century, against the charge of being worshipers of the cross, as may be learned from Tertullian, (“Apologia, xii” xvii, and Minucius Felix, “Octave”, XXIX) “**Christians swear by the power of the cross**” (Jewish Encyclopedia. ... Apocalypse of Mary, viii, in James. “Texts and studies,” iii 118).
- 4- The sign of the cross is a summary of the act or the doctrine of our Christian faith, namely inspired in principle from the Lord's Prayer: “**Our Father who art in heaven**” where we ask the Father, and we recognize the coming of the kingdom of God in Christ, and we do the will of God and forgive the offenses of others against us through the auspices and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and we cover ourselves with the Cross to deliver us from evil.
- 5- These are the most important dissimilarity between Catholics and Greek Orthodox:
 - a- The number of fingers of the right hand to be used in making the sign of the cross,
 - b- The combination and the order of the fingers, the number of fingers open, linked or folded of the hand,
 - c- **Left or Right**: which shoulder comes first after mentioning the name of the Father on the front and the name of the Son on the chest? Catholics, in principle, dictates the left shoulder first, then the right, while the Greek Orthodox dictates the use of the right shoulder only without the left. [More within this study].

6- The Greek Orthodox do not consider the five wounds of Christ a part of making the sign of the cross, but they believe in them. Catholics say the five wounds of Christ are at the heart of his sufferings on the cross and His death for the atonement of our sins, where Greek Orthodox believe the same thing, while the mouth of the Catholic believer while speaking or whispering "*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" traces the sign of the Cross, he recalls, along with five fingers that Christ died sacrificially for his/her sins.

Although no direct mention or express command in Scripture on tracing the sign of the cross on people or oneself, the whole practice started as a continuous accumulation of improvised traditions, customs and routines performed by early Christians in different versions, in improvised adaptations in associated rituals and sacramental connotations, such as sculpture, scoring or erecting a sign on the graves, on the walls of the catacombs or representative in writing, but not of their face and/or body.

We have a lot of historicity for the practice, just to name a few: Tertullian (ca AC160-225), was an early and prolific Christian author and a precursor to the Nicene doctrine, wrote about a Christian woman "signing" her bed with (*cum lectulum Signas tuum, "Ad uxor"*, v. ii, p 5:= "With the sign of your bed", "your wife") before retiring to rest. St. Jerome (ca-AC347 420), informed us in "*Epitaph. Paulæ*" to trace the sign of the Cross on the lips and in "*Prudence*" Cathem v. vi, p 129, the heart/chest. Sozomen (AC400 AC-450), one of the famous historians of the early Church, born in Bethelia (Bethel), a small town near Gaza in Palestine (vii, xxvi), describes how the bishop Donat when attacked by a dragon: "*In making the sign of the cross with his finger in the air and spat on the monster.*" We are also told in "*Studia Biblica*" v. 32, That St. Nino (ca AC296-340) performed a miracle by the power of the Cross where she began to pray and implore God for long. Then she took up his cross and hit the head, feet and shoulders of the queen, making the sign of the cross and the queen was healed instantly...

In conclusion, by methodically and properly making the Sign of the Cross with the **Right Hand** only, not in hurry or as chasing flies, we venerate and practice this ceremonial life-giving and saving symbol and renew our baptismal vows. We express our belief in the Unity and Trinity from whom all blessings flow and that with God everything is possible as we shield ourselves with the Power of the Cross. We remind ourselves of God's unconditional outpouring love for us, of Jesus' ultimate painful sacrifice on our behalf and his unwavering promise of eternal life, of the only Comforter Giver of life, the Holy Spirit, who infuses in us the awareness of his presence, conviction and guidance. By tracing the Sign of the Cross on ourselves, we bring God's blessing on ourselves, in other words, we bless ourselves, and when we trace it on others, we implore the Triune God's blessings on them.

The HISTORICITY of the SIGN

According to the Church fathers, it is believed that the wide practice started somehow from the 2nd to the 4th century, prior to that, the symbol of the fish was much more used. Today's making of the different Signs of the Cross evolved over the centuries, was and still is one of the deep-seated reasons for the schism in the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Church of Christ, be it in its adoption, adaptation, practice, variation, performance, requirement and/or efficacy. The majority of Protestants, especially the Reformers, reject in principle the ritual not on its merits and connotations but for being a Catholic and Orthodox invention and custom.

In the fifth to sixth century, the Monophysite heresy spread teaching believers that Christ has only one nature. To counter this false doctrine, the Church has encouraged the believers, as taught by the apostles, to begin making the sign with two fingers as a confirmation of the double divine and human natures/wills of Christ, and then evolved to three fingers.

The three enduring heavenly faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, conclusively refer to Jesus the Messiah, as the one and only **Sign** for the past, present and future ages, hence the effectiveness of Him being a sign renders the Sign of His Cross as important.

While Jews adopted the six-pointed Star of David as their emblem, Muslims picked the Crescent as their symbol; Christians chose the insignia of the Cross as their distinguished crest and sign to commemorate the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on behalf of humanity on the Cross. While YHWH and Allah instituted Circumcision for Jews and Muslims, Christ commanded Baptism of water and fire for his followers administered with the pronouncement of: "***In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit***".

The Byzantine emperor Nikēphoros (A.D. 811), a contemporary of Caliph Haroun Al-Rashid, reportedly wrote that St. John the Evangelist made upon himself the Sign of the Cross before dying; other

similar narratives claim that St. Paul used the same Sign to restore sight to a blind man. Other scholars interpret St. Paul's saying: "*From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus*" (Gal 6:17) that he refers to the Sign of the Cross.

It is alleged that after the conversion of Constantine the Great and the vision he saw in the skies (A.C. 313 – Edict of Milan), the Sign of the Cross became officially the distinguishing emblem of Christianity. Constantine claimed to have seen a flaming Cross with inscription in the heavens followed the next night by Christ appearing to him and ordering him to make the Sign of the Cross his ensign and his banner.

BIBLICAL PASSAGES for the ALLUDED to PRACTICE

The cross has been traced by Christians with the thumb or finger on their own fronts. This practice is attested by innumerable allusions in the literature of the Fathers of the Church, and it was clearly associated with the idea of certain references in Scripture, including Eze 9:4 (the brand of the letter Tau); Exo 17:9-14, especially Rev 7:3, 9:4 and 14:1.

How to trace the sign of the cross has become a stumbling block for many Christians and caused rifts and schisms in the same denominations and among different Christian rites. To name a few: The schism between Catholics and Orthodox, the division of the Russian Orthodox Church, the discord between mainstream Christianity with Protestantism on the issue. Different allies to make the sign of the Cross quote passages from the Old and New Testament in support of their application, especially those who speak of the sign and seal of God (Cross) on the front against the sign of the beast (Satan/the devil), while opponents accuse them of paganism, charlatanism and sorcery:

The PAST: "*The Lord said: "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and **put a mark** (no specific mention but might mean ash, oil, water, or blood) **on the foreheads** of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable that are done in it"* (Eze 9:4).

The PRESENT: "*Who his own self **bare our sins in his own body on the tree**, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you were healed"* (1Pet 2:24)... "*And Jesus answered and said: "Verily I say unto you: There is no man that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come **eternal life**"* (Mar 10:29-30)... "*Blessed are they that do his commandments so that they may have right **to the tree of life**"* (Rev 22:14).

The FUTURE: "*Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal (no specific mention but might mean ash, oil, water, or blood) on the foreheads of the servants of our God"* (Rev 7:3).

The Great COMMISSION: "*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen"* (Matt 28:18-20).

"*Search the scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me"* (John 5:39)... "*My Father works hitherto, and I work"* (John 5:17), then we should admire how demons and how various diseases are dispelled **by the sign of the precious and life-giving Cross**. All the stories of the Bible emphasized the powerful and profound importance of this sign, so that we can refute heretics and infidels and repel and expel Satan. The tracing of the sign with two fingers of the right hand was and still is to represent the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to recognize his existence in two natures and one hypostasis (person) of the Triune God. It points to his infinite power and that he is seated at the right hand of God. The gesture is down to signify his descent from heaven. The movement from right to left (symbolizing Jesus sitting at the right hand of God) or left to right (to symbolize the Holy Spirit, or the passage from the Jews (right) to the Gentiles (left) or connotation for the seat of the devil) which both are to push, through the invincible power of the Cross of Jesus, the devil and his cohorts:

"*For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him... So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God... Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand **of the power of God**"* (Col 1:16; Mar 16:19; Luc 22:69).

Thus reminding us that: “*Because the prince of this world (Satan and his cohorts) is judged*” (John 16:11) seconded by the biblical passages that confirm that Satan is already disarmed, weakened and conquered (Col 2:15, Rev 12:7, Mar 3:27), and that Jesus Christ triumphantly and thunderously declared: “*I have overcome the world (and by extension “his prince”*” (John 16:33).

In Jesus, God the Father, under the auspices of the Holy Spirit, has revealed to us the fullness of grace through the Cross is the only source of all blessings:

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with **all spiritual blessings** in heavenly places in Christ. According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved. **In whom we have redemption through his blood** (Cross), the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ; in whom you also trusted, after that you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that you believed, **you were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory**”* (Eph 1:1-14).

*“As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ... **But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature”* (Gal 6:12, 14-15).

*“He might reconcile both unto God in one body **by the cross**”* (Eph 2:16).

*“And, having made peace **through the blood of his cross**, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven... Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, **nauling it to his cross**”* (Col 1:20, 2:14).

*“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him **endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God**”* (Heb 12:2).

CONNOTATION Of The TRIUNE GOD

The Triune God we believe in when expressed in speech, thoughts and deeds as symbols of prayer of Faith in a Trinitarian God, becomes a blessing and an incarnation of the commands and the facts of live as a triune of:



- Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier,
- Creator, Creature and Purpose,
- Birth/Rebirth, Death and Resurrection,
- Heart, Mind and Will,
- Spirit, Soul and Body,
- Faith, Hope and Love,
- Devotion, Worship and Praise.

THE PRACTICE

The rituals and the conflicting practices are wide spread among Latin and Western, Eastern and Roman Catholicism, all Orthodox Churches, Anglicanism, Lutheranism as well as Methodists, Episcopalians and Presbyterians and their offshoots.

Aside of the discrepancies and the incongruity, the Trinitarian beliefs and how to perform the Sign of the Cross by hand by tracing it on the air to bless people or individuals or making it on oneself symbolizing either the **four points** on the Cross or pointing to the four planetary boundaries: **North**,

East, West and South or expressing one's love for the Triune God with all the person's **heart, soul, mind** and **strength**.

*“Hear, O Israel: “The Lord our God is **one Lord**: and you shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart**, and with all your **soul**, and with all your **might**. And these words, which I command you this day, shall be in your heart: and you shall teach them diligently unto your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall bind them **for a sign upon your hand**, and they shall be **as frontlets between your eyes**. And you shall write them upon the posts of your house, and on your gates”* (Deut 6:4-9).

Many in the Orthodox Church claim that Jesus himself used **Two Fingers** to bless individuals and masses. St. Basil (4th century) reportedly held that the apostles practiced tracing the Sign while administering the rituals of baptisms; but if we ignore St. Basil's conjecture, it seems all started early in Christianity with a tracing of a small cross with **Two fingers** on the forehead to refute and challenge the Monophysites who claim that Jesus has only one nature, the like of Copts, Jacobites and heretics and who use **One Finger** to make the Sign of the Cross. The two fingers evolved into **Three joined fingers** (Thumb, Index and Middle Finger) in the 9th century as held outstretched together to symbolize and confess the Trinity **“Father, Son and Holy Spirit”**, while the remaining two fingers (Ring finger and Pinky) were held bent against the palm to signify **Christ's two natures** and/or **two wills**. Moving the hand in a larger sign from forehead to sternum (breast/Stomach) to the two shoulders followed by joining the two hands and repeating **“One God, Amen.”**

Pope Innocent III gave this self-explanatory interpretation:

*“The sign of the cross is made with three fingers, because the signing is done together with the invocation of the Trinity. This is how it is done: from above to below, and from the right to the left, because Christ descended from the **Heavens** to the **Earth**, and from the **Jews** (right) he passed to the **Gentiles** (left)”*.

Then Catholics and their camp adopted the **Five Fingers** with open hand to reflect, while confessing **“Father, Son and Holy Spirit”**, the five open wounds of Christ and as a reminder of his ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

The entire Orthodox Church, Oriental, Eastern and Western, retained the **Two fingers** (Russian Old-Believers) and the **Three fingers formula** (Eastern & Greek) with the remaining **Ring and Pinky fingers bent** bowing their heads till today.



The SIGN of the CROSS and BAPTISM & EXORCISM

*“Is Christ divided?
Was Paul crucified for you?
Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”* (1Cor 1:13)



BAPTISM: Since Baptism is the gate to be inducted into the fellowship and discipleship of Christ and its validity comes not of the use of water alone (three immersions/dunking/pouring representing the Trinity) but from the Orthodox **Trinitarian formula** (**In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**) attached to it. Even with the clear command of Jesus, many so-called Modalist Christians Churches adopted a non-Trinitarian approach, such as **“In the name of the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sanctifier”** in performing baptism.

Liturgically, all Trinitarian and non-Trinitarian Churches consider the practice of tracing the Sign of the Cross as a tradition recommended by the Church fathers, at the exception of Catholic, Russian Orthodox and Anglican Churches, who rank it as a sacrament.

EXORCISM: (from Greek εξορκισμός, *exorkismos* - binding by oath). Discounting the different denominations' beliefs and practices of the subject, I refer to it here because the act of expelling demons is linked to the powerful and mighty Name of Jesus and his Cross as you may ascertain from the Gospels' narratives and the Acts of the Apostles. Most priest exorcists use in their rituals, beside prayers, **“Holy Water”** and/or **“Crucifix”**. The **“Holy Water”** is usually sprinkled on the possessed in the form of a cross.



STYLES: is it CRUCIFIX or CROSS?



"But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant" (1Cor 14:38)

**"For I determined not to know anything among you,
save Jesus Christ and Him crucified"** (1Cor 2:2).

"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whosoever you are that judges: for wherein you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you that judge does the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And think you this, O man, that judge them which do such things, and does the same, that you shall escape the judgment of God? Or despise you the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But after your hardness and impenitent heart treasure up unto yourself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God..."

(Rom 2:1-29).

"You shall not make unto you any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: you shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me"
(Exo 20:4-5). . . *"You shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall you set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the Lord your God"* (Lev 26:1).

Despite the passages of the Bible above and many others admonishes, denominations of Christians, past and present, always fight and argue about the use and abuse of Crucifix and/or the Cross. They do not have the required transitive and/or intransitive knowledge and/or sufficient reason to establish a rational basis to justify their beliefs. Nonetheless, they decorate their homes, places of worship and public places with all kinds of graven images; they claim that they are merely gadgets to help believers worship better.

*"For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription: **"TO THE UNKNOWN GOD"**. Whom therefore you ignorantly worship, yet him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, **dwells not in temples made with hands**; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing **he gives to all life, and breath, and all things**; And has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: **for in him we live, and move, and have our being**; as certain also of your own poets have said, for we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought **not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device**. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men everywhere to repent: because he has appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained; whereof he has given assurance unto all men, in that he has raised him from the dead"* (Act 17:23-31).

Without the Cross, there is no Christianity to be had. Apart of the sacraments and the Eucharist, the Cross and the Resurrection are the central concepts and basis of the Christian faith being the cause and effect of that faith. The Cross symbolizes God's love and atonement, Christ's victory over sin and death and the sending of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter and the Giver of life.

Through theology, art and iconology, the majority of Eastern, Western, Latin and Roman Catholicism, Greek and Russian Orthodox, Anglicans and Lutherans and their offshoot Churches use crucifixes as a reminder of the ultimate sacrifice of Christ, whereas most Protestants since the 16th century distanced themselves from the main stream churches by using crosses to emphasize the resurrection of the triumphant God-Man Christ and his victory over death once and for all.

**"Him (Jesus), being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken,
and by wicked hands have crucified and slain"** (Act 2:23).

Over the centuries, Christians vied each other in fashioning shapes, styles and models of that shameful symbol of the rugged tree trunk, with or without Christ on it resulting in Crosses and Crucifixes. Each Denomination chose a figured distinguishing Cross and/or Crucifix to represent its understanding of that original Cross and manifest the infinite unconditional love of God for his creatures.

For politico-nationalistic-religious reasons and affiliations, each religious or even political denomination has historically carved and adopted a distinguishing shape, style and outline of either the Crucifix or the Cross, ranging from the most elaborate adorned with jewels to the simplest of forms. Starting with rudimentary shapes in the early church to “Labarum” the Cross Constantine the Great made to the many Latin, Orthodox, Coptic, Armenian and other religious and civic organizations’ configurations and interpretations in addition to all the crucifixes and crosses of popes, patriarchs, saints, knights and orders friars and nuns including but not limited to the Swastika of Hitler.

Why do CHRISTIANS make the SIGN of the CROSS?

- To implore God’s blessings - To dwarf evil - Before and after eating, sleeping, traveling, driving, working, etc – To bless a person or a group.
- When passing a Church, as recalling God presence in his House and in the Eucharist
- In disbelief and shock after hearing or witnessing a blasphemous acts - During disasters, troubles, calamities, surprises, bombshells, etc...
- When blessing others especially youngster, usually tracing the Sign of the Cross or touching the youngster’ head/forehead uttering a phrase, such as: “*The name or the watchful eye of God be upon you*”, or “*the name of God surround and shield you*” or “*May the envious eye not reign or not take hold of you*” or “*May the Lord bless and keep you*”, etc...

How the SIGN is PERFORMED:

How many FINGERS & SHOULDERS’ SUCCESSION?

Regardless which church you belong to and which way you trace today the Sign of the Cross, whether with *Three fingers* or *Five Fingers*, the chief recommended *hand* moves and sequences are:

- 1- Placing the *LEFT* hand extended under the *breast*,
- 2- Then raising simultaneously the *RIGHT* hand and touching the *forehead* with the extremities of the fingers, (*In the Name of the Father ...*)
- 3- Then lowering the *Right* hand towards the *sternum (and the Son...)*,
- 4- Then from *shoulder* to *shoulder (Left/Right or Right/left (and the Holy Spirit))*,
- 5- Then joining both hands while bowing and ending with: (*Amen*) or in Arabic (*One God, Amen*). Many Orthodox finish the sign of the cross by moving the hand to the left side, below the stomach, as opposed to the shoulder. They also frequently make the Sign two times in a row and then bow toward the altar, cross, icon and/or priest.

TYPES of tracing the SIGNS of the CROSS

With the many schisms, especially that of A.D. 1054, that plagued and still afflict the Church of Christ, whether between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, or within Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, within the Russian Orthodox Church itself, the Sign of the Cross generated longitudinal and latitudinal debates and disaccords to the extent that it constitutes one of the focal points of these schisms.

From the beginning of the practice in the 2nd century and beyond, these are some of the many forms used by one denomination over the other when performing the Sign of the Cross on people, objects or on oneself given as historical facts without approving or disapproving who is right or wrong:

- 1- Sign of a little Cross: to gesture with the *Right Hand's Thumb* only and across the forehead. As reported by St John Chrysostome, St. Cyril, St Jerome, and by Tertullian (A.D. 155-230), a church leader and a prolific author of Early Christianity wrote: “*We Christians wear out our foreheads with the Sign of the Cross*”,
- 2- Trace *Three Small Crosses* with the *Thumb* of the right hand on their own *Forehead*, on their *Lips* and on the *Heart* (Breast) in quick succession.
- 3- Making the sign of the Cross using the *Tongue (top, bottom, and left-right/right-left)* especially for those living under religious persecutions, or when it is deemed inappropriate to make the sign publicly.
- 4- Making the sign of the Cross using the *Head* (Lifting *Up*, bowing *Down*, and turning *left-right/right-left*).

- 5- Until the 17th century, Russian Orthodox made the Sign of the Cross with only *Two Fingers*, like the Old Believers, to symbolize the *Dual Nature* and *Dual Will* of Christ.
- 6- By the 6th century, a trajectory large Sign of the Cross with *Three joined Fingers* and *Two folded* pressed against the palm of the hand was adopted by the majority of Eastern and Western Christian Churches.
- 7- By the 13th century (Pope Innocent III), Catholics and many of their offshoots adopted a trajectory large Sign of the Cross with the whole extended hand using *Five Fingers* to reflect the pierced *Five Holy Wounds of Christ*, which is also depicted on what is known as the Jerusalem Cross, mostly used on Eastern European Countries' flags, mainly the flag of the Republic of Georgia till today.

INTERPRETATIONS given for the different PRACTICES

CATHOLICISM: The symbolic sign of the Cross was applied after the oldest gesture of two or three fingers have been simplified. The open right hand is often used to represent the *Five Open Wounds of Christ*. Although this is the most common method by Catholics worldwide, as well as other forms such as the "*Little Sign of the Cross*," in which a small cross is drawn with the thumb on the forehead, lips and breasts of the individual while whispering the words: "*Christ's words are in my mind, on my lips and in my heart*" before reading the Gospel, and is also commonly used in oneself blessing of holy water at the entrance or exit of a church. There is a big misunderstanding that seems to say that they are: "*4 Fingers symbolizing the Trinity and the Virgin Mary*".

Catholic Rationalization:

The *five fingers* representing the *five Holy Wounds of Christ* are the effect of his crucifixion and an embodiment of his ultimate sacrifice for humanity while proclaiming: "*In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen*". Two birds in one move. Catholics still subscribe to many of the same explanations and interpretations given to the Sign of the Cross by the Orthodox Church and other denominations with some nuances summarized in the sequence of the shoulders.

ORTHODOXY AND EASTERN GREEK: the thumb, index and middle fingers are raised to a point, symbolizing the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), three persons (hypostases) sharing one essence (ousia), the two fingers (kept pressed together and touching the palm) representing the human and divine natures and wills of Jesus Christ as well as the incarnation of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX: Old Believers: with the Oriental Orthodox Churches (to name a few: Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Eritrean Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Syrian Malankara Orthodox Church (Indian Orthodox Church) and Armenian Apostolic churches, etc.) still use to this day the two fingers (symbolizing the dual nature and will of Christ), developed with the other three fingers pressed representing the Trinity.

The Russian Patriarchs Rationalization:

"Furthermore, the Russian Church of Old Believers insist: "with the thumb and the two lower fingers joined together, and the extended index finger joined to the middle finger, slightly bent; thus should prelates [and] priests give their blessing and thus should men cross themselves. . . . It befits all Orthodox Christians to hold their hand thus, and to make the sign of the cross upon their face with two fingers, and to bow, as we said before. If anyone should fail to give his blessing with two fingers, as Christ did, or should fail to make the sign of the cross with two fingers, may he be accursed."

The Bridgettine nuns' interpretation:

Tracing the Sign of The Cross has its mystical reasons as it is summarized in: the *Incarnation*, the *Passion*, and the *Ascension*.

Until the reforms of Russian Patriarch Nikon in the 17th century, aiming to establish consistency between the practices of the Greek and Russian churches, it was customary to make the sign of the cross with two fingers. The application of the sign of three fingers was one of the reasons for the schism with the Old Believers (zealots of piety) whose congregations continue to use the sign of the cross with two fingers, while some use as the Byzantine finger formation. Also, it established that The "Hallelujah" be repeated three times instead of two.

The Power of the Sign of the Cross on Water/Food

Many over the centuries as well as Russian Scientists, especially Angelina Malakhovskaya have proved the *Miracle-Working Properties* of the mystical Sign of the Cross and prayer. Experiments were verified in particular where the unique bactericidal properties of water, after being blessed by the Sign of the Cross and a prayer especially the “Lord’s prayer”, revealing the transformation of the structure of water, and by extension foods, by increasing its optical density in the short ultra-violet spectral region showing the impact these two make on pathogenic bacteria. The experiments were made by believers and non-believers alike, to exclude the impact of mental suggestion, using samples from wells, rivers, lakes, springs, and reservoirs, the results showed the number of various harmful pathogenic sets of bacteria from different sources decreasing seven to even over thousand times. It was also observed that if the Sign of the Cross is made offhandedly, with three fingers put together carelessly or placed outside the necessary points: the middle of the forehead, the center of the solar plexus and the recesses in the right and left shoulders, the positive result was much weaker or absent altogether.

Sample PRAYERS Associated with SIGNING the CROSS

We may alternate ritually these invocations:

“In the Name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit” or
“In the Name of the Holy Trinity” or
“In the Name of Jesus of Nazareth” or
“Son of David, have mercy on me because I am a sinner”, or
“Holy God, Holy Strong One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us”,

The latter is an Orthodox invocation which is usually intoned by Western Churches on Good Friday only.

These are but few prayers used by Christians when tracing the Sign of the Cross:

“I am sealed with the seal of the living God”,
“My help is in the name of the Lord”,
“O Father, Son, Holy Spirit, come to my assistance”.

Or in case of temptations, trials, hostilities and fear, with signing the cross on yourself, you can repeat St. Benedict’s prayer:

“By the Sign of the Cross, deliver me from my enemies, O Lord”

This is just a simple prayer to accompany the Signing of the Cross on oneself: Touching the forehead, one says “*Lord*” professing Christ as the Head of the person and the Church. Then, touching the belly, one says, “*Jesus Christ*” acknowledging He became Man of the Virgin Mary. Then, touching the right shoulder, one adds “*Son of God*” believing that He ascended to Heaven and sits at the Right Hand of the Father, followed by touching the left shoulder and ending with “*have mercy on me, the sinner*”, then joining the hands, one would bow and say “*Amen*”.

Many, after or before making the Sign of the Cross, kiss their thumb as if they were kissing the Cross.

Finally, we may intone these two prayers:

*“God saves me,
Jesus enlightens me,
The Holy Spirit is my life,
Hence I fear nothing.”*

(Teaching how to pray by our Lady Mary of Soufanieh,
Ever Virgin, in her fourth apparition 31/2/1983 09:30 pm)

*The Father is my Hope,
The Son is my Refuge,
The Holy Spirit is my Protector,
O all Holy Trinity, Glory to Thee”*

(The prayer of the Greek Orthodox St Ioannikios (ca 846 A.D.)

PERTINENT TESTIMONIALS

Some attributes the use of the larger cross to Pope Leo IV instructions in the middle of the 9th century, when he wrote: “*Sign the chalice and the host with a right cross and not with circles or with a varying of the fingers, but with two fingers stretched out and the thumb hidden within them, by which the Trinity is symbolized. Take heed to make this sign rightly, for otherwise you can bless nothing.*”

John Chrysostom wrote: “*Wherever the fiends see the sign of the cross, they fly away, dreading it as a staff that they are beaten withal. And in this blessing you begin with your hand at the head downward, and then to the left side and believe that our Lord Jesus Christ came down from the head,*

that is from the Father into earth by his holy Incarnation, and from the earth into the left side, that is hell, by his bitter Passion, and from thence into his Father's right side by his glorious Ascension.”

St. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem (A.D. 386) wrote: “Let us, therefore, not be ashamed of the Cross of Christ; but though another hide it, do you openly seal it upon your forehead, that the devils may behold the royal sign and flee trembling far away. Make then this sign at eating and drinking, at sitting, at lying down, at rising up, at speaking, at walking: in a word, at every act.”

St. John of Damascus said: “This was given to us as a sign on our forehead, just as the circumcision was given to Israel: for by it we believers are separated and distinguished from unbelievers.”

St. Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 35-107) was a disciple of the Apostle John. It is commonly accepted that St. Ignatius established the practice as a formal accompaniment to devotions, and he wrote: “The Sign of the Cross is the trophy raised against the power of the prince of this world (Satan): When he sees it, he is afraid: when he even hears of it, he is filled with terror.”

SUMMARY

These are just few interpretations and connotations given in general by the different churches to the gestures, moves and parts of the body in tracing the Sign of the Cross:

PART I

Head/Forehead

It symbolizes the seat of **Thought** and **Intentions**: the Originator Creator, the Oneness and Uniqueness of the Trinity, the Father as the Eternal Mind, the Heavens, the Powers, the Throne, the Redemption and the Sanctification, as well as Jesus being the Head of his body the Church, the Alpha and the Omega ... “The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become **the head** of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?” (Matt 21:42; Psa 118:22-23).

Sternum (Breast/Abdomen)

It symbolizes the seat of **Emotions** and **Desires**: Birth, Rebirth, Regeneration, life, the Earth, the World, and by extension Mary's Womb, Incarnation, Jesus' Coming to Earth ... “And the **breasts** and the **right shoulder** Aaron waved for a wave offering before the Lord” (Lev 9:21).

Right Shoulder

It symbolizes the seat of unleashed **Power**, the **Highest** and **Absolute Authority**: Jesus' **Ascension** and sitting at the **right hand** of the **Father**, the **sending** of the **Holy Spirit**. Some claim it is the seat of the guardian angel: “And he shall set the **sheep on his right hand**, but the **goats on the left**” (Matt 25:33)... “**The Ram...the right shoulder**: for it is a ram of consecration” (Exo 29:22)... “And the **right shoulder** shall you give unto the priest for a heave offering of the sacrifices of your peace offerings” (Lev 7:32)...

Left Shoulder

It symbolizes the seat of **re-Birth** and **Salvation**, passing from **Death** to **Life**, and **Final Judgment**, “So many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death. That like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father; even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4). Some claim it is the seat of the devil.

Shoulder succession

It symbolizes also Jesus' **coming** from Heaven and **returning** to Heaven as well as in **honor** of the **Holy Spirit**. Some Orthodox Churches claim that since Jesus is equal to the Father and sits at his right hand, thus touching the right shoulder first in honor of the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father only is more appropriate.

PART II

With short strokes of crosses on:

- **Forehead = Mind, Thoughts, Intentions** to pledge

Our belief in the Good News of the Gospels, meditating on God's words,

- **Lips/Mouth = Speech, Utterance** to pledge

Our eagerness to preach the Gospels with our mouths, Christian life and love,

- **Chest/Heart = Emotions, Desires** to pledge

To love, treasure and obey the words of God etched in our hearts.

PART III

And these are the purposed arrangements and indications given in general by the different churches to the symbols' positioning and forming of the *FINGERS* and the *PALM*:

1- ***Holding the three fingers represent the Greek Initials for Jesus:***

The common abbreviation IC X C (*Iesous Christos Soter*),
The *forefinger* representing the "I" (Iesous),
The *middle finger* crossed with the **thumb** standing for the "X" (Christos),
And the *bent middle finger* serves to suggest the "C" (Soter/Savior).

2- Some Orthodox Churches believe that:

The thumb, index and middle finger symbolize the Trinity sharing one **essence**,
The other two pressed fingers representing the *Dual Natures/Wills of Christ*,
The ring and little fingers also symbolize *Adam* and *Eve* kneeling in front of the Trinity.

3- ***With large trajectory sign***

The *three* extended fingers symbolize the *Trinity* in the *Heavens*
The *two* folded fingers against the *palm* stand for the *Two Natures* and *Wills of Christ*.
The *palm* of the hand implies *Mary's womb*, *Jesus' incarnation* and his *coming to Earth*.
Left Shoulder represents the *Holy Spirit* being equal in essence with the *Father* and the *Son*.
Right Shoulder confirms the sitting of Jesus at the right hand of the Father and of being the one and *only judge* at Judgment Day.

PART IV

In summary:

- 1- With *One Finger* for declaring the *Unity* and *Oneness* of the Triune God.
- 2- With *Two Fingers* for acknowledging the *Two Natures/Wills* of Christ.
- 3- With *Three Fingers* in honor of the *Trinity*.
- 4- With Five Fingers to honor the Blessed *Five Wounds* of Christ.
- 5- The *Right Hand* on the forehead: shows *our belief in the Cross*,
- 6- On the *Breast*: shows *our love of the Cross*,
- 7- And the *Shoulders*: shows *our readiness to bear the Cross*.
- 8- The *Joined hands* or *bowing*: shows our *witnessing*, *acknowledging* and *signing* what we are *professing*.

Moreover, in the light of the above:

- Raising the fingers on the forehead means our admission that God is in the heavens asking him to enlighten our minds and our perspectives,
- By lowering the hand to the chest symbolizes our confession came down from heaven and became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary, asking him to create in us a pure and immaculate heart,
- Extending our hand to the shoulder symbolizes:
 - a- He ascended to heaven from where he came and sat at the right hand of the Father,
 - b- At the Final Judgment in its glory and sovereignty, he will put the faithful servants to his right to enjoy his company forever and the wicked to his left to rot in eternal agony away from him and his father. And asking him, as he saved us by his Cross, which we draw upon ourselves, to embrace us with his arm and give his angels charge to protect us from all evil, to do his will and to love him for his glory according to his command.
 - c- Then we remember the Holy Spirit that Christ promised to send after his ascension, so he can console us, strengthen us, guide us and confirm our faith in Christ to love and serve.
 - d- We conclude with "Amen" to confirm what we think and what we say is to express our faith in sincerity and truth; and the word "Amen" is a testimony that Christ is the Lord and as if affixing our signatures on what we proclaimed.

PART V

Now, let us see what the secular world label the main components of a hand, which is a tool of good and evil, tool of peace and war (fighting or shaking hand), or such as in "*lend a hand*" (help) and "*strike with the hand*" (slap, smack, bang).

PALM = the lines being the road map of human life, caress, possession, crater, womb,

THUMB = Energy, priority, dexterity, independence, hope as in green thumb, encouragement, rule of thumb, approval.

INDEX = the second finger, the forefinger, the trigger, the pointer, the caller, the grabber of attention, the teaser, the accuser, the power and threat waver, the cleaner.

MIDDLE = the chaser of evil eye, the insulter, the impudent finger, the obscene, the reader between the lines,

RING finger = the seat of the heart, the directly connected to the heart by a vein, the medicinal finger, the magical power finger, the commitment finger,

LITTLE finger = the Pinky (from Dutch Pink=little finger), the fifth finger, the useless, the cleaner, the baby finger, the binding swearing finger, the maker of bets.

ANECDOTES

Here below are two opinions about the word/adjective “**Right**” and “**Double-Cross**”

“**Right**, as a substantive (my right, his right), designates the object of justice. When a person declares he has a right to a thing, he means he has a kind of dominion over such thing, which others are obliged to recognize. Right may therefore be defined as a moral or legal authority to possess, claim, and use a thing as one's own apart of physical superiority or pre-eminence.”

“The English-language expression or catchphrase “**Double-cross**” has led to some fake etymology: the fact that the sign is made in one direction in the Western rite, and the other in the Eastern rites, leads to its sometimes informal use for two people to identify themselves and others as being from the West or East. There was a period in the middle Ages when some Venetian merchants and others would cross themselves in the Western fashion when meeting with Westerners, and in the Eastern fashion when meeting with Easterners. This duplicity supposedly led to the coining of the phrase “**Double crosser**” to mean someone who professes to be aligned with one party, but in reality is aligned with an opposing party or with no party.

The actual origin of the expression “**double-cross**” which dates in English from only 1834 has to do with “fixing” a horse-race in a pre-arranged swindle that is almost certainly unconnected with the Sign of the Cross.”



In conclusion, let us repeat with St. Paul: “**I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me**” (Gal 2:20).



Arm yourself
with the one and only
Sign Of
Truth - Salvation - Pride - and Victory