

In my opinion the cross as a symbol explains the mystery of the divinity as diversity in the unity far better than any other. However, either for tradition or for mental laziness, it has always been indissolubly connected to Christianity. On the contrary, the cross is a very old symbol; it was discovered among archaeological finds of the Neolithic age. We can also mention the Egyptian ankh, the Tibetan swastika and the Aztec cross of Tlaloc, all prior to the Christian era. The same symbol, then, can be found in different times and socio-cultural contexts with analogous or sometimes identical meanings. This fact stirs up deep emotions and invites us not to identify the cross with Christianity; the limits of any particular religion, whatever its dignity, appear to be cramped before the Infinite.

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Most commonly, the cross symbolizes the sun. In ancient times the sun was considered as a divinity because it was associated to the idea of life. Furthermore, the Egyptian ankh was called so because the relevant hieroglyph means life. In some Tibetan drawings the arms of the swastika are superimposed to symbolize the coitus of a man and a woman, which is the starting moment of human life. (fig. 1)

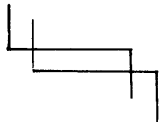


Figure 1

The sketch depicting two people of different genders copulating, thus creating a new life, makes us think over another meaning of the cross, i.e. the dialectics of the opposites: male/female, life/death, rationality/intuition and so on. These opposites are the arms of the cross that, being absorbed in one context, namely the cross itself, don't appear antithetical anymore, but rather complementary.

We can gather, therefore, that every phenomenon we perceive is the sensible manifestation of another reality that cannot be perceived through our senses. To exist, in its etymology – Latin: *ex stare* – indicates a being that is dependent on a different Principle from which it has been emanated. As a consequence hereof, all phenomena that our senses perceive as different only seem so, because they stem from the unique principle to which they will eventually converge, reassembling themselves in full harmony.

I quote from the VI chapter of Bhagavad-Gita:

A true yogi observes Me in all beings, and also sees every being in Me. Indeed, the self-realized man sees Me everywhere. For one who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, I am never lost, nor is he ever lost to Me. The yogi who knows that I and the Supersoul within all creatures are one worships Me and remains always in Me in all circumstances.

The two arms of the cross can also be considered as four half-lines which stem from the same point, thus dividing the plan in four equal parts. No initiate may ignore the significant meaning of the number 4. According to the Pre-Socratics four elements composed our world: earth, air, water and fire and as many were the parts of a man: body, mind, soul and spirit, each respectively corresponding to one element.

Four are the journeys taken by the candidate; the first is outside the Temple, in the Cabinet of Reflections and the other three inside, where he receives purification through the symbolic tests of water, air and fire.

These four elements have their own separate features and differ from each other; still they are all harmoniously coordinated with each other. The Pythagoreans then guessed a fifth element, which was called “olko’s”, prop, which was considered the sustaining factor of the universe due to its harmonizing activity. The movement of the planets, the alternate forthcoming of seasons and the development of the four ages in man, in other words the perennial cycle of life depended on this factor. This concept is symbolized by the circumference, a geometric figure with no end and no beginning. Let me remind you that Christian iconography meaningfully delivers the picture of Jesus with Alpha and Omega, the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet, placed by his sides,. (fig.2)

The rays are the four elements of the circumference; the center, which is also the central point of the cross, is the point where the beams spring from but also where they return to. It therefore symbolizes the Principle from which everything starts and to which everything returns.

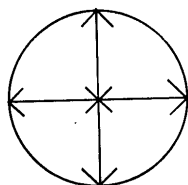


Figure 2

Man’s task is to get out from the circle and reach the center, where, in communion with the Principle, he will wisely live his earthly life, far away from passion.

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To achieve this goal, man must let his “talents” yield. Obviously the result will be different from one man to another, because of several interior and exterior conditionings that they undergo.

So, if we consider the intersection of the lines as a symbol of human possibilities, we will have segments of different length which are symbols of different goals that have been achieved. (fig.3)

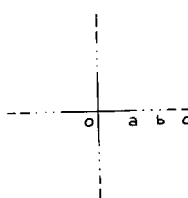


Figura 3

Nevertheless, in any case the cross is always the same, or rather, the same cross is depicted in three different manners, hence a further consideration: the variety of forms is set in accordance with a hierarchical principle which, on one hand, does not affect the substantial equality of the structure and on the other hand exalts the diversity of its functions.

Virtue and knowledge are the tools which let man reach the final goal. These tools, in my opinion, are the vertical and the horizontal arms of the cross, or if we prefer to borrow from Islamic esotericism, “amplitude” and “exaltation”.

However, the cross also contains a warning: virtue and knowledge must be balanced if we wish to keep harmony between human image and conscience. Harmony is a cosmic law, the crossing point between the Being and the Becoming, between the immutable entity, *natura naturans*, which man knows only through intuition, and the phenomenal realm which is perceived by the senses, *natura naturata*. In the opinion of Epicarmus, the visible harmony refers to another harmony, which is as much concealed as real.

“*Armonie afanés, du bist Gott*”, Oh secret harmony, you are God: so Diels commented upon the verses of the Greek poet.

Therefore, on one hand it is surely reprehensible to create a religion of reason (fig. 4)



Figura 4

on the other hand it is equally wrong to turn to mysticism, with no care for the actual problems of every day life (fig. 5)



Figura 5

Est modus in rebus, Horace wrote, there must be equilibrium in every aspect of human life.

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To achieve his aims the initiate must abandon his passions and overcome his prejudices, in other words he must get rid of the “metals” that tie him to materiality, thus hindering him from ascending to higher goals. He must “die” because only by doing so he will be able to be reborn to a different and better life.

Let us remember that the cross was the alchemic hieroglyph of the crucible, in late Latin called *crucibulum*, such a word stemming from *crux*, cross. In the crucible materials are transformed by fire into new ones.

Death, in its initiatory meaning, marks the time of rejection of materiality and ephemerality; this is an essential moment in the achievement of true Life.

This process can be easily read in the cross if we imagine its arms pointing to four different directions, corresponding to the cardinal points and fixed by the movement of the radius (fig. 6):

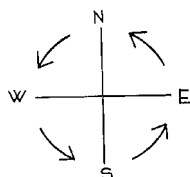


Figura 6

North is the starting point; it symbolizes the biologic life, which is typical of the superficial and selfish man.

West is the moment of humiliation, fall and also death. It often happens that a man who is seeking success stumbles and falls. He will then feel humiliated and mortified, he will consider himself a failure and near to death; he will probably think of death as an escape.

Let us reflect on the assonance between *occasus*, sunset, and *occidere*, to die.

At this point, man is alone; he reviews his life, what he has been and what he has done. He goes through a crisis and he judges himself – the Greek verb “krino” means to judge – he meditates on what he has been and doesn’t want to be any more. This stage of reflection is symbolized by South, which shows the descent to Infers. As Bro. Guenon said, it is the recollection of the lower states of conscience; we have all gone through this when, alone in the Cabinet of Reflection, we have thought about the invitation to allegorically visit the dark recesses of earth.

The next position, East, symbolizes the process of gestation of the “new” man who is going to see the Light.

Sure, the enterprise is neither easy nor fast. To this purpose it is useful to remember the words that Goethe put in the mouth of Mephistopheles, who was enjoying the sight of Faust tormenting himself in the search of something unachievable:

“Even if now he serves me in a confused tremor, I will *soon* lead him to clarity.”

The italics is mine because I want to emphasize that along the initiatory path man proceeds by degrees; degree means step and this gives the idea of the difficulty that man faces during the way towards perfection.

And here is, finally, resurrection. We must not be astonished if the departure point is the same – meaningfully, I’d add – as the arrival point; this is not an accidental coincidence. The spirit - Tommaso Campanella said - proceeds from the Infinite and once the latter has been unveiled, it destroys itself, losing its own individuality and becoming Infinite itself.

From the Word that was made flesh, therefore, to the flesh that is made Word: the cycle has been closed, the adventure of man is finished.