

# Symbols by paul tillich



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As already said, as per Tillich, the symbols have been many a times and in many ages been used to give expression to the ultimate concerns of a society, institution, race or political entity (44). Yet the irony inherent in this premise is that the ultimate concerns of a group, organization or a political entity at some place or in some time may not be so propitious to the well being of the entire humanity or a specific group or way of life. Hence, it inevitably and logically follows that if the prime concerns of a group or political entity are negative, the symbols used to express such concerns are bound to be loaded with negative meanings, connotations or the feelings they evoke in the group at which they are targeted. It could happen both ways round. Either the symbol adopted by a hate group may be inherently associated with negative meanings or aspirations by the dint of commensurate historical associations or traditions. The other possibility is that a hate group may pick up a an new or already existing symbol that is otherwise neutral or say sacred, and give it a new meaning that is negative or vicious by the nature of their acts, expressions or crimes that they commit in the shadow of that symbol. Many a times in the history of Western society, hate groups have resorted to the distortion of the traditional symbols, to give them a new meaning that evokes fear or intimidation in the groups they intend to target. For example the usage of Swastika by the Nazi party as its symbol and insignia is an apt example of the above mentioned line of thought. To begin with, Swastika had been a symbol that was and is shared by many religions and theologies. Swastika is a symbol that is commonly used in Eastern religions and religious ceremonies and expressions to signify good luck, well being or holy grace (Quinn 29). Swastika also has associations with Christianity in the sense that it represents a hooked cross

(Quinn 29). However, according to Hitler as he mentions in the political treatise *Mein Kampf*, he choose Swastika as a symbol of the Nazi party because Swastika was also used by the ancient Aryan nomads, who at one time inhabited the banks of River Rhine, as a religious symbol. Hitler considered the Germans to be Aryans and his choice of Swastika as a symbol signified the triumph of the Aryans over other races. Not to say, it were the atrocities committed by the Nazis against Jews, Gypsies and other races under the symbol of Swastika that were eventually responsible for the transition of Swastika from an ancient sacred symbol to a contemporary negative symbol. The burning of Cross by the Ku Klux Klan is yet one another example of the distortion an ancient Christian symbol. Actually speaking, as per the traditions of some Celtic tribes, the cross was set ablaze on hilltop to summon the members of the tribe in case of some emergency or danger (Mecklin 47). However, the Ku Klux Klan picked up this ancient Celtic practice to use as a ritual to unify the Clansmen and as a tactics to intimidate the ethnic groups that they target. The hate crimes committed by the Klan over the decades eventually distorted this ancient practice into a symbol of hatred and violence. The contemporary media certainly played a pivotal role in adding to the notoriety of the two above mentioned symbols.

Works Cited Mecklin, John Moffatt. *The Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1963. Quinn, Malcolm. *The Swastika*. New York: Routledge, 1994.