



The Swastika

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One of the most striking forms of the “horizontal” cross, that is, the cross traced in the plane which represents a certain degree of existence, is the figure of the *swastika*, which indeed seems to be directly attached to the primordial tradition, for it is found in the most diverse and widely separated countries, and from the most remote periods. Far from being an exclusively Eastern symbol as is sometimes thought, it is one of those most generally distributed, from the Far East to the Far West, for it exists even among certain indigenous peoples of America. It is true that at the present day it has been preserved more especially in India and central and eastern Asia, and that perhaps those are the only regions where its meaning is still known, yet even in Europe it has not wholly disappeared. In antiquity this sign occurs among the Celts and in pre-Hellenic Greece; again, in the West, it was anciently one of the emblems of Christ, and it even remained in use as such down to nearly the end of the Middle Ages.

We have said elsewhere that the *swastika* is essentially the 'sign of the Pole'. If it is compared with the figure of the cross inscribed in the circumference of a circle, it will be seen that these are really equivalent symbols in certain respects; but in the *swastika* the rotation round the fixed center, instead of being represented by the circumference, is merely indicated by short lines joined to the ends of the arms of the cross and forming right angles with them; these lines are tangents to the circumference which mark the direction of movement at the corresponding points. Since the circumference represents the manifested world, the fact that it is as it were 'suggested' indicates quite clearly that the *swastika* is not a symbol of the world, but rather of the Principle's action upon the world.

If we relate the *swastika* to the rotation of a sphere, such as the heavenly sphere, upon its axis, it must be supposed as traced in the equatorial plane, and then the central point, as already explained, will be the projection of the axis on this plane which is perpendicular to it. As for the direction of rotation indicated by the figure, its importance is only secondary and does not affect the general meaning of the symbol; in fact both forms are found, indicating both clockwise and anti-clockwise rotation, and this would not mean that it is always intended to establish an opposition of some kind between them. It is true that in certain countries and epochs schisms from the orthodox tradition may have occurred, and the schismatics, in order to manifest their antagonism, may have deliberately given the figure an orientation contrary to the one used in the environment from

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which they separated; but this in no way touches the essential meaning, which remains the same in all cases. Besides, the two forms are often found in association, and they can then be regarded as representing one and the same rotation looked at from each of the two poles. This is connected with the very complex symbolism of the two hemispheres, which we cannot go into here.

We cannot think of developing all the considerations to which the symbolism of the *swastika* can rouse, and which in any case are not directly connected with the subject of this study. But its considerable importance from the traditional point of view made it impossible to omit all mention of this special form of the cross.