

**#Carving for the Saints**  
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Since 1980, I have created sculpture for the major denominations of the Christian Church: Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant. My most pressing problem has been to find visual metaphors suitable to the use of theologically similar but iconically diverse religious traditions.

The more I think about the relation between my recent work and the topic "the Authority of Religion," the more I realize that my notion of religion as authority has differed in character depending on which denomination I worked for. So I will not offer generalizations or definitions about religious authority and the art of sculpture. As an artist, and in deference to the rigors of true scholarship, I take refuge from definitions and typologies in the faith that artists should create problems for scholars to solve.

Authority that the artist must respond to takes on many guises within a religion. The church building and its architect, the ecclesiastical hierarchy and clergy, and the lay community each present challenges to the artists' imagination. Each of these denominations has a long history of using art in and as its rituals. Because temple architecture represents theology in crystalline form, church buildings manifestly represent the authority of religion as the spatial context to which sculpture must respond. In each case, the architectural settings (and in two cases the architects) were major factors in shaping my thinking about appropriate sculptural form. Each denomination has a storied legacy of theological thought and ritual practice entrusted to the care of its clergy. The architects and I always worked in consultation with each other and the clergy. I carved certain images at the strong suggestion or even direct instruction of a priest or bishop. Each denomination ultimately relies on its community for the moral and financial support to buy art, and all of my work took place within a continuing dialogue with donors or committees in charge of hiring artists.

When I decided to work for these churches, to step out of my role as studio and exhibiting artist, I knew that I would labor within profound confines of site, style, and subject. History produced these limits both in the sense that a particular theology and artistic style evolved in the course of time and in the sense that each religion grounds itself on a notion of the beginnings and nature of time. Cosmological models influence art and vice versa. For example, Byzantine Orthodox style rests on a God-centered

Ptolemaic cosmology, and the creators of Byzantine Orthodox images have spent centuries refining a formal language of other worldly order and grace. Renaissance Italian Catholic art began displacing the Ptolemaic cosmology with the Copernican world view by embracing the new artistic device of linear perspective.

I took on the work for four reasons. First, to test whether I could find power in a two thousand year tradition of iconography and infuse it with my vision. Second, to test my abilities as a craftsman against historical standards. Third, I wanted to collaborate with the architects, clergy, and laity. Fourth, I wanted to practice making images of an unmistakably spiritual purpose.

I first went to work for St. Clement Ohridski Eastern Orthodox Church in Dearborn, Michigan as a subcontractor to Mr. Suren Pilafian, architect, who had designed a monumental new Iconostas for St. Clement Ohridski. Domes, the exterior hallmark of Orthodox churches, symbolize the heavenly home of the faithful. The interior hallmark, the Iconostas, an image laden partition linking the congregation to the altar, symbolizes the idea of Theosis, movement from mortality towards divinity. Mr. Pilafian's program called for one hundred forty square feet of woodcarving on the Iconostas as well as seven pieces of carved ecclesiastical furniture "recognizably Macedonian in character prior to the Twentieth Century." A very specific command from the past one lent even more authority by the architect's absolute creative control over the project.

But even Mr. Pilafian had to answer to authority. He was acting under instructions from the church's Interior Decoration Committee that he follow Old Country tradition and hire a local woodcarver. I carved a sample based on the scant information available on Macedonian woodcarving in the University of Michigan libraries in 1980. When I presented it to Mr. Pilafian, he said, "I like the carving. The design is very active; the forms are beautiful, and I think that the scale will work in the large space. But tell me, Michael, what is Macedonian about this carving." Sensing the commission slipping through my fingers, with mingled resignation and quiet desperation, I replied, "Mr. Pilafian, the only thing that I am sure is Macedonian about this carving is that my grandmother was born there." It turned out that she emigrated to America from the same town, Bitola, as the father of the church's Interior Decoration Committee's Chairman. Whether this geographical coincidence superseded my artistic ability in gaining the commission remains a question I have never asked.

So, in April, 1983, my wife, Karen, and I went to Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Romania to find out as much as we could about the character of Macedonian carving. Before proceeding to that, however, let me share some not so minor treasures of architecture and painting we found along the way. I will discuss three churches, culled from over a dozen, to illustrate not just their high quality of artistic achievement but the elastic contours of the Byzantine style, which encouraged my later innovations.

On Mount Vodno, just above Skopje, Yugoslavia stands the tiny monastery church built and dedicated to Sveti Pantelemon in 1164. The form of the building shows a classical Byzantine cross in square plan with a dome rising over the crossing and a narthex added to the west. It inaugurates a Slavic innovation, the four smaller corner domes. The stout, squat proportions and the heavy arches lend a homely air to the building, but the walls have survived two major earthquakes since they rose, one in 1555 and another in 1963. They have preserved frescoes whose dramatic compositions and emotional expressions prefigure the Proto-Renaissance images of Cimabue, Duccio, and Giotto.

The monastery of Sopocani has stood since 1255 in the mountains above Novi Pazar along the Morava River. Italian architects designed its basilica form and the table corbel decoration in the masonry below the eaves. The frescoes of Sopocani, which survived four centuries open to the elements before the roof was repaired, evidence in their full bodied volumes a pre-Renaissance era of classicizing in Byzantine art.

The church of the Holy Virgin at Studenica Monastery, built in 1183-91, reveals in the competing shapes of its walls, pediments, domes, and sculptures a high volume argument between eastern and western European cultures that to this day rages through the land of the south Slavs. The patron of this church, Stefan Nemanya, first Emperor of Serbia, hired Constantinople's best painters to execute the frescoes. They represent the quintessence of Byzantine art: stylized, reserved, austere spirituality. Using travel journals written in the Nineteen-Fifties by the Englishman, Cecil Stewart, we planned our itinerary to see these artistic treasures, and also to include buildings which house the best of Macedonian woodcarving.

In Skopje, we found the tiny church, Sveti Spas, Holy Savior. The Ottoman Turks forbade any Christian structure to exceed one story, not much room for the grand treatment that Orthodox Christians like to give to the interiors of their temples. So, in crafty defiance of their oppressor, the people of Skopje built a single story exterior, then

excavated within the completed walls a sanctuary deep enough to erect a two story Icon screen, thus lending new meaning to the term, "cultural substratum." A three man team from the nearby village of Garje, Makaria Fukovich and the Phillipovich Brothers, Petre and Marko, designed and supervised the creation of all this work. With an unknown number of apprentices and assistants, they spent ten years from 1814-24 cutting, fitting, and carving the walnut trees of the Vardar valley into the Iconostas, pulpit, and furniture of Sveti Spas.

The simple subject matter, the stories of the gospels, the lives of the saints, and the feasts of the church are born by the rich, exuberant, and ornate style, which deploys figures, flowers, and birds in three interweaving layers of carving. An analogy to folk music suggests itself because the rhythms and textures, so rich and compelling almost become audible. If the best folk musicians play the most notes the clearest and fastest, then the best folk carvers fashion with the fewest cuts the face of a saint, the flight of a bird, or the scroll of a vine. Literally hundreds of deftly carved figures, four to five inches tall, act out the stories of the Saints painted in the Icons. Salome dancing her dance of veils typifies the expressiveness of the carving and the penchant of Macedonian artisans to dress Biblical villains in Albanian costume. In place of a signature, the craftsmen carved likenesses of themselves at work.

This signature style of Macedonia bears the name, Debarski, after the town, Debar, which nestles above the westernmost valley of Macedonia overlooking Albania. There, the Monastery of Sveti Jovan Bigorski hired Makaria Fukovich to carve its Iconostas. He spent another decade fashioning work on an even larger scale than that of Sveti Spas. Joking aside, the Byzantine stylization at the heart of the Debarski style survived as a substratum, because the Ottoman Empire insulated the region from the Renaissance and subsequent western European stylistic developments.

We found the oldest datable carving in the Iconostas at the Monastery Church of Sveti Naum, built on the southern shore of Lake Ohrid in the ninth century by Sv. Naum. He, along with Sv. Clement studied under Svs. Cyril and Methodi and became among the first generation of priests and monks to preach Christianity to the Slavs. The carving dates from the eighteenth century. While not as complex in depth as the subsequent Debarski style, it nonetheless richly portrays the traditional motifs of the Slavs, an exuberance of birds, vines, and animals celebrating creation. In particular, the motif of the dragon or serpent chained to the service of the cross struck me and would incubate

nearly nine years before I used it at St. Clement. The Icons at Sv. Naum represent nothing less than masterpieces of the Slavic style. The artist's name is lost to us, and the date is uncertain, but the images show a skilled hand and vivid imagination. The finer proportions and agitated contours differentiate these from Greek Icons.

We also met two of the finest woodcarvers still working in 1983. In the town of Ohrid, Yugoslavia, the namesake of the very St. Clement Ohridski who employed me in Dearborn, Michigan, not a hundred yards from the shore of Lake Ohrid, we found the home and studio of Mr. Dimitri Jovanski. Carvings as rich and as strong as his homemade wine filled his modest living room. We chatted while sitting on hand carved chairs around a hand carved table. We had discovered examples of his work by accident. They hung on the lobby walls of our otherwise nondescript tourist hotel. He had carved Marshall Tito's desk, but the Yugoslav government forbade him to carve for churches. In this regard, the ostensibly liberal communism of cold-war Yugoslavia proved intransigently intolerant.

In downtown Sophia, Bulgaria, we met Mr. Peter Kushlev. The freshly carved components of a new Iconostas cluttered his studio. This work belonged to a chip-carving style favored in northeastern Bulgaria. In contrast to Yugoslavia, the communist regime of pre-glastnost Bulgaria hired artists and craftsmen like Mr. Kushlev to renovate churches as "expressions of the National Spirit." Mr. Lazar Lazarov, the architect in charge of restoration, introduced us to Mr. Kushlev and served as our translator and guide to several other churches with interesting woodcarving, including a Debarski-style Iconostas in Pazardjik that may have been carved by the Phillipovich Brothers.

Mr. Kushlev demonstrated his ability to work in a half dozen regional styles, but he took particular pride in his mastery of the tri-layered complexities of the Debarski style. Both Mr. Kushlev and Mr. Jovanski welcomed me to their studios and shared all they could, time and language permitting, of their expertise. In these all too brief visits, I tried to learn by observation and osmosis as much as I could about how they organized their work space, detailed their shop drawings, blocked and roughed out work in progress, and finished completed work. During my only "apprenticeship" as a carver, I tried to absorb a sense of how their forms came out of their tools and to find my standard of craftsmanship.

Returning home, I treated my commission as a course of study. I had fifty-five bands and panels, ranging in size from three inches by twenty-four to thirty-four inches by twenty-eight to design. I used the thirty narrow bands to teach myself technique and to practice various regional styles. This sort of eclecticism dovetailed with Mr. Pilafian's overall plan. His design met the standard requirements of an Orthodox Iconostas and then explored new possibilities. He in fact had no choice in placing the Icons of Christ and John the Baptist in the first two places to the South of the Royal Doors at the central opening of the screen, and he had no choice in placing the Icons of The Theotokou and St. Clement in the first two spaces to the North. Tradition further dictated placing the Icon of the Last Supper above the Royal Doors.

Beyond these requirements, however, Mr. Pilafian broke with the fundamental hierarchy of traditional Iconostases, abandoning strict horizontal stratification in favor of a more diagonally interwoven composition. Furthermore, his instructions to me called for making no two panels alike, thus abandoning the strict left to right symmetry of past designs. Truthfully, I had some trouble adjusting to this idea. Apart from the additional task of inventing fifty-four designs instead of twenty-seven, I felt that the architecture of the Iconostas called for symmetry. Therefore, I always maintained an underlying symmetry of design to lend unity to corresponding panels, and I made the panels nearer the center ever more symmetrical. The parishioners grew to appreciate the novelty, challenge, and fascination of non-symmetrical balance.

Mr. Pilafian had two closely related goals. First, he wanted to make the overall experience one of awe, which to him meant creating on a grand scale and with visually dramatic contrasts of light and depth. Second, he broke with the security of the past compositional formulas, consciously adding harmonious strains of the modern to the ancient voices. Here lay the common ground on which the aging architect and the then still young sculptor could stand together: our confidence that history authorized us as artists to nudge tradition forward and outward. We both felt that no matter how monolithic Byzantine tradition might seem at first glance, upon entering it, we could find variety, feel vitality and add our individual voices to the choir.

As my work progressed, I gravitated toward a personal variation of the Debarski style. I felt that I owed it to all the Macedonian craftsmen, living and dead, to try it. By the time I came to carve the Royal Doors, Pulpit, and Bishop's Throne, I felt that I could have

worked along side any of them. And, in all modesty, I know that both in concept and technique my work in some ways exceeds theirs.

Mr. Pilafian and I designed the Royal Doors as a single plane of carving. Five Icons occupy their traditional hierarchy-- the four Evangelists in the body of the Doors, and the Annunciation in the surmounting cross-- but the Doors read as single expanse of wood, four and a half feet wide, seven feet tall and two and one half inches thick. A beveled overlap conceals the central opening, so that the two halves join into a seamless whole. Technically, such an expanse of wood lies beyond Old Country methods. Like good woodworkers everywhere, the Macedonian craftsmen designed their work taking into account the seasonal shrinking and swelling of wood. In Europe, we never saw single panels larger than two feet square. They built up large and complex items like Royal Doors, furniture, pulpits, and whole Iconostases from small panels fitted into larger frames, which allows all the components to shrink and to swell together without splitting. This technical limit fit perfectly with the Orthodox concept of hierarchical space, in which all images are neatly ordered within a static framework. But we capitalized on the availability of tropical woods like Mahogany, which do not shrink or swell very much, so that we could more easily conceive of a dramatic single plane to express a distinctly Twentieth Century concept of space as continuum.

With no supervision from the architect or the church, I conceived the symbolism of the Royal Doors around the metaphor of the cross as the tree of life growing at the center of the new Eden. The Doors represent a richly grown arbor of intertwining grape vines, lilies, roses, and oak leaves which carry on their boughs twenty-eight Christian symbols including the crown of martyrdom, the keys to heaven, the scale of judgment, the anchor of hope, and the banner of victory. A detailed examination of the symbols would take too much space for this essay, but in a gesture upholding Macedonian tradition, I signed the Doors by carving an image of my tools in the lower left corner of the arbor. As tradition dictates, the Doors are completely covered with gold leaf.

In the pulpit, we used another modern material, plywood, for the internal shell of the piece. It is forty-two inches in diameter and built of with fourteen plywood staves whose shrinkage is negligible. Around this stable core, I hung a curtain of carved walnut three feet high and nine feet wide. A twenty-seven square foot piece of wood concentric to an underlying form would have given nightmares to a woodworker a century and a half ago.

He might have solved it with tools and materials at hand, but he had no compelling concept of space to tempt him into it. It proved very difficult in 1989.

Except for the eagle at the pulpit and the cross on the Bishop's Throne, I received no instruction for the symbolic content of my carvings. Bishop Joseph required the pulpit to have an eagle at the lectern. I made it fly rather than perch as eagles usually do on pulpits. I carved hummingbirds in the pulpit, just because of their lively shape, but thereby unwittingly made this pulpit a New World pulpit, because hummingbirds do not exist east of the Atlantic or west of the Pacific. I carved four angels playing musical instruments to symbolize the four Evangelists, who usually have a privileged position on Orthodox pulpits.

The Bishop sits on the Bishop's Throne when he visits a parish, usually once a year on the name day of the Patron Saint. For the rest of the year, the Throne stands empty but in eternal readiness for its ultimate occupant. The Greek term for this preparedness is *etoimasia*. But most importantly, The Throne carries the Icon of Christ as Bishop who presides from the Throne throughout the year. Of the seven pieces of Liturgical Furniture, the Throne looks the most traditional, because it consists of carved elements framed by uncarved elements. The composition of the entire throne centers on the Icon: the carving on the back, the lions beneath its arms, the dragons supporting the cross at its apex are linked by carved rays emanating from the Icon. Visually reversing the actual, I subordinated the framing to the sculpture and the sculpture to the Icon. If all the forms develop centrifugally from the Icon, then the whole chair should read as the advancing wave fronts of that single event. I wanted to make a sculpted chair, not a chair with sculpture applied to it. Of all the work I have done for St. Clement, this and this alone follows from a text, a phrase in the closing prayer of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, "For all good gifts and all perfect gifts are from above and come down from you, the Father of Light."

A detailed account of symbolism is beyond the ken of this essay. Suffice it to say that Orthodox tradition considers painters as artists and carvers as craftsmen. The irony of this "high art" versus "low art" division leaves the carvers freer to turn for inspiration to nature and abstraction. Because the painters make images of mighty spiritual beings and sacred events, the church requires them strictly to adhere to prototypes. Mr. George Filipakis painted the Icons at St. Clement. Born in Crete, he became an apprentice in the Cretan School at age eleven. He undoubtedly underwent a program of training similar to

another young Cretan several centuries ago, Domenico Theotokopolous, El Greco. Unlike El Greco, Mr. Filipakis adheres to the ancient style.

The forms of authority at St. Thomas a Becket Roman Catholic Church remained the same as at St. Clement, the architect and his building, the clergy and its rituals, and the community and their sense of tradition. But the differences from the Orthodox in all three required rethinking my whole approach to imagery.

I think it fair to say that since the fifteenth century invention of perspective, the Roman Catholic church has proved more open to artistic experimentation than the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Catholics view this as a virtue, and the Orthodox as a vice. Once the Orthodox get a thing to their liking, they keep it. They haven't changed a word of their liturgy since at least the fourth century, when St. John Chrysostom wrote it down. They had settled on an architectural style by about the sixth century, and their Iconography has undergone only minor variations since then. Considering themselves the original firm, they see little need to change. Catholic art, on the other hand, not only served as a vehicle for stylistic and cosmological change in the early Italian Renaissance, but the Church in this century has welcomed the pioneering artistic efforts of Matisse, Corbusier, Richier and other certified modernists. Among the Catholics, I encountered a good deal more discussion about form and content.

The architect of St. Thomas a Becket, David Osler, solved the problem of accommodating a large congregation on a small budget by building a structure with industrial materials into a simple liturgical form. The pyramidal shape, virtually all roof carried on massive laminated beams, proved an economical way to enclose a large volume. However, it evoked a feeling of emptiness, scalelessness, and chill that he sought to overcome by the interior detailing. He set windows at ground level behind an eight foot tall oak curtain wall on the north, east, and south perimeters of the nave to bring warmth and a suitably mysterious light to the sanctuary. Mr. Osler wanted my sculpture to join in lending a sense of human scale, human texture, and human warmth to the big, cold building as well as to satisfy a liturgical necessity.

Catholic Church tradition calls for placing an image of the Patron Saint of the parish, in this case, St. Thomas a Becket, and an image of the Holy Virgin in the sanctuary for the purpose of veneration. The oak curtain wall has two semi-circular niches to accommodate the images located opposite one another near the western ends of the

northern and southern wings. The architect and community had decided to use wood sculpture. Mr. Osler felt that the use of wood alone would lend a quality of warmth and intimacy. He asked me to look for old wood, weathered and cracked material that already had its own history and character. Near Manchester, Michigan, I found red oak beams from a hundred twenty year old barn recently flattened by a tornado.

Although Thomas a Becket belonged to a Norman family that had attained position in English society through their allegiance to William the Conqueror, I decided to emulate the understated style of pre-Conquest British sculpture. This allowed me to keep the carving budget within reason, summarize the anatomy, concentrate on the hands and faces, and integrate the plain forms into the simple geometry of the curtain wall.

I created the character of Becket virtually from scratch. Like a good Orthodox iconographer, I looked for prototypes, and, indeed, he appears rather nondescriptly in various stained glass and parchment images. From these I learned that he should be dressed in the mitre and chasuble of a bishop. I gave him the stern face of a warrior and the praying hands of a priest. This represents the two contradictory lives that he led, before and after his ordination, and the dilemma that ultimately brought about his martyrdom.

The frontal, open palm gesture of St. Mary represents a commonplace of Catholic art. But this Mary shows an unusual face. She wears no covering on her head, as she had in my original sketch model, and as she has in countless images throughout history. Instead, luxuriant hair falls to her shoulders. This somewhat non-traditional rendition grew out of discussions among myself, the lay committee in charge of the interior, and especially the priest, Father Pocari. He enjoined us all to conceive of St. Mary as human, to make her common, simple, plain, and strong, and, therefore to dispense with religious regalia, uncover her head, and let her womanhood radiate.

The architect had planned to incorporate the Stations of the Cross in a traditional European manner, engraving at four to five yard intervals along the curtain wall the roman numerals one through fourteen. Could I carve them? Certainly. This satisfied him and the Priest, but not the laity. They wanted imagery in the Stations to educate their children. The numerals, while traditional and concise, elegant and succinct, seemed too abstract, too far removed from experience. Searching for a visual form not only realistic but vivid in the minds of children in the last quarter of the twentieth century, I turned to

the paradigms of television images: hand-held mini-cams, zoom lenses, on-the-spot news documentaries. I carried on the theme of the statues of Becket and St. Mary by concentrating on hands and faces. I employed a realism as photographic as possible within the limits of quarter inch deep relief carved in one foot square panels-- small screen TV. I dramatically changed the point of view from panel to panel, enhancing the sense of witnessing the events of Good Friday from within the jostling crowd.

After showing them one sample, the priest and parishioners granted me authority to select the particular scenes. In order to design the Stations of the Cross one must consult the Synoptic Gospels and Church tradition. The Gospels recount nine of the fourteen episodes, some cursorily, others in great detail. Five are traditional, and I researched them in the history of art from Durer to Matisse.

The Eleventh Station is richest in my memory because it developed out of conversations with Dr. Percival Price, the man who brought the carillons to Burton Tower on the campus of the University of Michigan. As a young post-graduate, Dr. Price traveled to the Holy Land to research early Christian bells. He had secured an audience with the Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria. Wishing to use his time well, Dr. Price asked His Holiness where one could find the earliest Christian bell. The Archbishop replied that the first bell of Christianity was a hammer striking a nail. I tried to carve the verb, the striking, with the hammer incidental, and the nail out of the scene.

I will discuss one more piece of work because it grew out of the earlier work. The First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan held a competition to find imagery suitable for the narthex of their building. The program stipulated two requirements. First, it called for an image to add Christian thought and symbolism to the blank wall of the lobby. Second, it should harmonize with the existing architecture. Because the financing came from a memorial donation, two additional requirements arose. The image must serve as a memorial, and the donors would participate in the selection.

Approaching the competition, I heeded only the requirement to harmonize with the architecture because I had already chosen an image to submit, and I had complete confidence that it met the entire program. Of all my work at St. Clement and St. Thomas, the starburst holds a special place in my mind. It possesses a quality of universality that I strive for in my nonsectarian work. I cannot prove it, but I suspect that woodworkers throughout south-central Europe had fashioned similar images long before Christian

churches existed to enshrine them. The symbol of the sun as fire and light has primordial roots. I first saw them hanging in the doorways of the Iconostas in Pazardjik, Bulgaria, their makers unknown.

I grafted this archaic image to the Celtic Cross, sized it to fit the narthex wall, and fashioned it of the Church's dominant wood, oak. In this image, the primary symbol of the faith stands center-most and foremost, all other forms radiating from it, all forms echoing upon it. For me, it illuminates a text whose author I do not know, "The last day of Revelation will read what the first day of Genesis has writ."

Each of these churches consecrated the images according to their tradition. The Presbyterian church used a prayer recited in unison by the entire congregation. In the Catholic church, Father Pocari asked that I install the Stations of the Cross during a special recitation of Lenten prayers on Good Friday, 1982 led by Brother Robert of the Dominican Order. The sanctuary sculptures received blessing from Cardinal Szoka during the consecration of the entire church. At St. Clement, Bishop Joseph of New York consecrated the Iconostas by anointing it with holy water and oil on St. Clement's Day, 1989. On St. Clement's Day, 1991, Bishop Joseph anointed with holy water the Bishop's throne, the donor family, and the woodcarver.

All of the imagery that we have seen from my hand is made of wood. Wood comes from trees, the royalty of the plant kingdom. It seems that even as we near the second millennium, people will worship among trees. The fine irony of carving rose petals and oak leaves in wood is not lost on me. Fashioning wood into objects of contemplation, one can hardly avoid contemplating the nature of wood and the claim that it stakes on our imagination even before it we transform it into imagery. Our human relationship to trees is symbiotic at many levels. We trade the trees carbon dioxide for oxygen. We cultivate trees for their fruits and nuts, saps and medicines, and their sheer ornamental beauty. What have we not made from their wood? Tools, weapons, utensils, musical instruments, clipper ships, canoes, paper, cloth, shoes, furniture, dwellings, temples, and sculpture. We identify with trees, with their trunks, limbs, and crowns as living beings. The Sequoia are the largest forms of life on the dry land, and the Joshua the oldest on the surface of the planet. In the past we have identified with them as spiritual entities. Holders of the knowledge of trees were the Druids. We emulate their attributes: durability and trust, treaty and truth are but a few of the words that we derive from *deru*,

the ancient Indo-European word for tree. It is no wonder, then, that we entreat our gods from among them, living exemplars of the best qualities of life.