

# The Sign of the Cross

by Mark Stavish, M.A.

Gestures and symbols have always played a major part in the Western Mystery traditions. Yet, of all symbols, the cross has been the most prominent and influential in guiding western mystics towards Cosmic consciousness.

While seen as almost an exclusively Christian symbol, the cross has existed since the dawn of the mysteries. The Egyptian tau and ankh, the Cross of Christ's Passion, the Rosy Cross of the medieval and Renaissance alchemists, to the post-Vatican Two cross of the Resurrected Savior, all are historical variations of the same symbol that has lead a large part of humanity on its path to God.

## History of the Cross

Generally, the cross is seen as the linking of an upright line with a horizontal line, or the active (I) with the passive, or receptive (-). When these two forces are combined, we have the creation of a third force, idea, or entity. While definite early sexual symbolism is present, it is on the psychological and spiritual levels that the cross is most fully explored. The Egyptian ankh, or looped cross, is said to be an example of this early sexual (i.e. creative) symbolism; however, most of its later uses are as a sign of life force and divine power in a complete sense.

Jung suggests that the cross has its origins in humanities discovery of fire, and as such, is in reality a fire symbol derived from primitive man's rubbing of two sticks together in order to start a fire for warmth, protection, and the creation of tools. It is interesting to note, that words signifying cross, such as krois, krouz, kreuz, crux, cruz, or croaz, possess etymological similarities with words signifying fire. The roots ak, ur, or os, all signify cosmic light or fire.

The earliest crosses were simply marked as (T) or (X). Later variations added the additional arm to the top to form a (t or +). The equal armed cross (+) was used to represent the four cardinal directions, elements, colors of mankind (Hopi lore), as well as the Four Heavens of Zoroaster and its later variation in Jewish Qabbalah. When circled it became the four seasons, stages of life, and all of the associations of life, death, and re-birth.

Plato in *Timaeus* tells how the Demiurge reunited the broken parts of the fragmented 'World Soul' through two sutures shaped like, what we call, the Saint Andrew's Cross (X). The Egyptian ankh, or looped cross, has for many, been the symbol of humanity's resurrection, in that it shows the initiate greeting the day with arms outstretched and head held high. One theosophical writer calls this posture the "Madonna Posture" as if we are attempting to embrace all of creation. She further states that it is also good for the thymus gland/heart area, in that it creates a feeling of openness and compassion, right where the vertical and horizontal shafts meet.

During the Middle Ages the cross became chiefly associated with the crucifixion of Christ. As a result, the cross in an upright manner (+) became the symbol of Divine Power and Presence, the defeat of death and ignorance. By logic, the inverted cross, then became the symbol of blasphemy, demonic power, or the rejection of Christ's sacrifice. Yet this was a strictly historical interpretation at that time, for Saint Peter requested crucifixion in this manner, inverted, as he felt he was not good enough to hang the same way as did Jesus. Earlier, and later, mystical doctrines use the various forms of the cross to signify different flows of Cosmic force, potential, and rhythm.

In England the cross was associated with the Yew tree, often seen growing in churchyards. Christ in medieval songs and stories is said to have been 'hung on a tree' just like the Norse god Odin. Christian mystics would later change this to the "Tree of Life" of medieval Jewish mysticism, or Qabalah.

### Use of the Cross

By using the sign of the cross in a conscious manner, we can create within ourselves a condition that is supportive of mystical experiences and expanded awareness. We in fact, make ourselves, open and willing channels for Cosmic Wisdom, Universal Love, and Creative Power to manifest in our lives and the world. The Christian mystics called this the 'axis mundi' or World Axis — the joining of heaven and earth.

In his work, *The Nature and Use of Ritual*, Roche de Coppens quotes a masonic-rosicrucian document in which 'Bishop Theodotus' states:

"When we say 'In the Name of the Father' and place our fingers on the forehead, we actually point to an important organ in our spiritual body just below the space where God dwells in us 'on high'. The vibrations set up in motion by our loving thought about our heavenly Father activates the Divine Essence of the 'Crown' which pours into our Heart center as a veritable though unseen Glory (Shaft of White Light). This activation of the 'Crown' itself is described by St. Peter: 'Ye shall receive a Crown of Glory'. When we say: 'And of the Son' and place our fingers on our heart, we again actually point to a space in our spiritual body where the Divine Light, in the words of the Prophet Isaiah poured upon us from 'on high', is activating another spiritual organ suffusing us with the Divine Love of the Son. And when we say: 'And of the Holy Spirit', touching our right and left breast respectively, we activate these spiritual sensoria within us which manifest as the creative and vitalizing power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Finally, when we say: 'Amen' and join our hands together, mentally affirming the presence of the Triune God **within us**, we actually close the spiritual currents within the periphery of our spiritual body in order to maintain this awakening to spiritual awareness as long as possible." (S.R.I.A. Documents)

By bearing the cross of incarnation, like the Cosmic Christ before us, we can know the light of our Inner spiritual cross of Illumination, Resurrection, and Salvation. Just as Constantine went 'by way of the cross' so can we know the esoteric meaning of 'via crucis' in our daily lives. By acknowledging, accepting, invoking, and applying Cosmic Wisdom, Universal Love, and connecting the two through the power of the Holy Creative Spirit, we can personally know the Christ Within. When this happens, we partake of the true spiritual communion, or Holy Mass, in

which all are joined in the 'Corpus Mystica Christi' or Mystical Body of Christ. It is here, that all true and sincere believers are united in the Invisible Church of which Eckharthausen spoke:

"It is necessary, my dear brothers in the Lord (Cosmic Consciousness), to give you a clear idea of the interior Church; that of the illuminated Community of God which is scattered throughout the world, but which governs by one truth and (is) united in one spirit."

"... It is the most hidden of communities yet possesses members from many circles; of such is this School. From all time there has been an exterior school based on an interior one, of which it is but the outer expression. From all time, therefore, there has been a hidden assembly, a society of the Elect ... called the interior Sanctuary or Church."

"...But when men multiplied, the frailty of man and his weakness necessitated an exterior society which veiled the interior one, and concealed the spirit and truth in the letter ... wrapped in external and perceptible ceremonies ... which the symbol of the interior, might by degrees be enabled safely to approach the interior spiritual truths ... so that the sensuous man could ... be gradually ... led to interior truth ..."

*(Cloud Upon the Sanctuary, Letter Two, von Eckharthausen)*

### **Modern Mystical Uses of the Cross**

Since the 'Occult Revival Period' of the 19th and early 20th centuries, several variations of the Sign of the Cross as a mystical and magical gesture have become public. While many of the organizations that lay claim to these techniques also make claims of somewhat questionable historical antiquity, the effectiveness of the method is what must be judged, and not history that may be more mythology than fact.

One of the largest, most splintered, and yet surprisingly effective of these movements is Martinism. Tracing its lineage to the French "Unknown Philosopher" Louis Claude de St.-Martin, and his rogue teacher and master, Martinez Pasquales, Martinism came into full bloom in Europe, America, and other areas around the world, prior to World War One.

Under the careful formation and leadership of Dr. Gerarde "Papus" Encausse, Martinism quickly grew into one of the largest and most widespread mystical movements in the world. Unfortunately, such quick and sudden growth also led to a fractioning of the original Martinist Order into several schismatic organizations and independent lodges. Despite their political quarrels, and doctrinal differences, they all remained true to their rituals, teaching methods, and core beliefs.



Since Martinism identifies and defines itself as "esoteric, Christian knighthood" based on initiation and the Qabbalah, it is no surprise that several variations of the cross appear in some of its rituals.

In *The Martinist Tradition* (vol. 1), Rene Cossey gives a copy of a Martinist ritual. The preface to the ritual outlines some of the long-standing history of the cross in both Christian and pre-Christian periods.

Quoting Jean Danielou's *Les Symboles Chretiens Primitifs* (Paris, 1961), Cossey points out that the tau was used as a "Sign of the Elect" in the Old Testament, being traced on the heads of the initiates by the Angel of Yahweh. The ancient Egyptians, Gnostics, Eleusian Mysteries, and Rites of Dionysos, all had uses for the tau prior to its being written about in *Revelations*, or adopted as the Passion Sign of Christ.

The High Priest of Israel had it traced upon his head with Oil of Unction upon his consecration. Early Christians in North Africa had it painted or tattooed on their heads as a sign of faith. Medieval rabbis visualized it as they were tossed into the flames during the Inquisition as a shortened version of the Tetragrammaton.

For the purpose of this ritual however, the 'operator' is advised to trace it upon his or her forehead with their right thumb (while possibly visualizing it in the aforesaid Qabbalistic fashion), after making a plea for Divine Intercession in the world's state of affairs. At one point however, the ritual changes to tracing the cross with the thumb, as well as the forefinger and middle finger. This possibly symbolizes the coming together of various Cosmic forces.

An alternate method of tracing it is to use a candle in the air in front of oneself. By drawing it as such (  ) it symbolizes resurrection, when drawn (  ) it symbolizes Divine incarnation or assistance.

### **The Golden Dawn**

While the teachings of Martinism have had a wide influence on many mystical organizations, particularly those either claiming the Martinist banner, or of a Rosicrucian variety, the Hermetic order of the Golden Dawn has by far had the widest and most well publicized impact on Western occult thought in the last 100 years.

Formed in the last quarter of the 19th century, the Golden Dawn was a direct off-shoot of a quasi-masonic Organization calling itself the Society Rosicrucia in Anglia (S.R.I.A.). Formed by a group of Masonic scholars seeking the Rosicrucian roots of the Masonic Order, the SRIA later became the nucleus for the Golden Dawn. Through the Golden Dawn, the S.I.R.A. sought to establish an outer organization where members could be trained in spiritual rites, whereby they might be prepared for later admittance into the Order of the Ruby Rose and Golden Cross, or their version of the Rosicrucian Order. Like Martinism which came only a few years later, the Golden Dawn sought to re-establish the lost entrance way into the secret and highly sought after Rosicrucian Order.

The Golden Dawn's greatest contribution to the understanding of the Sign of the Cross comes in its highly revered ritual meditation known as the "Qabbalistic Cross". In this ritual, like that described by Bishop Theodotus, the initiate visualizes brilliant spheres of light and the formation of a cross of white or golden light within themselves as they recite the invocation: "For thine

(head), is the Kingdom (heart), and the Power (right shoulder), and the Glory (left shoulder), unto the ages, Amen (hands together in prayer)." This simply, but powerful act, when done with concentration and sincerity, can bring us into contact with Cosmic Wisdom, Love, and Creative Power, just as its Christian variation can.

## **Conclusion**

While this is just a brief and hopefully practical introduction to the meaning and uses of the cross by mystics across the ages, it is important to remember, as Eckharthausen has pointed out to us, we are not alone on our spiritual journey. We are supported by a host of "Unknown Superiors" or invisible allies that constantly seek to uphold us on our Pilgims Progress. By seeking a deeper understanding of our spiritual symbols, and using them in our daily meditations and prayers, we can strengthen ourselves inwardly and bring ourselves one step closer to God's promised Kingdom — "Via Crucis!"