

The Energy of Symbols

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One summer on retreat at The Abbey of the Genesee I was meditating in my room and watching a cloudy sky through a small window. The clouds were turbulent, as it was a dark and windy morning. Suddenly the form of a cross was clearly illuminated. The cloud form continued its transformation and the new images captured my attention. The outline of the cross slowly changed to the outline of a dove.

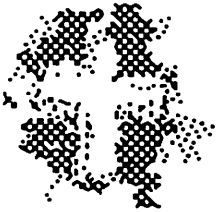
On retreat at the Abbey in the following year, I came across the ideas and writings of Simeon, a tenth-century theologian, who put a renewed emphasis on Baptism in the Holy Spirit. He taught that this Baptism came by way of carrying our daily crosses. His point was that enduring hardships through life's trials, tribulations, and illnesses challenge us to turn in repentance to the Lord as Savior and Healer, and in turn this makes us more receptive to the Spirit.

The cross expresses energy in the form of integrated polarities; energies that reach vertically between heaven and earth, and energies that flow horizontally between us. Since the cross also symbolizes Christ's suffering while bringing his healing presence, it creates a tension between suffering and healing. Letting go of this tension can release energy.

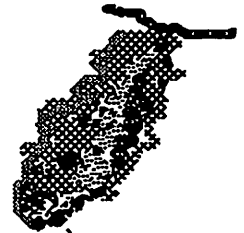
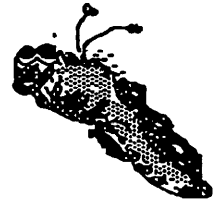
The dove has long been a symbol of peace as well as a symbol of the presence of the Holy Spirit (as in Christ's baptism, Luke 3:22). The energy of the Spirit is especially expressed through the spiritual gifts given to individuals for the benefit of the community. (See 1 Cor 12)

The Greek language uses one and the same word for the human soul and the butterfly: *psyche*. And for ancient Christians, the dove-winged eros in amorous pursuit of the butterfly Psyche, the human soul, was one of those prophetic symbols that the Church adopted unchanged and transferred to Christ. In the time of the catacombs, the fable of Eros and Psyche was part of the sacred decorations of the underground sanctuaries.

The metamorphosis of caterpillar to butterfly is well known even to our children, but we, as adults, are reminded of the transcendent energy and beauty of the Spirit that awaits the patient cross-bearer.



Eros



Psyche