

A DISCUSSION OF THE SYMBOLIC

MEANING OF THE CROSS

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THE CROSS AS AN ARCHETYPAL SYMBOL  
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"What we call the beginning is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning  
The end is where we start from."

This quotation from T.S. Eliot's Little Gidding which was given in the course of the lectures, supported the thought of the paradoxical meaning of the cross as an archetypal symbol that Dr. Harding developed.

She prefaced her series of three lectures by saying that the words Cross, Symbol and Archetypal needed explanation. Starting with the cross, she pointed out that a cross by the roadside, alerting people to a coming crossroad; or a cross indicating a wrong answer on an arithmetic paper, to mention just the examples used - are signs, with meanings accepted by all. Whereas a cross on a building means, to most people in our present culture, a Christian church, though probably not carrying its original significance. However, if seeing a cross in one's dreams, or in a picture or shrine, produces a feeling of fascination, wonder, and awe, then the cross has become for us, at that time, a symbol, numinous because of its impact.

In this connection then, the cross shows its archetypal nature, for "the archetypes are the unseen patterns of psychic life, on which indeed, all psychic life is based and they therefore carry the meaning and energy of life itself;" or, as Dr. Harding further states, "archetypes are the forms and patterns of a psychic nature inherent in every man that correspond on a psychic level to the patterns underlying the instincts that determine human behavior on the

physiological level."

The term numinosum was introduced by Rudolph Otto who described it as "a dynamic agency of effect not caused by an arbitrary act of will, an experience of something that causes awe, fascination, dread and wonder." Jung has pointed out that the numinosum seizes and controls the human being. He goes on to say that the sense in which he uses the term "religious" refers to such numinous experiences.

It is agreed that so far as is generally known, most people or tribes possess more or less organized religious teachings and rituals, and yet Dr. Harding comments, these stem from subjective experiences or fantasies of individual men. The cross, as an archetypal symbol, is concerned with individual subjective experience, the genuine religious function which manifests itself in dreams and fantasy images of individuals.

Dr. Harding spoke of the problem which comes to each of us as to what in us is individual and what collective; that many of life's experiences common to all - birth, death, marriage and so on - feel the most personal and sacred. Here she stated, "It is his emotional reaction to the common happenings of life that distinguishes the individual from the herd," and mentioned Konrad Lorenz' book On Aggression where he says in effect that "it is the unreasoning, emotional appreciation of values that adds a plus or minus sign to the findings and dictates of reason."

But these areas of universal experience are apt to be those in which the human being is most secret, for, again quoting Dr. Harding, "...there is indeed something in man that is stronger than his conscious ego, and in any deep exploration of the psyche sooner or later one encounters inner secret fears and anxieties regarding powerful factors beyond one's control - in other words, one encounters the numinosum. These experiences ... are not the same for everyone, for they are profoundly modified by the temperament and

type of the experiencing subject,..."

It is in exploring the subjective side of the psyche that the deeper layers of psychic experience are brought to light and are mediated to the conscious through symbols. "These symbols," said Dr. Harding, "are the symbols that Jung has called archetypal, that is, they are based on ancient types or patterns... of the psyche, corresponding to and underlying the instincts that control physiological activity." She contrasted the views of the academic psychologists and others in the field who disregard the inner subjective side of an experience, and who hold that the patterns of actions are transmitted consciously from one generation to another, with Jung's view of the underlying archetypal patterns "which exert an inescapable influence on the motivation of human behavior and inner subjective experience." Here, too, it was pointed out that these symbols underly the dogmatic teachings of religion, folk-tales and mythology; that they often survive as folk-customs and that though the wide dissemination of similar myths is explained by many scholars as being due to the "migration of symbols" or to "borrowing," in addition, in Jung's view, they are based fundamentally on an unconscious patterning in the psyche, that is, on archetypes.

Energy manifests itself in patterning, as shown, for example, in physics or electricity; and the individual cell is such a manifestation in the biological field where patterning occurs regularly in the simplest living structures. Dr. Harding elaborated on patterning in the single cell, stating that the protoplasm of the egg cell contains a "pattern" of the entire adult and is goal-directed as has been shown experimentally. Other examples of patterning were cited, such as the migratory instinct that young birds showed even though reared in isolation from all adults; and the instinctive fear young mice evinced when cats appeared, although they also had been isolated from adult mice;

or examples of symbiosis between plant and insect. The proliferation of cells in healing a cut, and the cessation of such proliferation added another amazing example, and the questions were asked, "How do the cells know when to stop proliferating? Who or what patterned the cell?"

"And all this complicated drama, said Dr. Harding, "is carried out by each generation of creatures guided by the instinct which must give the adult the wisdom, though not the knowledge, of how to act. In man a similar wisdom arising from the instincts can be made conscious, as meaningful fantasy."

Biologists explain this patterning as the ability "to know without knowing," and the understanding given by these researchers throws light on the modes of functioning of the psyche. This problem is complex on the biological plane but far more so on the psychological level for here the observer is also the subject. Nevertheless we are able to observe something of psychological patterning from within, for the alchemists and other early thinkers held that within the darkness of the psyche was a spark of light, a scintilla, which illumines the psychic darkness from within. Dr. Harding reported a helpful analogy in a suggestion from Jung that "these light sparks can be equated to the symbols that arise spontaneously in the unconscious in the form of archetypal images which we meet in a deep introversion - images that illuminate the dark and hidden depths of the psyche." And Dr. Harding saw a correspondence in this idea of "light sparks" to the teaching that God created man in his own image, saying that his image is to be found within man, not only in the outer universe, and explaining that this "within" means the unconscious realm, not the conscious part of the psyche that man calls "I."

The difficulties of correlating religious experiences and the findings of psychology are, to some extent,

due to different use of terms. For example, inspirations that are considered as coming from a Being outside of man, according to religious terms, are looked upon as being derived from the objective psyche, that is, the collective unconscious, in the terms of analytical psychology. These phenomena, or inspirations, follow certain patterns, which can be observed only through their manifestations in dreams, visions, and so on - psychic patterns that Jung has called archetypes. These are universal, although the symbolic forms in which they appear follow the cultural background of a particular individual. Examples of this fact were cited from Campbell, where the myths of tribes with a hunting background or ancestors were shown to be different from those with a food-gathering ancestry, though the basic human patterns are the same.

The fundamental problem which has concerned humans through the ages is the struggle with the opposites in ego-dominated man and his spiritual side, and each age has had its particular "dominant" or principle - a certain understanding which is taken for granted by everyone. For example, in the middle ages, in the Western world, the "dominant" was the Christian view of life. Dr. Harding stated "that the 'dominant' of an age is known by direct observation - it is an archetypal pattern and can only be observed either in fantasy, a symbol rising from the unconscious, or through the effects it produces in the conduct of men and nations."

A culture may grow old and die and the symbol or dominant or archetypal image that carried it disappear - falling into the unconscious, forgotten or perhaps persisting in a degenerated form of a religious ritual such as the witch cults or devil worship left from the worship of Dionysus. Then a new form of an archetypal image must arise that will contain the numinosity necessary to hold man's allegiance.

Today the renewal and transformation of the Christian

"dominant" is being forced upon us, and the cry "God is dead" is heard once more. Dr. Harding pointed out that over and over again the "death of God" has occurred, but that this may be interpreted in two senses. For instance, the God-man, Jesus, is killed but it is a voluntary death; so too, Dionysus was sacrificed as Zagreus, the Bull. These represent the dying and resurrecting Gods. But the other sense is that the conception of God, that is, as a Deity outside of man, is dead.

And so we have the picture of youth rebelling against law and order, manifesting the rebellion in a reversion to the primitive in dress and behavior, to outright delinquency, alcoholism, and drug addiction. But, as Dr. Harding pointed out, "...rebellion for the sake of rebellion leads inevitably to worse tyranny unless the dominant thought - the creative spirit - is strong enough to transcend man's innate greed for power and personal gain." Creative young people, in rebelling against society's laws, often regress to an auto-erotic and childish self-indulgence and frequently "go to the dogs." This is borne out in a quote from Nietzsche which was given, "Thy dominant thought would I hear, not that thou hast cast off thy chains. Some people lose their last value when they gain their freedom." Hence a man must be gripped by a not-personal spirit whose dynamic energy brings out devotion to the value he chooses to serve.

What perhaps is generally unrealized is not that the value has been destroyed but that it must be looked for in different areas - it is the religious view of the world that needs redemption. Dr. Harding quoted Jung as saying, "I am convinced that it is not Christianity, but our ...interpretation of it that has become antiquated in the face of the present world situation. The Christian symbol... carries in itself the seed of further development. ...it depends on us whether we can make up our minds to meditate again, and more thoroughly, on the Christian premises. This requires a

very different attitude towards the individual, towards the microcosm of the Self, from the one we have adopted hitherto. ...The destruction of the God-image is followed by the annulment of the human personality." We then have the mass - communism, fascism, and so on.

It is necessary that an individual come to terms with the regressive side in himself - egotism, the power motive, greed and lust, inertia - before he can hope to deal with the opposing forces in his psyche. Dr. Harding emphasized this by saying, "...it is the not-personal part of the psyche which expresses itself ... in the unwilld thoughts and affects, as well as in fantasy, ...that is in need of transformation. And this cannot be brought about by conscious effort alone. ...it is brought by an inner experience, ... psychic happenings that stem from what Jung has called the objective psyche..." If these problems are not dealt with as personal problems, then the unacknowledged or "shadow" pieces of the psyche are projected onto some scapegoat.

The cross has been portrayed from the earliest ages of man, in many cultures and in many forms, but all forms of the cross, as was outlined in the lectures - the long or Latin, Christian, square, Chi, Tau and perhaps the swastika - all have a common factor, they express opposition and also union, at least as it appears to an observing ego. In its simplest form the cross represents the conflict between good and evil, and hence concerns man alone, since he only has learned to differentiate. It is still a living symbol, appearing in the dreams and fantasies of modern man, as well as in art and iconography. In addition to opposition and union, the cross represents discrimination, for consciousness depends on the ability to recognize differences. Conscious discrimination must be able to contrast one thing or one quality with another, light-dark, high-low, - the division of experience into opposites which is the first fruit

of consciousness. Traditionally also, the cross represents the suffering on earth of the incarnate God... the conflict between the human and divine nature of the Christ, which were thus shown to be irreconcilable.

Now the manifestation of the cross today is shown in modern men in the feeling of being torn apart, of painful indecision - perhaps a conflict between outer duty and inner life; or some moral or ethical decision must be made. This state of tension is equated with the nigredo state of the alchemical work, a state which occurs during the transformation of the "substance." This "substance" of the alchemists corresponds to the not-personal elements of the psyche, the instinctive drives and reactions, such as rage, hate, envy and the like. The transformed "noble" form of the alchemist's "substance" corresponds to the creative impulses which stem from the spirit.

And so, says Dr. Harding, "...the cross is a unified form in which the opposites are held together ... by that tiny point, that minuscule dot, that is the center of the crossing. This is the point that stands firm in spite of the conflict. ... It is that weak yet strong point in us that will not be swayed by the voice of the multitude. It represents a state of stabilized conflict." But in order to find this central core one has to undertake the responsibility of thinking for oneself, yet it is consciousness that is important, not thinking as such. "The point has a position, ... it is a stand-point - and the 'point' or 'dot' is the first symbol of the Self... the center of both the conscious and unconscious realms."

For anyone caught in a fundamental problem, the struggle and arid indecision is like an emptiness, a hole. Yet philosophy, religion and poetry all represent this emptiness as a creative emptiness - a "point." Dr. Harding elaborated further on the "dot" or "point" saying that being a no-thing it is forever creative. You

cannot say of it "now I've got it, now I know the answer," for the point is energy which cannot be held in the hand. One can only be its channel. She emphasized the psychological fact that "every resolution of conflict leads to another, a further split and a further differentiation," and spoke again of the paradoxical nature of the cross. For the cross represents conflict and a resolution through the center; and again conflict on another level, the process continuing until life ends. And the numinosity of the "point" or "center" is indistinguishable from that of the Christ-image.

When the conflict in the world today is not or cannot be faced or considered consciously, a reaction may come in dreams or nightmares. Occasionally dreams may come that point the way to a possible resolution. Two such dreams were presented which suggested that a solution might possibly be found by including the unacceptable elements instead of repressing them; in short, that both negative and positive were essential in the situation if the problem was to be resolved.

The point of crossing of the bars of the cross, being the unifying and creative center, is often shown surrounded by flame, circle or halo. But this center cannot be reached so long as one pursues one or another line of thought exclusively, admitting the conscious but not the unconscious, in this way one only gets further from the core of oneself, one's own center. The solution of a psychological problem is not found by compromise. A central point, a stand-point on a different plane, must be searched for, and can only be found by an outgrowing of the plane of conflict.

Just as the cross represents conflict, division, unwholeness by reason of the bars pulling in opposite directions, so by reason of the crossing point, the center, it represents unification, healing of division and wholeness. And this great value of the center is a point, a nothing, and is the meaning of the reference quoted from T.S. Eliot, when he speaks of "The still point of the turning world."

The point or center represents the ideal Self, that is the Deity; but for each individual the archetype of the Self as it appears in us is but an approximation of the true center. "And this," Dr. Harding said, "is a strange paradox, for while the true center is found only after a life-time of experience and of search, it consists in the end of that which we were unconsciously in the beginning. ...We are parts, not whole in any universal sense. ...We must strive for wholeness, driven on by the numinosity of the inner experiences we have had, but we cannot hope to achieve perfection. ...Each man must search within his own psyche for the symbol that might solve his most intimate problem. ...One who undertakes this quest may find a solution for himself in the form of images that have a numinous quality. These images may appear as abstract designs or in personified form such as the archetype of the Self or as symbols considered to be God-images."

If in the twentieth Century these numinous aspects come in personified form according to the level of consciousness presently attained, we may still share in the experience as quoted from a fourth century Desert Father, Evagrius Ponticus, who wrote in his Treatise on Prayer, "...When the intellect has done away with the old-style man by the grace of God and the new man has replaced him, he will, at the time of prayer, see his state like a sapphire, the color of the sky. That is what the ancients, to whom it was manifested on the mountain called 'the Place of God'."

And in closing the lecture series, Dr. Harding made it clear that even if such a numinous experience should come to one, there would still remain the task, and one is again at the beginning. For

"Tasks in hours of insight willed

Must be in hours of gloom fulfilled."

Henrietta Bancroft