



## LETTER X

### The Wheel of Fortune, Arcanum of Cosmic Drama *Spiritual Exercise: The Law of the Cross*

*The marriage of opposites—this traditional theme of alchemy—is the essence of the practice of the law of the Cross. For the Cross is the union of two pairs of opposites, and the practice of the Cross is the work of conciliation of four opposites—two horizontal and two vertical opposites. The Eagle and the Bull are vertical opposites: they are the tendencies towards the heights and the depths, towards the general and the particular, towards a comprehensive overview and towards the minutiae of points of detail. The Angel and the Lion constitute the other pair of opposites on the cross of man’s instinctivity. Here it is a matter of the transformation of combative courage into moral courage—into the courage of conscience. (page 259)*



It’s interesting (at least to me) that our unknown author describes a spiritual exercise based on what he calls “The Law of the Cross” in a letter devoted to the *Wheel* of Fortune. If you share my love for Celtic culture, then you are familiar with the Celtic or Iona Cross, which consists of a circle integrated into a cross. There are many theories as to why the Celtic Cross integrates a circle, many having to do with the poetic love for nature, animals and the earth that is found in so many writings from the Celtic tradition. But whether the Celtic Cross represents a pre-Christian image

(not unlike the Medicine Wheel found in some Native American cultures), or a distinctive way of fashioning the Christian Cross, or some blend of Christian and pre-Christian imagery, ultimately doesn't matter — at least, not as much as the spiritual message encoded in this symbol, regardless of its origin. In the Celtic Cross we find a union of heaven and earth, of male and female, of pagan and Christian. It is a holistic symbol that implies what unites us matters far more than what separates us.

Our author's "Law of the Cross" is, in his words, the "the union of two pairs of opposites" — both the horizontal and the vertical lines of the cross represent a spectrum or continuum (or paradox, perhaps). Previously the author has suggested that we see in the vertical axis of the cross the fullness of *space*, linking heaven (top) to earth (bottom), while the horizontal axis of the cross depicts the fullness of *time*, linking the past (left) to the present (center) and on to the future (right). This alone gives us plenty to reflect on. However, in his Letter X based on the Wheel of Fortune he offers another way of viewing the cross, based on the four images traditionally associated with the four gospels: the man or angel (Matthew), the lion (Mark), the ox or bull (Luke) and the eagle (John). This symbolism has its origins in the vision of the chariot experienced by the prophet Ezekiel: "As for the appearance of their faces: the four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle" (Ezekiel 1:10), this imagery shows up again in Revelation 4:7, describing creatures worshipping God in heaven.

Our author suggests that the eagle and the bull are vertical opposites on the cross, while the lion and the angel represent the horizontal opposites. Each figure corresponds to a traditional understanding of the four tasks or powers of magicians: To Know, To Dare, To Will, To Keep Silent. The eagle represents will, the bull silence, the lion daring, and the angel knowledge. Our author suggests that each of these tasks or skills requires the others and supports the others; and that asceticism — spiritual discipline and self-restraint — makes it possible for each of these figures to be transformed into a higher or more sacred version of themselves: eagle becomes Eagle, bull becomes Bull, lion becomes Lion, and man becomes Angel (I think we can set aside, for the purposes of this exercise, the traditional understanding that angels and humans are separate orders of beings and therefore a sanctified human does not become an angel, but rather simply manifests the full glory of humanity).

Back to the Wheel of Fortune: as the circle of the wheel can either be closed (what the author calls "of the serpent") or open (and therefore capable of never-ending evolution and expansion), so the Law of the Cross invites us to hold in tension our capacities for knowledge, for discipline, for courage and for contemplation, in order to (by the grace of God) become truly the fullness of who we are called to be.

## **The Exercise**

When you meditate, do so in the presence of a cross (or, at least, hold an imaginary cross in your mind's eye). It does not need to be a Celtic Cross, although because of the visual link with the Wheel of Fortune, that might be an excellent cross to work with (if you don't have a Celtic Cross of your own, print the one at the beginning of this document).

For Christians the cross represents the saving death of Christ, but for this exercise imagine the cross in a more abstract way. See it as a great "link" — linking heaven and earth together; linking past, present and future together; linking the Eagle and the Bull (and their virtues of discipline and contemplation), as well as linking the Lion and the Angel (and their virtues of knowledge and courage). Imagine yourself at the center of the cross, where each of the four beings brings you their gift: the Angel brings you sacred knowledge; the Lion, conscientious courage; the Bull, silent contemplation; and the Eagle, willing discipline. You are called to receive these gifts at the center of all things, the sacred present moment where heaven and earth meet: in your heart.

You do not need to analyze or "figure out" these gifts and their purpose in your life. Simply trust that God is the giver of all good gifts, and so the Holy Spirit, poured through divine love into your heart (Romans 5:5) makes these gifts available to you. Consider how these gifts need each other and blossom because of each other: how silence makes it easier to truly know; how discipline facilitates the practice of contemplation; how daring makes it possible to exercise your will, and so forth. Each of the gifts enhances the others. The Law of the Cross is the principle of holding all these gifts in creative and dynamic tension. You do not have to choose between heaven and earth, between past, present and future, or between the various gifts. In your heart, all is given to you, and you are the center point where all are held together (in Christ, of course).

As you reflect on this Law of the Cross, be available for prayer. Consider the relationship of this Law of the Cross to Lectio Divina: reading a sacred text imparts knowledge; reflecting on the text cultivates discipline; praying to God in response to it is an act of sacred daring, and the contemplative rest at the end brings you into deep silence.

So allow prayer to emerge in whatever form it may take: a simply dialogue, or an imaginative encounter, or simply the mystical sense of deep quiet and calm. Do not force your prayer. Simply allow it. Trust the gifts of the cross, that your prayer will be all you need to grow closer to God; now, and for all eternity.