

0:26
Symbol is about the use and power of symbols
0:29
Powerful swastika symbol we examine
0:32
the ancient history of the swastika and
0:34
how its meaning and power changed our
0:36
story takes us from Antiquity to Modern
0:38
Times
0:39
We look at the world of symbols from the
0:41
center of a disturbing controversy in
0:43
Saint Cloud Minnesota in the north
0:45
central United States in 1920 the
0:48
Catholic church burned down the local
0:50
German Catholic Community rebuilt the
0:52
church Saint Mary Church was completed
0:54
in 1931. in 1937 it became The Bishop's
0:58
Cathedral Church ornamentation included
1:01
swastikas these swastika symbols
1:03
bitterly divided the local community
1:05
over decades 60 years after the
1:08
Holocaust in World War II the diocese
1:10
decided to remove and replace the
1:12
swastikas
1:13
the city of Saint Cloud includes a State

1:16
University where another part of this
1:17
story unfolded in 2001 a federal class
1:20
action lawsuit alleging anti-Semitism at
1:23
Saint Cloud State University was settled
1:25
without trial or admittance of any
1:27
wrongdoing one result was creation of
1:30
the Jewish studies program Professor
1:32
Joseph Edelheit was hired to lead the
1:34
program and inform the community about
1:36
Jews and Judaism part of that work
1:38
involved dialogue about the swastikas
1:40
with Father Stephen Benfelds and Bishop
1:42
John Kinney leader of the Saint Cloud
1:44
diocese many voices tell the story of
1:47
the swastika symbols in Saint Cloud
1:51
it goes back a very very long way there
1:55
There are examples of in indigenous American
1:57
societies dating back probably a couple
2:00
of thousand years at least in Europe
2:02
it's a very ancient way of designing
2:05
things some people see it as a
2:07
representation of a bird perhaps or some

2:10
other form of motion or of movement but
2:12
it is indeed a very very old symbol and
2:16
found in a number of different parts of
2:18
the world independently invented as far
2:20
as we can tell the broken cross the
2:23
hakenkreuz are the swastika is known
2:26
in various religious traditions the
2:28
Hindu tradition the Native American
2:30
among others and it was a decorative
2:33
cross that was used and you can find it
2:35
in some of the ancient tombs in Rome you
2:37
can find it as decorations on floors and
2:40
all over the place
2:45
what they were before they were changed
2:47
the hakenkreuz the broken cross was a
2:50
sacred symbol in Antiquity and it
2:52
predates Christianity as soon as I saw
2:55
them there and became aware of them of
2:56
course I didn't think of the broken cross
2:59
that is a symbol of hatred and of
3:01
Oppression and death
3:03
I don't know if there's a single answer

3:05
for what it represents to the Catholic
3:07
community because people remain I think
3:10
pretty divided even though those symbols
3:12
are down
3:13
the feelings are still there I do work
3:16
in India
3:17
for HIV AIDS prevention and have seen
3:21
the Hindu swastika
3:30
I've been on Native American
3:32
reservations and seen it as a part of
3:35
their art
3:36
when the federal class action lawsuit
3:39
came up there was a great deal of tragic
3:43
publicity that divided the university
3:45
community and the community at large and
3:50
unfortunately Saint Cloud became
3:53
tarnished with an image of being
3:56
anti-Semitic
3:58
one of the actual physical realities
4:02
that helped bolster that tarnished image
4:05
was the symbol of a swastika built unto
4:10
and into the edifice of Saint Mary's

4:14
cathedral in Saint Cloud Minnesota
4:20
my 10 year old son at the time one day
4:24
said to me he didn't know that I had
4:25
raised this with Father Steve and he one
4:27
day said to me Mommy why are there
4:30
swastikas on our church
4:33
even though that had been put there for
4:35
a whole different reason when the church
4:37
was constructed there's no way that
4:39
those symbols can be redeemed they're
4:42
still actively being used in our world
4:44
to represent hatred and racism and all
4:47
the things that are opposite values of
4:49
what we value as a faith community well
4:52
at first I was concerned
4:56
and as many of us who grew up in that
4:58
era
5:00
traumatized by the World War II issues
5:04
around the swastika but after I did a
5:06
little bit of research myself and
5:08
understood more deeply what the swastika
5:11
meant and its history I was less

5:15
concerned being on the church
5:17
I grew up in Saint Cloud
5:20
and I have more of a family connection
5:23
than personal connection to the Saint
5:26
Mary's Cathedral my grandparents were
5:29
members of the Saint Mary's parish and
5:32
went to church at the Cathedral for
5:34
decades my understanding of the history
5:37
of the symbol on the church is that
5:39
Saint Mary's cathedral was
5:42
patterned after a church in in Italy from
5:45
the third century
5:47
because the Jewish Community is so small
5:49
in Saint Cloud it is our way of
5:53
supporting the Jewish Community there
5:55
and also first having an effect on
5:59
change in our state I really believe
6:02
that as a large urban reform
6:05
congregation we have a duty and really
6:11
it has become a privilege of being the
6:14
voice of Judaism
6:16
within a state that was known at least

6:20
the City of Minneapolis was known as the
6:22
anti-semitic capital of the world in the
6:24
30s and 40s
6:28
the oldest archaeological evidence that
6:31
we have thus far for the design that we
6:34
call the swastika it's probably about 6,
6:36
500 years before the present in Samara
6:39
which is now part of Iraq the
6:42
comparative mythographer Joseph Campbell
6:44
asserted that it was a bird in flight
6:47
derived from other kinds of designs that
6:50
use that sort of wing event slow more
6:53
and more broken up or swirling some
6:55
people might have argued that it had to
6:57
do with the original Chaos and Order and
7:00
so on but this is purely speculative we
7:02
have absolutely no idea what it meant
7:04
but we do know that it was a design
7:06
element that was found dating back to
7:09
about 6,500 years before the present
7:12
the swastika is a very ancient symbol
7:16
there are many more meanings to the

7:18
swastika dating back to the beginning
7:20
you know Christianity also used the
7:23
swastika as a mean of world power of
7:26
Christ my understanding is that this
7:29
symbol comes up
7:31
across many different cultures all
7:35
around the world
7:37
and
7:38
through time going back
7:40
to pre-Christian days
7:43
I think it's kind of ironic that that
7:47
the Nazis chose this symbol as a symbol
7:51
of so-called Aryan Unity
7:54
when in fact it was a symbol of their
7:56
unity with Hindus and Buddhists and
7:59
Navajos in point of fact it was when I
8:04
first went to Zambia
8:06
south central Africa
8:08
along the main road Leopards Hill Road
8:10
there was a Hindu temple
8:12
and there were swastikas along the edge
8:16
of the temple and at first I thought my

8:18
house strange you know I was
8:21
probably 35 years old and had never seen
8:23
a swastika used in the temple and so I
8:26
asked some of the Hindu people I said now
8:28
what's this symbol mean
8:31
and they said well we share it with the
8:32
Buddhists
8:34
and it's fundamentally a symbol of the
8:36
Turning of the Great Wheel and the wheel
8:39
is time once a year for example the
8:41
Dalai Lama goes down to Bodh Gaya in
8:44
northern India and he does the Kala
8:46
chakra turning of time from year to year
8:49
and so the swastika itself among Hindus
8:53
is about movement and time it's ritual
8:56
which is an action that is implying
9:00
metaphor
9:02
that gives things their meaning
9:05
so symbols arise out of a ritual
9:09
of course it is known that the swastika
9:11
was not Hitler's invention
9:13
the symbol of the swastika is found in

9:15
many ancient cultures from India across
9:19
the Middle East to Europe as far as
9:21
northern Scandinavia it is this
9:23
connection to the Nordic Heritage which
9:26
attracted Hitler to it
9:28
since he had the weird idea of creating
9:30
a quote-unquote master race of humans
9:34
displaying Nordic blonde and blue eyed
9:37
features the Aryan race
9:42
it begins to switch and become
9:45
increasingly uh foreign born
9:48
the
9:50
Minnesota's largest ethnic population is
9:54
not the combined Scandinavian but German
9:57
actually
9:58
in 1854
10:01
railroad reaches the Mississippi at the
10:03
same time there's a lot of speculation
10:05
about increased traffic north there's
10:08
also by that point there's steamship
10:10
traffic in fact by the early 1850s from
10:13
Saint Anthony to Saint Cloud

10:18
Saint Mary's is founded over 150 years
10:20
ago by pioneer priest Francis Xavier
10:23
Pierz a Bohemian he purchased this
10:26
entire block for 500 dollars the first church
10:29
they built St Mary's was a small
10:30
L-shaped wooden building over in that
10:32
corner right there and he went out to
10:35
the east coast and invite all these
10:36
Germans to come to this area and so they
10:39
came in droves and they quickly outgrew
10:42
that small church and they built another
10:43
church on Saint Germain Street facing
10:46
Saint Germain a gothic church which
10:48
burned down in 1921.
10:55
father Luke Fink was a Benedict and
10:57
pastor at the time he had gone to
10:58
Eucharistic Congress in Italy
11:01
prior to the building of the church and
11:03
so he came back with ideas and designs
11:06
from
11:07
Ravenna so that's why this looks so much
11:09
like an Italian Church it looks like

11:11
it's plunked right here out of Italy
11:18
as far as we can tell by the end of the
11:20
19th century the swastika was
11:22
increasingly associated with northern
11:24
European political groups that were
11:28
convinced that there was such a thing as
11:30
an Aryan quote race
11:32
and that this was a group of people who
11:35
had been the great conquerors the great
11:37
heroes of European history who had
11:39
settled the Indian subcontinent
11:41
Conquering the Indian people there but
11:44
who had lost their power and now needed
11:46
to reassert themselves and so the
11:48
swastika became increasingly a symbol of
11:50
theirs by the end of the 19th century
11:53
even before World War One it was already
11:56
a symbol of far right wing anti-semitic
12:00
anti-central European anti-gypsy kinds
12:04
of organizations after World War One
12:06
became associated with an organization
12:09
whose founders were also among the

12:11
founders of the Nazi party by 1920 the
12:15
swastika was already the symbol of the
12:17
this tiny little fringe party called the
12:20
national socialists in Germany and then
12:23
suddenly
12:24
it changes meaning entirely it becomes
12:28
associated with Nazism in Nazism then it
12:32
became part of the anschluss it's also
12:34
movement the movement of Hitler's ideal
12:38
Aryan race across the world of course as
12:41
we know it didn't happen
12:43
but it perverted or changed the symbol
12:46
and denigrated it when I came to Saint
12:49
Mary's in 1999 I noticed the swastikas
12:53
immediately I was a history major in
12:56
college my undergraduate degree was in
12:58
history and my specialty was in Nazi
13:00
Germany that was what I did my senior
13:01
seminar paper on it the College of St
13:03
Catherine and so they stood out very
13:07
loud and clear for me and I went to
13:09
Father Stephen said why do we have

13:12
swastikas on our church contrary to
13:15
ancient times the swastika in today's
13:17
society is a symbol of evil the symbol
13:21
for hatred and racism it stands for the
13:24
tens of millions of people killed under
13:26
the 12 years of Hitler's brutal Nazi
13:28
regime during which not only 6 million
13:31
Jews were killed but also millions of
13:34
others among them gypsies poets
13:37
Jehovah's Witnesses political opponents
13:40
homosexuals and many other groups of
13:42
people
13:44
when as a young priest
13:47
I first walked through the gates of
13:50
Dachau concentration camp
13:53
outside of Munich Germany
13:57
no one spoke
14:00
and no sounds were made
14:03
as our group walked through the
14:05
buildings
14:07
that 25 years before
14:10
had housed the barracks and the

14:13
crematoria of the Holocaust
14:17
this was a place of horror
14:22
and our quiet that day
14:25
was the silence
14:27
in a cemetery
14:30
a huge place of burial
14:37
the place of the shoah
14:39
June 1943 I'm now 22 years old
14:42
and Hitler actually declares
14:44
congratulations to the German population
14:46
we can now tell you that ninety percent
14:50
of the Jews have been as he called it
14:52
quote unquote evacuated
14:54
I believe it was 90 percent because I didn't see
14:56
anybody anymore that I knew everybody
14:58
was gone as a rabbi as someone who
15:00
teaches post Holocaust theology
15:15
that swastika no matter how many other
15:19
places you can find it anthropologically
15:23
historically that swastika means only
15:26
the Nazi symbol that which immediately
15:31
brings the issue of the Holocaust

15:33
forward to me
15:38
however we also understand that there
15:42
has been a great deal of anti-Semitism
15:44
within Christianity and as we look at
15:48
that we also need to find a way to
15:51
reconcile and to remedy that and to
15:55
bring about a different understanding of
15:57
interfaith dialogue
15:59
we communicate
16:01
a great deal through symbols
16:04
and the power and impact of the swastika
16:08
in the 21st century is locked forever in
16:13
the nine years of the Nazi regime and
16:17
its willful extermination of six million
16:20
Jews and 5 million non-jews as part of
16:23
the sesquicentennial
16:27
we had planned to take them out and
16:30
replace them of course with the Nazis'
16:32
rise to power that became a great symbol
16:34
of oppression
16:36
and uh genocide and hatred
16:40
and so Rabbi Joseph Edelheit and I for a

16:43
whole year did kind of a Jewish Catholic
16:45
dialogue and talked about symbolism and
16:48
Judaism and Nazism and the Holocaust and
16:53
we did it over kind of a whole year's
16:54
time in the 150th anniversary
16:56
culminating in the service that we had
16:58
in May
17:02
in 1998 and 99 we formed a committee
17:05
called Vision 2000 and we needed to do a
17:09
capital campaign for the repair of the
17:10
exterior of the church
17:12
and so we did a capital campaign did a
17:15
feasibility study first
17:17
to find out how much we could raise with
17:19
the congregation that's aging and much
17:21
very small actually
17:22
and we found out the most we could raise
17:24
would be about seven hundred fifty
17:26
thousand dollars
17:28
we needed about 2 million to do what we
17:31
needed to do but the vision was to
17:35
repair the exterior of the building and

17:38
to redo the lower church but also with
17:41
that came replacement of the discs
17:44
because we just felt that as we come
17:46
into the New Millennium and also with
17:48
150th we needed to make a statement
17:50
Father Binsfeld explained that the
17:53
Parish of the Cathedral of Saint Mary
17:56
here in Saint Cloud had grown small and
18:00
that given the nature of what it would
18:03
cost to remove these discs that were
18:06
embedded into the edifice itself wasn't
18:10
something you could sand wasn't
18:12
something you could sand blast wasn't
18:14
something you could paint over it had to
18:17
be dug out and other discs had to be put
18:21
up this is a historic building in the
18:24
Saint Cloud area and it became a matter
18:27
of offering with grace can I help you
18:32
raise the money to take these down and
18:36
this became now a question of the
18:40
community at Large
18:42
community in Saint Cloud our own campus

18:45
community and people I sought in the
18:48
Jewish communities of the Twin Cities
18:51
all of whom immediately
18:54
understood that this would be better for
18:58
everybody the church had in fact decided
19:01
as a part of their own Millennium
19:04
investigation reflection to take down
19:08
the symbols that whatever the symbols
19:11
might have meant in history they had now
19:14
become a source of alienation within the
19:18
community and no longer represented what
19:21
the cathedral wanted others to know of
19:24
Catholicism after knowing more about the
19:27
Jewish community
19:30
it is possible for me to understand its
19:33
history and complexity
19:37
most importantly
19:39
I can better understand the hurt and
19:43
pain of the past when we discussed this
19:47
at the parish pastoral council meeting
19:49
in November of 2002 I think it did end
19:52
up passing unanimously

19:55
people definitely felt like it was time
19:58
to remove that symbol from our church I
20:02
believe with such a strong history to
20:05
that symbol they were appropriate to be
20:08
on the Saint Mary's Cathedral I think it
20:11
has a profound significance not unlike
20:13
the Navajo decision to stop using the
20:16
swastika although it had been an
20:18
essential part of their symbology
20:20
associated with their religion I think
20:23
what's important about that is a
20:25
recognition that that symbol is
20:27
corrupted that that symbol cannot stand
20:30
for anything anymore
20:32
at least until many generations have
20:35
passed that cannot stand for anything
20:37
other than
20:39
the horrors of the Nazi years in Germany
20:43
Horrors not simply for the victims of
20:46
the Nazis but for the Germans themselves
20:48
and what followed subsequent to that so
20:51
that from my perspective

20:53
given that the swastika is not in fact
20:56
part of the Christian symbology
20:59
does not have the same resonance as
21:01
other profoundly important symbols in
21:04
the Christian faith the cross the Lamb
21:06
of God other kinds of symbols to take
21:10
down a symbol an indication of something
21:13
that refers to the superiority of one
21:17
group of people and the inferiority of
21:19
other peoples and to replace that by the
21:22
symbols of the Universalist Church would
21:24
seem to speak profoundly to the
21:26
underlying meanings that the Catholic
21:28
Church believes in which is that it's
21:30
open to all people I'm a little sad to
21:34
to think that this old church
21:37
that managed to drag a little bit of
21:39
antiquity into the 21st century had to
21:42
be changed my feeling is regret but
21:46
understanding
21:48
I know that I do think it's
21:50
unfortunate

21:52
that
21:54
the Nazis 60 years later still seem to
21:58
have a hand reaching out from the grave
22:00
and that reaches to central Minnesota
22:02
and forces
22:06
churches to change ancient symbols that
22:09
were on their church I'm sure you've
22:11
talked to folks who are you will talk to
22:13
people who say that's part of the
22:16
original architecture of the church why
22:18
do we have to do this for them why do we
22:21
spend our money on this preserve the
22:24
Integrity of that structure
22:27
so there are those people who the
22:29
removal of the symbols
22:31
is painful maybe even a betrayal people
22:34
who've been you know lifelong members of
22:35
that parish and their their mom and dad
22:37
were in that parish and their
22:39
grandparents were in that parish but
22:41
then there are people like myself also
22:43
in the parish who really see it as a

22:46
sign of hope and as a sign of something
22:48
good for the future and kind of a new
22:51
day in interfaith relations in Saint
22:53
Cloud
22:54
well it seems logical to involve both
22:58
the diocese and the the cathedral parish
23:02
and the local Jewish community
23:05
and I think that whatever those three
23:08
groups
23:09
came up with
23:11
for a solution to the to the issue
23:14
by definition an appropriate solution if
23:17
it's what they wanted to if it had been
23:20
my decision to make I'm not sure I would
23:22
have done it any differently
23:26
the discs themselves were replaced by
23:29
images
23:30
that are symbolic of the Luminous
23:32
Mysteries of the Rosary
23:33
Pope John Paul II came up with five
23:36
Luminous Mysteries of the mysteries of
23:38
light

23:44
symbols just don't come out of nowhere
23:46
they are something that's been handed on
23:49
through history but what happens is
23:51
they're just used in a different fashion
23:53
go back to Hitler look at the how he
23:55
used his in a very different fashion
23:57
well these we
23:59
put them together to represent each of
24:01
the Luminous Mysteries
24:07
I think like I'd see Father Steve just
24:09
maybe after Mass or something and he'd
24:12
say about these medallions that he was
24:13
going to be changing which were
24:15
originally the swastikas on the church
24:18
and I mentioned my father to him
24:20
whatever we do it's going to have to be
24:22
very simplified so that it can be viewed
24:24
from down below otherwise if it gets too
24:26
intricate you'd never be able to see
24:27
them I've been stealing in symbolism
24:31
well ever since that was in the granite
24:32
business I had some of the information

24:35
that Father Stephen from the original
24:37
sketches from St John's
24:40
knowing what the symbols were what would
24:42
uh both Pope John's Luminous Mysteries were
24:47
I decided to develop from my background
24:50
the symbols that would illustrate what I
24:52
thought would be the best for their each
24:54
Mystery first of all we have the pitcher
24:57
and the wine is flowing out of the
25:00
pitcher into a chalice
25:02
so then it becomes part of the
25:04
Eucharistic symbol as well and in the
25:06
background there's a cross to represent
25:09
Christ
25:12
there is something about an old symbol
25:14
the ancient symbol and you know it's an
25:17
ancient symbol you know that it goes
25:19
back to to pre-Christian days you know
25:22
that it's
25:24
Universal it comes out of something
25:26
inherent in in human psychology
25:30
and

25:32
replacing it with a
25:34
a picture that some artist designed in
25:37
the last 10 years or 20 years just
25:40
doesn't have quite the same pull on you
25:43
I said in the Cathedral of Saint Mary
25:46
that day
25:48
if we as Americans remember the dead
25:53
that fought in the European theater of
25:55
World War II those swastikas should be
25:58
removed there were times I felt very
26:00
impatient with it and felt like
26:02
should have been removed 50 years ago
26:04
one of the members here was quite ill
26:06
with cancer he left home as weak as he
26:09
was came to the service and afterwards
26:11
he was crying he said I never thought
26:13
I'd see the day why not 50 years ago
26:17
to me it seemed like 90 percent of the people
26:19
didn't think swastika as a early
26:21
Christian symbol for the cross but
26:23
rather as Hitler's Herb Goodrich said to
26:26
me that the dedication he said I'm so

26:29

grateful I saw this before my death and

26:32

as it turns out he did die within weeks

26:35

I know more now

26:38

so I can feel more

26:40

I feel more now

26:43

so I can do more

26:46

if we do not have an ardent desire for

26:51

justice

26:53

if we do not commit ourselves

26:58

to ensure

27:00

that evil does not prevail

27:04

over good

27:06

as it did for millions of children

27:10

of the Jewish people

27:14

Humanity cannot permit

27:18

all that to happen again