

# CRITICISM OF RENE GUENON



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## Some Observations Concerning Guenon, Initiation, and Spiritual Exercises

by Frater M

All that exists potentially is advanced to actuality by the agency of something which is actually what the other is potentially: the partially potential by that which is actual in the same partial respect, and the wholly potential by the wholly actual — Proclus, Metaphysical Elements, Proposition 77

Every so often one hears of conversations, or reads essays contrasting Rene Guenon's views of initiation and spiritual practice against those of other initiates, such as Julius Evola, or Frithjof Schuon. In certain of these, one tends to find Guenon characterized as overly "conservative" and "bureaucratic", or perhaps less flatteringly, as "cold", "dry", and exceedingly "logical"; his emphasis on initiatic doctrine, and regularity of a chain, appears to cause many readers of Guenon to develop an opinion that he only regarded a rigid, formal, inflexible initiation rite as necessary, and of sole importance, to the exclusion of any other possibilities, or efforts. While undeniable that Guenon stressed the regularity of chains, and meticulously sought to differentiate the doctrines of traditional initiation from "occultist" and "spiritist" pseudo-initiations of his own era, he did so in the hopes of preventing further decay of what did remain of a traditional character, and yet never without fundamentally maintaining that regardless of just how regular an initiation might be, it must always accompany an inner work. Mincing no words on the matter, he remarks in Perspectives on Initiation that "Initiatic teaching, outward and transmissible by forms, in reality is and can only be—we have said this before and stress it again—a preparation of the individual for acquiring true initiatic knowledge by personal effort (203)".

The notion that Guenon was "too heady" and therefore "cold" likely arises from those who would take the written word of Guenon, as tantamount to the personhood of Guenon. Indeed, he wrote with staggeringly logical precision—but was no logician, frequently explaining that though metaphysics could be presented in a logical fashion, it is superior to logic; that the representation of metaphysical teaching discursively, is not the same as realization of that teaching, although serving as an advantageous departure point, yet insisting that "Whoever clings to reasoning and does not free himself from it at the required moment remains a prisoner of form, which is the limitation by which the individual state is defined (supra, 209)".

Others have argued that Guenon offers few solutions to the problem of degeneration and disappearance of regular and effective initiation in the West, outside of either Freemasonry, or Compagnonnage—and more so, that he quickly condemned any attempts at esoteric knowledge outside of those parameters. But again, it would seem Guenon was exercising a precise caution, while attempting to ingrain reliable "landmarks" in those either already on, or seeking a "path". Could it be believed for example, that Guenon, while living in Egypt, as devout Muslim and ardent Sufi would have

been unfamiliar with the Sufi practices of certain orders, who perform rituals and vigils at tombs of prophets and saints, in effort to invoke barakah, and participate in a silsilah-chain with deceased masters, and moreover, that such rituals often entailed an “istikhara”, that is, “dream incubation”? This would all seem unlikely, but his reluctance to discuss such things was probably due to reservations that such doctrines would quickly, especially in his era, be misunderstood and rapidly associated with “spiritism”—which they are not. Still, in his chapter from “Perspectives”, on “Initiatic Centers” these sort of practices are alluded to when Guenon is speaking of a “double hierarchy” within initiatic orders, particularly when an order has reached a phase of becoming externalized to a greater extent, what stands above and behind the physical leadership (who may have forgotten their true roles), is the presence of “invisible” and “unknown superiors”. While perhaps unbelievable to some students of Guenon, he elaborates:

All this permits us to glimpse among the many possibilities of spiritual centers certain means of acting which are quite different from those ordinarily attributed to them, and which are especially evident in abnormal circumstances...that do not permit...apparent regularity...a spiritual center of any kind may thus also act outside its normal sphere of influence, whether in favor of individuals particularly qualified but isolated in a milieu where the darkness has reached a point that almost nothing of tradition remains and initiation is precluded, or...as reforging an initiatic chain that has been accidentally broken...it is essential to remember that even if an apparently isolated individual succeeds in gaining a real initiation, this initiation is spontaneous in appearance only and will always involve some kind of attachment to an effective center (supra, 65).

For an individual having received a regular initiation (virtual or effective), or such a “spontaneous” initiation as described above, Guenon indicates that there are means of support for the being’s continued progress, even if an order has essentially lost or forgotten its “operative” methods. In “Initiation and Spiritual Realization”, Guenon in a brief chapter turns our attention to the doctrine of “upaguru”, an influence that triggers or elicits a spiritual or initiatic process, remarking that this function might manifest as another person, or present itself as a situation, circumstance, or even some object. When arising as a person, it matters not if the person fulfilling the role, realizes what it is they are doing because “...in reality the true cause is found in the very nature of the one upon whom the action is exercised”. The upaguru is not though, something entirely random and “objective”, as it is an “auxiliary” and “prolongation” of the being’s actual guru—and although upaguru might manifest on numerous occasions in the being’s life, each manifestation elicits something specific, after which it is no longer upaguru (104-105).

What though might be said though of the initiate who has no guru by which upaguru could be extension or prolongation? In one type of case, as in orders that operate through “group work”, the role of a human guru is replaced by the “spiritual influences” behind the work, which of course relates to what

was said above concerning the influences of “spiritual centers”. While Guenon insists that a guru (either human, as the influences behind group work, or the influences behind the rare “spontaneous initiation”) are indispensable for the initiate, such is only true so far as the “first stages”—meaning, the conferral of an initiation to begin with, initiation as “beginning” proper, which is to say another way, the establishment of communication with the higher states. Provided that one or more of these conditions have been met (which as noted above always also implies a continuous attachment to a spiritual center, with or without attachment to a physical center) the continued process of spiritual realization need not necessarily be dependent upon a human guru since “...the human guru is in reality only an outer representative and ‘substitute’, as it were, of the inner guru...whether or not there is a human guru, the inner guru is always present, since it is one with the very ‘Self’; whether in order to manifest itself to those who are not yet capable of having an immediate consciousness of it, it takes as support a human being, or a ‘non-incarnated’ spiritual influence, is in the final analysis, only a difference of modality that changes nothing essential (124)”.

With all of the foregoing considered, it becomes clear that consideration of the inner work does frame Guenon’s views governing initiation far more than are generally acknowledged, to summarize what this entails, he remarks “Indeed since all knowledge is an identification, it is evident that the individual as such cannot attain to knowledge of what lies beyond the individual domain...any knowledge that can truly be called initiatic results from a communication consciously established with the higher states (207-208)”. This therefore accurately describes both the dilemma of Guenon’s initiation, and the solution. Knowledge is the unification of knower-knowing-the known; but, the individual “as such”, that is proceeding no further than beyond the faculties of individual mode (of which mind is the limit), as he mentions, cannot enter into knowledge of super-individual states; yet, it is by means of initiatic transmission (regular or spontaneous), the presence of a guru, or a “spiritual influence”, that must usher the “first stages”, after which, in tandem with inner work, the chasm is crossed, since it is not mind, but Intellect, the noetic faculty which enters into said communication.

Another debate that still seems to go back and forth about Guenon and possibilities of a Western initiation, involves his rejection of the Christian sacraments as initiatory—the reasons for which he préciséd in both “Perspectives on Initiation”, and in the article “Christianity and Initiation”—but he said more than just that concerning the sacraments, which tends to get short shrift. Yes, he argued that once Christianity “exteriorized” as religion, from tariqa, the sacraments (although efficacious in the religious domain), could not in any event remain efficacious initiatically; so, although remaining beneficial to the human being in individual mode (“securing” and prolonging the human state post mortem, as opposed to possible disintegration of that state), they could not of themselves any longer take the being beyond the human state. What tends to gets ignored though, is that he added to this that they could however become initiatory, if a qualified being has the ability to “transpose” them beyond the domain of religion, in a reversal of the process leading to their exteriorization so to speak, returning them to their principle, noting “The truth is that the sacraments cannot indeed have such effects by themselves...but...the

exoteric rites can, in a certain way, be transposed into another order in the sense that they will serve as a support for the initiatic work itself and that consequently their effects will no longer be limited to the exoteric order (17)". Naturally, their use as such "supports" is contingent upon, as in the various foregoing scenarios, that the person is, in one or more of the senses outlined earlier, already an initiate.

Regular initiation for Guenon, is then inclusive of additional varied nuances, often glossed over. In "Studies in Masonry" he defines regular initiation, as "orthodox", by which he means, not something "static" or "mainstream" (a common, modern reaction to the word), but "correct teaching", in so much that it is correct, because it is whole, complete, originates in metaphysical unity, and points back to it. Far from suggesting something awkwardly rigid, and smacking of the "letter of the law", employing the same argument opposed to the possibility of repetition within the Absolute (total possibility), he declares

One can then say that it is impossible that, for two different individuals, there should be two initiations exactly alike, even from the outward and ritual point of view, and all the more so from the point of view of the inner work of the initiate...This is why we have said that initiate teaching can never take a 'synthetic' form, but on the contrary must always remain open to limitless possibilities in order to preserve the prerogative of the inexpressible (Perspectives, 203-207).

Something of a reciprocal relationship exists between Freemasonry and the Christian sacraments. Excluding for now the variable nuances and "spontaneous" initiations, Guenon does see as one of the only regular initiatic orders surviving in the West existing in Freemasonry—although its character has become virtual; at the same time, the sacraments while effective, are limited to the exoteric. The rites of Masonry lead toward the primordial and super-individual states, yet are latent or deferred; the sacraments pertain to the human individuality and "save", but do not "deliver". The former must be made effective; the latter need be transposed.

Hellenism has transmitted a great deal to the West in general, and not surprisingly both Masonry and Christianity have been heirs, especially of Hellenistic spirituality. In Masonry for instance, where traditionally practiced, a special emphasis is placed upon the "Chamber of Reflection". In the Western and Eastern Churches there is the sacrament of "Confession", "Penance", or "Reconciliation". Algis Uzdaviny's explains in his "Philosophy as Rite of Rebirth" that beginning with Egypt, and flowing into Hellenistic Philosophy, especially among the Stoics, that a particular pagan practice, as part of their method for initiation, ascent, and "returning to the primordial state", included public confessions of their "sins" (for practical purposes, let us substitute the word "privation" for "sin", as "sin" too has lost most of its meaning, signifying to contemporary minds silly sounding infractions against wanton

formalism, such as eating meat on a Friday; whereas the Church had, and the Eastern Church still mostly does, regard sin on a “sliding scale”—that is, the spiritual damage of an act, or act of omission is proportional to the way in which it limits ones spiritual progress, which is why there once were “confessors”—elders advanced in spiritual gymnastics, and learned in life, who could assist one in assessing the impact of such matters. Ironically, while such a notion is repugnant to modern minds, they will spend fortunes on “therapists”, “life coaches”, and “councilors” to express their “inner demons”, in exchange for nothing but more profane information, and drugs that provide no remedy!).

Quite akin to Guenon’s explanation that fundamental to initiatic science is transition from individual mode, toward increasingly less restricted states, Pierre Hadot describes the purpose of spiritual exercises and Philosophy in antiquity as promoting “The movement of the soul from individuality to Universality”. Hadot explains that for our Hellenistic Philosophers, this movement from individuality to Universality is marked by three key concepts and objectives:

1. Coming to see the insignificance of human affairs, profane affairs
2. Developing a certain “contempt” for the notion of death, or how death is understood by the profane world
3. Attaining to “Universal vision” characteristic of “Pure thought”

In his book “Spiritual Exercises”, Hadot examines and discusses the various types of “askesis” or methods employed by the Hellenistic Philosophers. Drawing upon the record of Philo of Alexandria, he relates seven major askesis employed in the ascent, and then consolidates them into three essentials:

1. Prosoche
2. Dialog
3. Learning to die (Philosophy itself)

While certain of these askesis are engaged through rhetorical and dialectical teachings of persuasion, skill in rhetoric and dialectic contribute to mastering one’s inner dialog and concentration, thus lending itself nicely to prosoche. Prosoche, which is “self-attention”, or “mindfulness”, is closely connected with nepsis, spiritual watchfulness, and “Guarding the Heart” (Center)—well enough known to students of Philokalia. It is also the significance behind the Masonic ritual “Chamber of Reflection”, as well as sacramental “Confession”—neither of which, in their deeper meanings constitute a “one time” symbolic

rite, nor an occasional “penance” to “meet ones obligation”—but intended as habitual activity, with increasingly greater strides in success. The choice of beginning here with sacramental confession and the chamber, in connection with inner work aimed at the “making effective” on one hand, and “transposing” on the other, further in relation to prosoche, is deliberate. Confession is the sacrament following baptism; while second in order, it is really only the first requiring an active participation, as baptism, even when performed on an adult, is more of an acquiescence. Confession then leads to reception of the next sacrament, which is Eucharist or Communion—union with the Body of Christ as Church, and union with the “Real Presence” of Christ in the Eucharistic species—which is (among other levels of meaning), an Anamnesis (“Do this in memory of Me”); if “transposed” to the metaphysical (as an aseksis) it becomes Anamnesis of the “Real Presence” of the central “Self”, which previously we observed Guenon identifying as the “inner guru” itself. In this way we might come to understand how a sacrament can “become” initiatic—how, as Guenon wrote, something exoteric can be taken as a “departure point”, and “foundation”, to be “transformed” (another observation that can be drawn from this, is as Guenon often pointed out, that there never can really be any “contradiction” between the exoteric and esoteric orders as the lesser is always included in the higher, and proceeds from it—an important observation, as so many seeking an “esotericism” imagine it to do with meanings that are somehow repudiations of exoteric meanings). As was also noted among Philo’s list, Prosanche is the bedrock of the Philosophical exercises toward ascent.

Hadot explains that for self-attention to begin, it presupposes “examination”; again, what is found in the sacrament under consideration, and occurring in the “Chamber”, where the candidate surrounded by images of death, left alone as if in a tomb, is instructed to consider their life, and prepare a will. And indeed, the chamber is a tomb, in which one dies to the profane world, to be “born” in the Lodge room (emblem of Kosmos/Universality)—which Guenon refers to as “the first death” and “second birth” (second birth for obvious reasons that it occurs after natural birth, and death to the profane world). Per Guenon, this phase of the Initiation process entails a “psychic regeneration”, the re-collection, recollection, anamnesis of the “intellectuality” of primordial man, by “gathering what is sown”. Still, like confession, this stage is but “preparatory” for, as Guenon notes “the second death and third birth” which is a “resurrection”. In a certain way then, although not exact, these relationships drawn between the use of an askesis (prosanche in this account) for the purpose of “transposing” a sacrament, and “actualizing” an initiatic doctrine, might analogically be expressed thus—prosanche/confession is to memory of the Real Presence as prosanche/chamber of reflection is to initiatic birth.

## Guenon's Critique of Theosophy

Theosophy is the new religious movement established in America in the late 1800s by the Russian Jew Helena Blavatsky. Theosophy is described to be esoteric Buddhism together with some original ideas thrown in. Esoteric means that it only treats only those aspects of Buddhism that transcend reason such as reincarnation and the chakras. Some of the original ideas popularized by theosophy involve the astral plane, astral projection, and the levels of the ego. The astral plane is the idea that there is a plane of existence that exists coterminous with our plane of existence and in which Ghosts live.

According to Guénon, there is no principle theosophical teaching, but it is presented as the core of all religion and the “absolute truth.” In addition to Eastern doctrines, theosophy also includes traces of Western doctrines such as Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, and Jewish Kabbalah. It claims to be of Eastern origin but takes on a totally Western character. A lot of the ideas involved are in fact wholly modern. Guénon claims it attempts to displace Christianity from the planet. (THP, 2, 90)

The main goal of theosophy according to Guénon is “progress.” The theosophists believe, for example in four-dimensional space and will go even further with higher dimensions such as seven-dimensional space. Theosophists typically regard their doctrine to be “transcendent materialism” in which the only thing that exists is matter. Matter, space and motion constitute the core of the universe. The Theosophists also have a progressive version of reincarnation. (THP, 101-104) Transcendent materialism means that they believe in the metaphysical but under a reductionist lense. For example, the law of attraction could be subscribed to but is interpreted under a reductionist lense. Heaven and hell may exist, but these are real physical places that people go to in embodied form. When it comes to higher dimensional space, this is where the conception of the hypercube originates that we see at times in India.

Blavatsky had a correspondence with a mysterious group of figures called the Mahatmas- which I assume was psychic correspondence, but which was also maintained through the writing of letters. The Mahatmas are the highest-ranking members of the occult hierarchy which according to the theosophists secretly govern the world. There are seven of these Mahatmas and they were initially known as “brothers” but changed to “adepts,” (borrowed from the Rosicrucians) to mean those who have achieved the highest rank in their hierarchy. They are also sometimes known as “masters” (THP, 38). The theosophists regard the Mahatmas to be living men located in Tibet, but who have developed superpowers.

## Guenon's Critique

### No real Mahatmas

Guénon clearly does not like Theosophy and throughout the text goes at great lengths to critique it and show its pseudo-religious character. For one thing, the historical accounts given by Blavatsky were often fabricated. For example, the trip to Tibet that she supposedly took initially never happened (THP, 21). Guénon maintains that most of Blavatsky's many spirit guides throughout her times at the theosophical society were in fact fabrications based off of people and esoteric societies she had been in contact with. For example, John King, her initial spirit guide was a person not a spirit and she never had contact with HB of L (THP, 11-13, 15-19). Blavatsky's "spiritual guides" - John King and the Mahatmas- only actually reflect various people that Blavatsky had met throughout her life. Some of these guides and esoteric organizations had used Blavatsky as a cover, while others Blavatsky used for her own benefit. Thus, those who believe she made it all up and did everything by herself were just as mistaken as those who believe her claims concerning the spirit guides (THP, 24).

In reality, the word Mahatma cannot designate a person, for it in reality designates a purely metaphysical principle that cannot be applied to human beings. There is evidence that the letters sent from the Mahatmas were in fact taken from other sources. For example, an article appearing in an occult magazine that was supposedly a letter from one of the Mahatmas turned out to be an article written by a professor at New York. This caused Blavatsky to switch to a new Mahatma, who was never referred to accept in appendices. The Mahatmas were not simply invented out of thin air by Blavatsky, but were inspired by others (THP, 39-44). In fact, Guénon says that sometimes she declared that she had made it all up in times of desperation. Blavatsky was in touch with the Rosicrucians, of which she translated some of the ideas about the adepts. For example, the book *L'Etoile Flamboyante* was a book written about several high masonic grades that borrows from the writings of an esteemed Rosicrucian. The idea of adepts who live for ever is also borrowed by some documents of western esotericists. Indeed, the idea that the adepts are located in the middle-East also comes from these same sources in which Western adepts have been regarded to leave for India. Thus, whenever Blavatsky located information about masters in old Rosicrucian texts, she incorrectly interpolated this as about the Mahatmas. (THP, 45-49) Indeed, Guénon said in 1913 he proposed a meeting with one of the figures associated with the Mahatmas who was supposedly located in the Balkans and when the meeting was arranged. a Western theosophist was all that showed up saying the supposed individual was unable to accompany them.

### Sources are actually fully Eastern and not Mahatmas

Guénon claims the doctrines involved are in fact taken from Eastern sources and compiled into a "wholly" modern framework- which is full of contradictions. Where do Blavatsky's original ideas come from if not from the revelations of the Mahatmas? She simply acquired her work through her travels. Partly arising from the likes of Jacob Bohme and Eliphas Levi and various kabbalistic and hermetic treatises. There are in fact letters from Olcott to Blavatsky recommending various rare Eastern and

Western texts. (THP, 82, 83) Blavatsky as a librarian, purchased and kept many rare books, the contents of which appeared in her main written books. These books had been manipulated and changed to her own liking- which is thoroughly full of contradictions. These were thrown together in an incoherent manner in which some interesting documents are found in a mass of uncontrolled jargon. (THP, 84) The original ideas obtained by Blavatsky were thus full of contradictions.

#### Defense against transcendent materialism

This is in contrast to the Easterners who don't even have a conception of matter (THP, 101). Indeed, it is difficult for the Westerner to understand Eastern conceptions with the advent of matter in the West. The Eastern conceptions are attempting to gain access into the fundamental nature of reality through speculation without a notion of matter. Similar to the Schellingian interpretation of mythology, this is very often obtained in the present moment- possibly with the advent of drugs. Indeed, it is difficult for a theosophist to understand the true nature of things when they have not had the drug experience. The drug experience gives first had acquaintance with the metaphysical. I personally have had experience with drugs and the outcome was an understanding of the metaphysical. Certain mythologies have their own more materialistic notion of mythology that could possibly be interpreted along materialistic lines, but this is certainly not how things have been reached in the East and a lot of times in the West. When it comes to magic, alchemy and astrology, Catholics have for the most part always interpreted these along nonreductionist lines. The Catholics make clear from the beginning that the soul is a Non reductionist entity that departs from the body upon death and enters a metaphysical domain. In addition, according to Guénon, there are clear sources from the Indian document that the different previous yuga periods had no materialistic component to them whatsoever. This is in contrast to Blavatsky's cyclic understanding.

## Rebuttal of Rene Guenon's Critique of Modern Theosophy

D. Johnson

The objective of this article on René Guénon's critique of Modern Theosophy, which he terms Theosophism is to outline his analysis in *Le théosophisme: Histoire d'une pseudo-religion*, and not to react to it defensively. Guénon calls the theosophy of the Theosophical Society generally pseudo-Theosophy (Theosophism) and 'pseudo-Christianity.' He specifically terms Mrs. Annie Besant's theosophy, 'pseudo-Christianity' and 'neo-Christianity.' The T.S. in his time after Blavatsky's death took on the strange amalgamation of a quasi-Catholic, Neo-Hindu theology, which provided him the arsenal for his critique.

### Critique of Guénon's Critique

So, with the use of the term Pseudo-Theosophy, that Blavatsky herself coined, used by Guenon to describe Modern Theosophy in general, we're all creating similar terms now. The result from the analysis is at best a conjectural study of modern Theosophy.

Guenon's critique does not separate the periods or put the conflicts within the T.S. into perspective, because Guénon doesn't view the T.S. associated Theosophy as "genuine (traditional) theosophy."

Wikipedia's article on Theosophy also for example speaks of certain Theosophists themselves using the term pseudo-theosophy or neo-theosophy as "originally derogatory," which is gaslighting, ignoring the fact H.P. Blavatsky coined it herself to describe new fanciful, exaggerated beliefs taken from Theosophy in her time she was defending against.

The term theosophy, the Preface of *Le théosophisme: Histoire d'une pseudo-religion* (Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion) explains, is a common denomination for a wide variety of doctrines, that are all of the same type, or originating from the same basic ideas.

The commonality between the systems maintaining those doctrines involves their esoteric conceptions of a religious or mystical mode of conveying knowledge through *hypónoia*, or inner meanings. They are of Western tradition, it is argued, and its basis is Christianity under its variety of forms. Therefore, the traditionalists maintain the historical significance of the term, as opposed to the Theos. Movement, which Rene Guénon dubs 'Theosophism.'

Guénon's work is vitriolic, Richard Smoley said in his *Against Blavatsky: Rene Guenon's Critique of Theosophy*. This was similar to the works of Buddhist convert, Arthur Lillie's *Madame Blavatsky and Her "theosophy": A Study* (1895). In a very different manner, Arthur Lillie argued that Theosophy was a constructed "pseudo-religion."

Famed persons of this parochial line of schools are named, despite there being not a single 'eastern' philosopher on the list. As René Guénon's thoughts on the crisis of the modern world was that the West's anomalous advancement, which he considered a regression, had a certain disdain for eastern civilization. It was due to the assertion, that the "Westerners," i.e., Europeans, only considered itself to be a civilization, and the pinnacle exemplar of a civilization, based on purely material lines, which he rejected. Since the nineteenth-century Theosophists were getting the peoples of Europe and the Americas to comprehend the same, despite the research of the Orientalists and adventurers, what was the angst of the Traditionalists?

Well, firstly Guenon was a sheikh of the Islamic tradition, and H.P.B. thought that Islam was obstructionist along with Christianity, particularly Catholicism/Jesuitism dueling for rule with the Muslims. Is the 'Theosophy' of the Theosophical Associates and Mahatmas a counterfeit "Pseudo-Theosophy" (theosophism), or is that which Guenon calls Traditional Theosophy (or Perennialism) the genuine line for our study?

Jakob Boehme, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, Swedenborg, are seen as traditional theosophy, but they only arrived on the scene less than five centuries prior. For those more grounded in orthodoxy, there are other influences and sources they rely directly upon. Guénon's critique, or those that acquire his views towards Theosophy have aided in the consequent fall in the repute of both 'Theosophists,' and 'Traditionalists.'

Traditionalists today, even Julius Evola and the Perennialists have been somewhat adopted by the New Right intellectual milieu. The same respects are however not extended to the pioneers of modern Theosophical Movement, with those of the Radical and Traditionalist Right (see Perennialism and Fascism) of course rejecting Theosophy and any scent of Liberalism, and alternative Western spirituality on the other hand.

According to the opinions expressed by Rene Guenon then, we are supposed to retire 'modern Theosophy' to the dust bin of history.

The Preface adds, Theosophism, or the Theosophical Society makes pretensions to esotericism it cannot verify, and its original tendency being "anti-Christian," does not put it doctrinally in line with the schools, especially the Neoplatonic nor the 'Philadelphian Society,' to which are claimed to be its predecessors. Guénon aims to dismantle the whole of Theosophical influence.

However, Guénon's work should be now put into considerable repute, in that first, *Le théosophisme: Histoire d'une pseudo-religion*, alluding to this neologism, 'Theosophism,' is mostly aimed at the changes in policy, doctrine, and expression beginning right in the time, H.P. Blavatsky died, that exploded soon after. Alice Bailey was a member at Adyar. Charles W. Leadbeater and Annie Besant were members. The latter two joined the T.S. in the time H.P.B. was alive, and interacted with her, but their actions and beliefs must not be glossed over.

Rene Guénon does not utilize other works. K. Paul Johnson, in his books argued that the Mahatmas were dupes, prestidigitators and confederates, or H.P.B. herself. An author and theosophist, Jeanine G. Miller, in her "The Blazing Dragon of Wisdom," puts researchers to difficult task, in asking how could a single person do all she did at a time where scholarship on the topics she covered were either scarce, or plainly not even known yet.

Guénon's answer: H.P.B was a master at suggestion (a hypnotist), with aiding confederates and dupes.

*Le théosophisme: Histoire d'une pseudo-religion* does raise some legitimate points to consider, and there are problems, but it is conjectural. You would have to already believe she was just a dupe.

#### The Miracle Club in Cairo

From 1870-72, H.P. Blavatsky became known as a medium in Cairo (Egypt), helping to form a society of spiritualists composed of other mediums, with member meetings, a reading room, and a library of spiritual works. It was called, 'the miracle club.' The profession as a medium Guenon argues, already puts her into repute for him, whether real phenomena or not, since the phenomena of spiritualists are known to have been simulated by hoaxes. This spiritualist dupery has transferred in the contemporary

period into the ideas and practices of self-identified ‘star-seeds,’ who purport to having channeled intergalactic extraterrestrials. They don’t even use cheese-cloth now.

When accused of fraud, the Miracle Club fell, and H.P.B. left Cairo, returning to Paris, but lived with her brother intolerably until leaving to the United States.

Two years later, Blavatsky founds the Theosophical Society. This is the beginning of the high suspicion of Guénon.

H.P. Blavatsky claims to have been sent to America to demonstrate the fallacy and deception of the spiritualist theory in a letter to Stain Moses, and in a letter to Solovyof in February 1886 to try out her psychic abilities. Guénon leaves no source for the Solovyof letter, and the latter himself forged letters of Blavatsky from within the T.S. as a member, in hopes of exposing her. It is merely the narrative of Blavatsky, that Guenon has accepted, as opposed to any other narrative. So the view of Guenon is simply, that H.P.B. was a con, and thus Modern Theosophy is a fraud.

Vera Petrovna de Zhelihovsky relays in her letters sent to her by her sister, Blavatsky. H.P.B. says to Vera:

“Humanity has lost its faith and its higher ideals; materialism and pseudo-science have slain them. The children of this age have no longer faith; they demand proof, proof founded on a scientific basis – and they shall have it. Theosophy, the source of all human religions, will give it to them.” (Vera Petrovna de Zhelihovsky, “Helena Petrovna Blavatsky,” Lucifer, London, Nov. 15, 1894, April 15, 1895)

Soon after, Vera says her sister began sending letters more on the abuses of spiritism, spiritual materialism, medium séances, etc.

Vera adds later, that her sister had wrote:

“If I have attached myself to a certain group of Theosophists, a branch of the Indo-Aryan Brotherhood, which has been formed here,” she wrote to us from New York, “it is precisely because they fight against

all the excesses, the superstitions, the abuses of the false prophets of the dead letter – against the numberless Calcheses of all the exoteric religions, as well as against the maundurings of spirits. We are spiritualists, if you choose so to call us, but not after the American manner, but after the ancient rites of Alexandria." (Vera Petrovna de Zhelihovsky, "Helena Petrovna Blavatsky," Lucifer, London, Nov. 15, 1894, April 15, 1895)

#### Western Occultists rejecting Reincarnation

It is precisely this link to the Alexandrian Neoplatonists, that Rene Guenon rejects Theosophy, to refuse its legitimacy. It is true, that the strength, condition and literature of Theosophy depends upon the collective knowledge and skill of the scholars of its associations. If they are not up to par, this brings Theosophists into question. Rene Guenon speaks of the H.B. & L., while describing the Theosophical doctrines as attempts to pervert the Western mind. He claims, that the "real Adepts" do not teach the doctrines of karma and reincarnation. Reincarnation is a modern doctrine Guénon believed, as he so casually brushed everything about the Theosophists. Did he learn this animosity from the Catholics? This isn't true, and the doctrine of reincarnation existed in the Middle East.

So, the argument is that, the Theosophical doctrines can't claim the torch from the Alexandrian school, because it adopts a special conception of evolution, which he argues is wholly modern.

Sylvia L. Cranston's *Reincarnation (A Compilation)*, 1967 easily dismantles this argument. The Secret Doctrine does not even hold the same popular conception of reincarnation, so that critique is superficial. It has been shown to date to an older position within Vedic atomism.

#### Traditionalism vs. "Theosophism"

Theosophists gradually shifted from focus on practical occultism to emphasizing the Theosophical Society as a philanthropic and philosophical society. Guénon argued these Theosophists lacked actual knowledge, and that they were not teachers.

"Why come to the theosophists for knowledge?" Guenon asks. Aleister Crowley criticized the Theosophists similarly, defining them as those who speak of Yoga, but do not practice.

If we get technical, the term theosophist does connote a profession, or a professional in the theurgic operations, hence Adepts, and not amateurs, or arm-chairs.

Rene Guénon expected by the dignity of that title Theosophist, which H.S. Olcott in his diary notes reveal was picked out of a number of other ill-fitting titles, that “theosophists” should be masterful teachers. Guenon focuses much on traditional orthodoxies as legitimate. Ultimately, at the end of Rene Guénon’s critique, there is no glory for either the model of Traditionalism or “Theosophism.”

Of Arya Samaj’s Dayananda Saraswati, it is researched by Guénon, that Dayananda broke with H.P. Blavatsky. It is because Dayananda considered her a ‘trickster’ only knowledgeable in the method of mesmerism, and lacking actual knowledge of the occult science of the ancient Yogis, and involved in dexterous conjurations.

The suspicion of Guénon throughout Pseudo-Theosophy is the legitimacy of the Theosophical Society as a claimant in connection with true Adepts of the Orient, particularly in the esoteric lineage of Buddhism. What is strange is that, in the chapter called The Theosophical Society and Rosicrucianism, Rene Guénon settles his whole angst within a few sentences, about true illuminati versus false Rosicrucianism.

“It is not our intention here to go into the controversies related to the origin and the history of the true and false Rose-Cross. These are veritable puzzles that have never been satisfactorily resolved, and about which writers who claim to be more or less Rosicrucian seem not to know much more than others.”  
(René Guénon, Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion, pg. 31)

On another note, Guénon continues to explain, that he thinks Blavatsky was a passive medium influenced by mind-controlling occult individuals, and that she used mesmerism on her subjects.

“This is an opportune place to point out that the names Mme. Blavatsky’s so-called ‘spiritual guides’—first John King, then Serapis, and finally the ‘Kashmiri brother’—in short only express the various influences that successfully worked on her. This is the very real backdrop to the wild imaginings, with which she surrounded herself (...) one can rightly conclude that in many circumstances Mme Blavatsky was above all a ‘subject’ or an instrument in the hands of occult individuals or groups using her

personality as a cover, while others in turn were instruments in her hands." (Rene Guénon, *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion*, Second Impression 2004, pg. 24)

He makes her seem like a woman possessed on the loose! Guénon lastly begins railing on Besant's 'neo-Christianity.'

Ramalingam Pillai's vindication of the T.S.

We end in a similar conundrum with the Theosophical Society. After demonstrating supporting evidence (*The Identity of Koot Hoomi of Kashmir, College and Travels*) that the 'Kashmiri brother' was in-fact a real mortal under a pseudonym, René Guénon would be equally confused by other evidences put before him, pointing to the integrity and validity of H.P.B.'s narrative and the Theosophical Movement being inspired by such men of a brotherhood (see *Tamil Swami Ramalingam Pillai's Prophecy*). This is even more apparent in Russian Philosophy Vladimir Solov'yov and Charles J. Ryan: H.P.B. did not Invent the Adepts.

Despite the influence of Traditionalism, and other Perennialists, Guénon's critique helped nobody. We continue to see reflections of his attitude in others today towards Theosophy. See 2016's Special Edition discussed in Georges Méautis: "Theosophy and Theosophism" Dissects Rene Guenon's Critique (1922 article from *Theosophy and Theosophism: Response to a Criticism of Theosophy* by René Guénon, Paris: Publications Théosophiques. Trans. and Intro., Godwin, Joscelyn. FOTA Newsletter, Special Summer, 2016).

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## Against Blavatsky: Rene Guenon's Critique of Theosophy

By R. Smoley

Theosophical Society - Richard Smoley is editor of *Quest: Journal of the Theosophical Society in America* and a frequent lecturer for the Theosophical Society. Over the past two decades, academic scholars have begun to investigate the long-neglected field of esoteric spirituality. They have singled out five figures as the chief guiding lights of Western esotericism in the twentieth century: H.P. Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, C.G. Jung, G.I. Gurdjieff, and Rene Guenon. Of these, Guenon is by far the least-known. Reclusive and contemptuous of the modern world, he did little to make himself famous. Nevertheless, even before his death in 1951, he had become a cult figure, and over the last half-century his influence has only increased—particularly among those who regard contemporary civilization as a spiritual blight.

Guenon's thought resembles Theosophy in certain important ways. They share a common emphasis on a central esoteric teaching that underlies all religions, and they even agree about many aspects of this teaching. Nonetheless, Guenon was extremely vitriolic about Theosophy and denounced it at great length in his 1921 book *Le theosophisme: Histoire d'une pseudo-religion*. This work was not published in English until 2003, when it appeared under the title *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion*. This translation is not entirely accurate. The original French title refers not to "theosophy" (theosophie) but "theosophism" (theosophisme), a word coined by Guenon to suggest that Blavatsky's Theosophy had nothing to do with genuine theosophy as practiced by the Western esoteric traditions but was a counterfeit, and a dangerous one at that.

Born in Blois, France, in 1886, Guenon had a conventional education in mathematics. In his youth he began to explore occult currents in Paris and was initiated into esoteric groups connected with Freemasonry, Taoism, Advaita Vedanta, and Sufism. Like Blavatsky, he held that there was a universal esoteric tradition that was the source of all religions, but he differed very much with her about what constituted a genuine continuation of this lineage. Theosophy, he insisted, was not. Why was he so contemptuous of it? The question becomes more perplexing when we learn that Guenon was first introduced to esotericism by Gerard Encausse (better known under his pseudonym Papus), who was a correspondent of HPB and cofounder of the Theosophical Society in France (Quinn, 111).

Ironically, one reason for Guenon's attitude may be that he and Blavatsky were in many ways not so far apart. In fact scholar Mark Sedgwick, whose book *Against the Modern World* is the best introduction to the impact of Guenon's thought, sees Theosophy as one of Guenon's chief influences (Sedgwick, 40—44). We have already seen that Blavatsky and Guenon agreed about the existence of a universal esoteric tradition. They both made liberal use of Sanskrit terms in expounding their ideas, and they agreed about

the dangers of spiritualism, arguing that spiritualistic seances do not enable one to make contact with dead individuals but merely with their astral shells, which have been shucked off as the spirit ascends to higher planes. Guenon devoted an entire book, *L'erreur spirite* ("The Spiritist Error"), to this issue. In it he writes: "It is well known that what can be evoked [in a seance] does not at all represent the real, personal being, which is henceforth beyond reach because it has passed to another state of existence...but only the inferior elements that the individual has in a manner left behind in the terrestrial domain following the dissolution of the human composite which we call death" (Guenon, *L'erreur spirite*, 54—55).\*

This bears more than a faint resemblance to Theosophical teaching. Guenon himself quotes Blavatsky as saying that spiritualist phenomena are frequently due to astral elementals or "shells" that have been left behind by the departed. Nonetheless, he insists that the Theosophists are wrong: "The Theosophists believe that a 'shell' is an 'astral cadaver,' that is, the remains of a decomposing body. And, apart from the fact that this body is thought not to have been abandoned by the spirit for a more or less long time after death, rather than being essentially tied to the 'physical body,' the very conception of 'invisible bodies' seems to us to be greatly in error" (Guenon, *L'erreur spirite*, 57). While Guenon admits that the distinction between his view and Blavatsky's is a subtle one, it is difficult to see any distinction at all except in terminology. But this is a common problem in most forms of thought, particularly esoterism: the smaller a difference is, the more vehemently one insists upon it. The history of religion offers countless examples.

Guenon also contends that HPB talked out of both sides of her mouth regarding spiritualism. And in fact she was deeply engaged in the spiritualist movement in the early 1870s. Speaking of her later claims that mediums are generally either fraudulent or seriously imbalanced, he writes: "It seems that she was faced with the following dilemma: either she was only a fake medium at the time of her 'miracles clubs' or else she was a sick person" (Guenon, *Theosophy*, 115—16). Blavatsky's supporters may reply that she always intended to sift the truth from the false in spiritualism—to acknowledge the reality of life after death and even to a degree of spiritualistic phenomena, while showing that these are of a low and sinister kind. One letter of hers, dated to 1872, says, "[The spiritualists'] spirits are no spirits but spooks—rags, the cast off second skins of their personalities that the dead shed in the astral light as serpents shed theirs on earth, leaving no connection between the reptile and his previous garment" (Blavatsky, *Letters*, 1:20). Another letter, however, written in 1875, contends, "Those that seek to overturn the truth of Spiritualism will find a furious Dragon in me and a merciless exposer whoever they are" (Blavatsky, *Letters*, 1:101).

What HPB really meant to accomplish by participating in the spiritualist movement is hard to fathom, especially since anyone wanting to collect contradictory statements in her writings, on this subject or on

many others, could readily do so. Nevertheless, her attitudes toward spiritualism in the last fifteen years of her life are hard to distinguish from Guenon's.

It is quite another matter when it comes to two other Theosophical doctrines: karma and reincarnation. In both cases, Guenon insists that the Theosophical view is a pure fabrication and has nothing to do with genuine Eastern teaching: "The idea of reincarnation . . . , like that of evolution, is a very modern idea; it appears to have materialized around 1830 or 1848 in certain French socialist circles" (Guenon, Theosophy, 104). This may be true of the term "reincarnation" per se, but the teaching can be found in the West as far back as Pythagoras, and is discussed at length in Plato's Republic and Phaedo, not to mention its long heritage in Hinduism and Buddhism.

Guenon denies all this. Regarding the transmigration of human souls into animals, he says:

In reality, the ancients never conceived of such transmigration, any more than they did of a human into other humans, which is how one might define reincarnation. There are expressions, more or less symbolic, that could give rise to such misunderstandings, but only when one does not know what they are really saying, which is this: There are psychic elements in the human being which separate themselves after death, and which can pass into other living beings, human or animal, although this has no more importance than the fact that, after the dissolution of the same individual, the elements that made him up can be used to make up other bodies (Guenon, L'erreur spirite, 206—07).

Unfortunately, the ancient accounts of reincarnation say nothing of the kind. At the end of the Republic, Plato tells the myth of Er, a soldier who has a kind of near-death experience in which he learns the fates of individuals after death (Plato, Republic, 614b-621d). In one famous passage, Er sees the dead choosing their lots for new incarnations. Odysseus, the shrewdest of men, refuses lives of riches and honor and instead chooses that of an ordinary citizen. However "symbolic" this story might be, it is hard to see how it might accommodate itself to a theory like Guenon's. One could make the same point about a similar myth in the Phaedo and about the teachings of the Orphic and Pythagorean mysteries, to the extent that we know anything specific about them.

Guenon's own views about the fate of the spirit after death are complex. Defining transmigration in what he considers the true sense, he contends, "It is not a matter of a return to the same state of existence....but on the contrary, the passage of the being to other states of existence, which are defined...by completely different conditions from those to which the human being is subject....Whoever speaks of transmigration is essentially speaking about a change of state. This is what all the traditional

doctrines of the East teach, and we have many reasons to believe that this was also the teaching of the 'mysteries' of antiquity; it is the same thing even in heterodox doctrines such as Buddhism" (Guenon, *L'erreur spirite*, 211).\*\*

Guenon conceives of existence as a kind of three-dimensional grid, with a vertical axis transecting an infinite number of horizontal planes. The vertical axis represents the Self, the true essence of a given being; each of the innumerable horizontal planes constitutes a separate plane of manifestation. Human life on earth is only one of these planes. A given being can manifest itself only once on any particular plane. Therefore you cannot be born more than once as a human.

Like much of Guenon's thought, this is rigorously precise and would seem to be irrefutable except for one thing. Guenon assumes that any given plane—such as earthly, human life—is static. But in fact there is nothing to prove that this is so. On the contrary, the earth and earthly life are themselves changing form ceaselessly, whether we look at them from the perspective of geological ages or even of human history. The possibilities for human life on earth today are not the same as they were in ad 1000 or will be in ad 3000. You can never be born onto the same earth twice, any more than you can be born as the same person twice.

Moreover, there is little evidence for Guenon's claim that his view is the true teaching of Hinduism and Buddhism. Teachers of these lineages frequently speak of reincarnation in ways that are far more similar to the Theosophical view than to his. The Dalai Lama writes: "There have been and are found at the present time, many incidents illustrating rebirth, from many countries in the world. From time to time small children talk about their work in a previous life and can name the family in which they lived. Sometimes it is possible to check such cases and so prove that the facts remembered by the child are not at all nonsense but are indeed true" (Dalai Lama, 28—29). This does not jibe with Guenon's claims that incarnation as a human takes place only once, yet the Dalai Lama's status as the exponent of a "traditional" doctrine is far higher than Guenon's own.

For a Hindu perspective, we might turn to Paramhansa Yogananda's classic *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Yogananda quotes his guru, Sri Yukteswar, as saying, "Beings with unredeemed earthly karma are not permitted after astral death to go the high causal sphere of cosmic ideas, but must shuttle to and fro from the physical and astral worlds only" (Yogananda, 428). The process of shuttling to and fro from the physical world would suggest that physical incarnation is not a once-only option. And again, the credentials of both Yogananda and Sri Yukteswar as transmitters of traditional teaching are far higher than Guenon's.

Guenon's denunciation of Theosophy includes its teachings on karma, "by which [say the Theosophists] the conditions of each existence are determined by actions committed during previous existences." He counters: "The word 'karma' quite simply means 'action' and nothing else. It has never had the sense of causality, and even less has it ever designated that special causation whose nature we have just indicated" (Guenon, Theosophy, 107-08). While it is true that karma can simply mean "action," as Guenon says, it is used in more senses than that.

Again, practically every discussion of these matters by a Hindu or Buddhist teacher agrees not with Guenon, but with Theosophy. Pandit Rajmani Tigunait of the Himalayan Institute writes, "Each school of Hindu philosophy accepts the immutable law of karma, which states that for every effect there is a cause, and for every action there is a reaction. A man performs his actions and receives remunerations for them" (Tigunait, 24). As we have seen above, Sri Yukteswar also uses the word in this sense.

Other charges of Guenon's are equally erroneous. In one footnote he remarks, "The Theosophists reproduce...a confusion of the 'uninitiated' orientalists: Lamaism has never been a part of Buddhism" (Guenon, Theosophy, 130). But here it is Guenon who is reproducing a confusion of the "orientalists"—the nineteenth-century European scholars who were the first to treat Eastern religion in an academic fashion. The term "Lamaism" does not exist, or have any equivalent, in Tibetan; in fact it is merely a name for Tibetan Buddhism that was invented by the orientalists. As far back as 1835, the scholar Isaac Jacob Schmidt declared, "It hardly seems necessary to remark that Lamaism is a purely European invention and is not known in Asia." Even by Guenon's time the term had fallen into disrepute (Lopez, 15). Elsewhere, challenging the existence of HPB's Mahatmas, Guenon insists, "the very word 'Mahatma' never had the meaning she attributed to it, for in reality the word indicates a metaphysical principle and cannot be applied to human beings" (Guenon, Theosophy, 39). This contention is refuted by the practice of all of India, which uses the word to refer to the revered Mohandas Ghandi.

Having seen all this, we are led to ask what prompted Guenon's assault. One answer lies in this statement: "If so-called Theosophical doctrine is examined as a whole, it is at once apparent that the central point is the idea of 'evolution.' Now this idea is absolutely foreign to Easterners, and even in the West it is of quite recent date" (Guenon, Theosophy, 97). He adds that the Theosophists regard reincarnation "as the means by which evolution is effected, first for each particular human and consequently for all humanity and even for the entire universe" (Guenon, Theosophy, 104). Moreover, he writes, "We have...presented the doctrine of evolution as constituting the very core of the entire Theosophical doctrine" (Guenon, Theosophy, 293).

Here Guenon stands on firmer ground. The concept of an evolving humanity in an evolving universe is very difficult to find in traditional Eastern texts. Blavatsky seems to be aware of this when she writes, "The day may come...when the 'Natural Selection,' as taught by Darwin and Herbert Spencer, will form only a part, in its ultimate modification, of our Eastern doctrine of Evolution, which will be Manu and Kapila esoterically explained" (The Secret Doctrine, I, 600; emphasis Blavatsky's). As the Theosophist Anna F. Lemkow observes, "Blavatsky integrated the idea of evolution with the venerable idea of the hierarchy of being" (Lemkow, 128; emphasis Lemkow's).

Before Blavatsky's time, while the doctrines of karma and reincarnation were known to the East and at least to some in the West, these ideas did not entail evolution. (One tantalizing exception appears in Rumi's famous lines "I died a mineral, and became a plant. I died a plant and rose an animal. I died an animal and I was man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?") That is, an individual monad was not thought to progress or evolve merely by virtue of going through endless incarnations; rather incarnation was viewed as a ceaseless whirligig that runs endlessly round and round and from which only moksha or liberation provides an exit. This is the gist of the Wheel of Life in Buddhist art, which shows the six lokas or realms—those of the gods, demigods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and denizens of hell—as a cycle of bondage whose chains are the Three Poisons of desire, anger, and obliviousness. By merit an individual may mount to the abode of the gods, with their abundance of pleasures; but when his good karma is exhausted, he falls back down to the hell realms and starts all over again. Only enlightenment can break the cycle. The Wheel of Fortune card in the Tarot contains a similar teaching.

Theosophy, by contrast, often portrays evolution as more or less automatic. By passing through countless incarnations throughout all the races, round, and globes, eventually each monad will attain divinity. Esoteric development is meant chiefly to accelerate this process for those who want to move faster—ideally with the goal of service to others. This version of evolution differs from the conventional Darwinian view in that the latter has no direction or purpose; it is merely the blind and adventitious result of adaptation to natural circumstances.

This integration of evolution with the esoteric doctrine may be the most seminal idea that Theosophy has introduced to world culture. It has been echoed and amplified by any number of thinkers—Henri Bergson, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Alfred North Whitehead, Sri Aurobindo—who have little or no connection with Theosophy per se. It has been picked up by the New Age movement and its present-day successors: The Reality Sandwich Web site, for example, has the tag line "Evolving consciousness, bite by bite."

Whether or not the Theosophical view of evolution is right, it seems harmless enough. Why should Guenon have hated it so intensely? For Guenon, tradition is the *ne plus ultra* of human life. He conceives of tradition as a spiritual hierarchy, with higher knowledge emanating from a now-hidden spiritual center to all of humankind through the "orthodox" traditions, among whom he includes (with many caveats and qualifications) the great world religions as well as certain other lines such as Freemasonry. In the present age, the Kali Yuga, the age of darkness, this transmission of traditional knowledge—the "doctrine," as he often styles it—has become almost completely blocked. Because this is the result of a long cosmic cycle, there is not a great deal one can do about it except wait for its end and in the meantime find refuge in one or another of the last holdouts of genuine tradition. Guenon took his own advice. In 1930 he moved to Cairo, where he converted to Islam and lived until his death in 1951.

For Guenon, the idea of evolution is pernicious because it denies the truth about the present era. We are not in an ascending arc toward greater consciousness; we are at the very nadir of a cycle, in what he called "the reign of quantity" (the title of his most famous book), and to pretend that we are evolving is more than deluded; it smacks of the handiwork of sinister—"counterinitiatic"—forces (see, e.g., Guenon, *Theosophy*, 272n.).

Still other charges of Guenon's against Theosophy are true, but most readers today would hesitate to take his side on the issues. He correctly contends, for example, that the Theosophical Society in India struggled against the caste system, adding, "Europeans generally display so much hostility to caste because they are incapable of understanding the profound principles on which it rests" (Guenon, *Theosophy*, 276). It is true that the Vedas, the Laws of Manu, and the Bhagavad Gita all validate the caste system on the grounds that each of the castes represent one of the bodily parts of the cosmic man. But there are probably not many today who would want to support such a system, no matter how many holy texts endorse it.

There are more elements to Guenon's critique of Theosophy than I can do justice to here, principally his denial of HPB's bona fides and of the existence of the Masters. Dealing with these issues—which have been explored from any number of angles—is beyond the scope of this article.

What can we make of all this? To begin with, Guenon deserves his place among the foremost esotericists of the twentieth century. His metaphysical writings—such as *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedanta*, *The Multiple States of Being*, *The Symbolism of the Cross*—are models of depth and lucidity in a field that is overgrown with profuse and meaningless verbiage. But in a curious way Guenon's greatest strength is also his greatest weakness. His view of "traditional" metaphysics is of a Cartesian clarity and precision (although Guenon would have hated the analogy). And yet it is precisely

this Cartesian precision that constitutes the chief problem with his thought. It cannot accommodate anything that does not fit into its elegantly geometrical grid, that partakes of the untidiness of ordinary reality; hence Guenon's relentless and indiscriminate hatred of the modern world. Everything of the Kali Yuga is reprehensible. There is nothing to do but hide in one of the last holdouts of "tradition" until a new age dawns.

It is not a hopeful vision; or rather its hope is based on the complete and utter ruin of the world that we see around us. Years ago one former Traditionalist (as Guenon's followers are often known) confessed to me that he had to drop it all because it was making him too depressed. Some Traditionalists have not been satisfied with Guenon's rather passive position and have sought to undermine what they see as the evil, materialistic milieu of the contemporary West. Thus in Europe Traditionalism has often fueled an impulse toward extreme rightist politics. One well-known Traditionalist, the Romanian scholar of comparative religions Mircea Eliade, supported the fascist Legion of the Archangel Michael (which he unsuccessfully tried to influence along Traditionalist lines) in pre—World War II Romania (Sedgwick, 113—15); another, the Italian nobleman Julius Evola, was not only connected with Mussolini's Fascist party (which he also tried to turn in a Traditionalist direction, equally unsuccessfully; he would later make the same attempt with Germany's Nazi party) but served as the doyen of far right elements in postwar Europe, some of them terrorists (Sedgwick, 98—109; 179—87). Still another form of Traditionalism penetrated to Russia during and after the Soviet era, where it mutated into an increasingly influential movement called Neo-Eurasianism, which holds that Russia should dominate the Eurasian land mass as a counterweight to American influence (Sedgwick, ch. 12).

Traditionalism has also fueled the anti-Western reaction in the Muslim world. While Traditionalism is an extremely obscure philosophy in the West, "in Iran and Turkey Traditionalism occupies a far more important position in public discourse than is the case elsewhere," as Mark Sedgwick observes on his blog. In prerevolutionary Iran, the Traditionalist scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr was a protege of the Shah, under whose patronage Nasr established the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy as a Traditionalist bastion. Nasr's Traditionalism backfired in his native country: it helped inspire the Islamic revolution of 1979, forcing him to emigrate to the U.S., where today he is a professor of Islamic studies at the George Washington University.

In the English-speaking world, Traditionalism has been more benign and less politicized. Its most prominent advocate in the U.S. is Huston Smith, author of *The World's Religions*, who published a book in 1976 entitled *Forgotten Truth: The Common Vision of the World's Religions* containing his exposition of Guenon's thought (including a chapter echoing Guenon's critique of evolution called "Hope, Yes; Progress, No.") In Britain, the most prominent adherent of this school is the Prince of Wales, who set up the Traditionalist-oriented Temenos Academy in 1990 as an umbrella for his cultural projects (Sedgwick, 214).

There has even been some recent interpenetration between Traditionalism and Theosophy: William Quinn's 1997 book *The Only Tradition* attempted to reconcile the two, while the Theosophical Society's imprint Quest Books has published *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, an important work by Frithjof Schuon, Guenon's most influential disciple.

Guenon remains unknown to the larger culture (Bill Moyers's 1996 PBS documentary on Huston Smith made no reference to

Guenon's influence on Smith), and yet his presence has been remarkably pervasive in the modern world he so despised. Today we must, I think, approach Guenon with the same clarity and discrimination that we must apply to any esoteric teaching—including Theosophy. He is a figure of uncommon brilliance, but contrary to his own self-portrayal, he does not come across as a figure of Olympian remoteness and serenity. He had a grudge against the world around him—one that was no doubt as much personal and psychological as it was spiritual—and following him too far in this direction will most likely lead to confusion and distress.

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\*Quotations from this book are my own translations. An English version of this work entitled *The Spiritist Fallacy* was published in 2004.—R.S.

\*\*Guenon's concept of orthodoxy is chiefly based on his understanding of the Hindu Vedanta (with many references to other traditions). Early in his career, he regarded Buddhism as "heterodox" (as it is from the Hindu perspective); although later in life he grudgingly granted it the status of a valid esoteric doctrine.

The Claws Of The Sphinx: René Guénon And The Islamization Of The West

Olavo de Carvalho (a catholic)

I.

The profound historical and spiritual transformations that will determine the future of humanity are so distant from our media, from our university life, and generally from all public debates in this country, that what I am about to say in this article will certainly seem stratospheric and alien to immediate reality.

The incurably ill patient who groans in pain on a hospital bed is hardly interested, at that moment, in the medical, biochemical, and pharmacological controversies that are going on in distant countries and in languages he doesn't know, but from which may come, one day, the cure for his disease. What is most closely related to his destiny seems distant, abstract, and alien to his pain.

Those who are interested in the future of Brazil should pay attention to what I am going to tell you here; but it will be very difficult to make them see that one has something to do with the other.

I will start by analyzing the review of an author unknown in this country [Brazil] who is reviewing the book of another author equally ignored here.

The book is False Dawn: The United Religions Initiative, Globalism, and the Quest for a One-World Religion, by Lee Penn, which I have recommended many times but few have read it, because it is a long and boring tome. The reviewer is Charles Upton, author of The System of the Antichrist, which has been even less read, which I have also recommended but with less emphasis and constancy. The review was published in a more recent book by Upton, Findings: In Metaphysic, Path, and Lore, A Response to the Traditionalist/Perennialist School.

Lee Penn's book describes and documents, with an abundance of primary sources, the formation and development of a bionic world religion, with all the characteristics of a satanic parody, under the auspices of the UN, the US government, virtually all the major Western media, and a handful of the mega-wealthy. Started in 1995 by William Swing, bishop of the Episcopal Church, under the name, United Religions Initiative [URI], although unofficially it had existed since much earlier (going back to the Lucis Trust, founded in 1922 by Alice Bailey), the enterprise, sustained by incalculably vast financial

resources and backed by a whole cast of show business and political stars, has even won the informal support of Pope Francis.

With the beautiful goal of creating “a world of peace, sustained by engaged and interconnected communities committed to respect for diversity, non-violent resolution of conflicts, and social, political, economic, and environmental justice,” the movement brings together, in festive so-called “ecumenical” celebrations, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Shintoists, Animists, Spiritists, Theosophists, Ba’hais, Sikhs, followers of New Age, Wicca, Satanism, Reverend Moon, Hare Krishna and any indigenous or ufological cult that presents itself, and giving to everything a sense of universal brotherhood that blurs with smiles of mutual condescension the most obvious and insurmountable incompatibilities among these various beliefs.

All religions and pseudo-religions added together, merged and mutually neutralized, are thus reduced to an auxiliary instrument of the globalist project, aimed at creating a World Government.

Roughly speaking, the ideology that sticks these heterogeneous and irreconcilable elements together is the low brow universalism of the “New Age,” which, copying badly the language of the Hindu tradition, proclaims that all religions are nothing more than local and accidental aspects assumed by a single Primordial Revelation, from which it follows that, by this or that path, everyone will reach the highest stages of human or even superhuman spiritual realization sooner or later.

This ideology had precursors in the 19th century, such as Allan Kardec, Helena Petrovna Blavatski, the famous Theosophist and—literally—pickpocket, Jules Doinel, founder of the French Gnostic Church (1890), Gerard Encausse, better known as “Papus,” Jean Bricaud, and, in general, all the components of the movement which was to be called “occultist.”

This “universalism,” which at the beginning of the 20th century sounded only like an exotic fantasy, ended up penetrating so deeply into the common sense of the multitudes that today the equivalence of all religions in dignity and value is a dogma subscribed to by all the great world media, by the parliaments, by the legislations of almost all countries, and by most of the religious authorities themselves.

Far from being a spontaneous phenomenon, this radical transformation of collective beliefs reflects the incessant work of the omnipresent agents of URI, to whose interference no socially relevant organization is immune.

It is not necessary, therefore, to emphasize the importance of this project within globalist plans, nor, of course, is it possible to deny the value of Lee Penn's work in gathering and sorting out more than enough documentation to prove the unity of inspiration and strategy behind phenomena that to the lay observer may seem scattered and unconnected.

The reviewer, Charles Upton, praises the merits of the book and adds a clarification that, he says, he had already transmitted personally to the author, with his full agreement.

The clarification is this: the parodic “universalism” of New Age and URI should not be confused with the high-brow universalism of the so-called “traditionalist” or “perennialist” school inspired by René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and their continuators.

It's true. They are very different. Long beforehand, the founder of the school, René Guénon, had already subjected to devastating critical analysis the entire “occult” ideology that decades later would come to form the doctrinal basis—if one can use the term—of “New Age” and URI.

A member and even bishop of the Gnostic Church in his youth, Guénon soon came out swinging and took no prisoners. Nor did he leave intact the spiritualism of Allan Kardec, the theosophy of Madame Blavatski, and a thousand and one other movements in which Guénon saw the very embodiment of what he called “pseudo-initiation” and “counter-initiation”—the former constituting the simian imitation of spirituality, the latter its satanic inversion.

In fact, the contrast between the universalism of URI and that of the Guenonian-Schuonian current goes far beyond the mere difference between low-brow and high-brow, although this difference is obvious to anyone who compares them.

On one side we see a pastiche of inconsequential syncretisms, reinforced by some sentimental or futuristic humanitarian rhetoric (sometimes “progressive,” sometimes “conservative,” to please

everyone) and adorned at most, here and there, by the superficial adherence of some fashionable writer, like Aldous Huxley and Allan Watts.

On the other side, sophisticated intellectual constructions, a deep and organized understanding of the religious and esoteric symbols of all traditions, a full command of the revealed sources, and a comparative technique that approaches, in precision, almost an exact science. In addition, some of the most consistent analyses of the civilizational crisis of the West in its various expressions: cultural, social, artistic, etc.

The difference is obvious to any educated reader. In contrast with the syncretistic mix of the “New Age,” we have here a universalism, in the strong sense of the word, a comprehensive and ordering vision that not only grasps with extreme sharpness the common points between the various spiritual cosmo-visions, but gives the reason and basis for their diversity, so that to this articulation of the one and the multiple is subordinated, in fact, the entire universal history of ideas and beliefs, theories and practices. In a word: everything that the human being has done and thought in his journey on Earth. There is practically nothing, no phenomenon, no thought, no fabulous or inauspicious event, that somehow does not find some efficient and persuasive, if not irrefutably certain, “perennialist” explanation.

From the point of view of the ordinary seeker who, coming from revolutionary, modernist and atheistic circles, is alerted to the importance of “spiritual” themes and, after a temporary illusion with the “New Age,” becomes disillusioned with its superficiality and goes in search of more nourishing food, the passage to the traditionalism of Guénon and Schuon is a formidable intellectual upgrade, an uncultivating impact, almost an inner transfiguration that will suddenly isolate him from the surrounding mental environment, marked at one time by the discredit of religions and the endless vulgarity of omnipresent occultism, and will leave him alone, face-to-face with his conscience. Thus is fulfilled, on the individual scale, the famous prophecy issued by an anonymous biographer of René Guénon soon after the master’s death:

“The time will come when each one, alone, deprived of all material contact that can help him in his inner resistance, will have to find in himself, and only in himself, the means to adhere firmly, through the center of his existence, to the Lord of all Truth.”

Rare, very rare are those who reach this point—most fall by the wayside—but for those who do, it is difficult to resist the impulse to make personal contact with Guenonian and Schuonian circles, in search

of relief, support and guidance. It is by this process of spontaneous selection that the “intellectual elite” is formed, which, as we shall see later on, Guénon had in view in the 1924 book *East and West*.

For it is clear that among the various worldviews in struggle, the most comprehensive one, which absorbs and explains all the others, is at the top. It is the summit of the consciousness of an age, the *nec plus ultra* of intelligence and the intelligible.

What gives even more authority to the Perennialist teaching is the repeated affirmation by its expounders that it is not their invention, but the mere transfer, in current theoretical language, of immemorial revelations that go back to a single original Source, the Primordial Tradition. An affirmation identical, on the surface, to that of the “New Age” proponents, but now based on a superabundance of documental proofs, rational arguments, and an organized science of universal symbolism and comparatism, from which are born intellectually dazzling tours de force such as René Guénon’s *Symbols of Sacred Science* and *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*, by Whitall N. Perry, one of F. Schuon’s closest collaborators in the USA. Schuon in the USA, a monumental collection of sacred texts organized in such a way as to illustrate, beyond any reasonable doubt, the essential convergence of the doctrines and symbols of the great religious and spiritual traditions, the “Transcendent Unity of Religions,” as Schuon called it in the title of a book that none other than T. S. Eliot considered the greatest achievement of all times in the field of comparative religion.

Any resemblance to the “universalism” of URI is misleading.

In the first place, all the Perennialists, without exception, insist that the doctrines, symbols and rites of the various traditions in particular, although they always point to a supreme Reality which is the same in all cases, have their own integrity, and cannot be subject to fusion, mixture or syncretism. In other words: they cannot undergo the kind of unifying operation that precisely characterizes the “New Age.”

Secondly, not everything that presents itself under the name of religion, spirituality, esotericism or the like can enter this synthesis. On the contrary, the precise, strict and even intolerant distinction between Tradition, Pseudo-Tradition and Antitradition is common to all Perennialists. Much of the material compacted in the “New Age” falls into these last two categories; and, far from integrating the unity of the primordial source, represents the parody or negation of everything that comes from it.

Third and most important, the transcendent unity of religions is really transcendent, not immanent. The religions there are unified only by the top, the summit and the living core of their doctrinal conceptions, and not by the irreducible variety of their liturgies, their moral codes and their different “paths” of spiritual realization. And where, precisely, is this core and summit? It is in their respective metaphysical conceptions, which are in fact convergent, as the simple collection organized by Whitall Perry suffices to show beyond all possibility of controversy. In this sense, religions and spiritual traditions can be seen, without distortion, as adaptations of the same Primordial Truth to the historical, cultural, linguistic and psychological conditions of various times, places and civilizations. The various exotericisms reflect, in their differences, the unity of the same primordial esotericism. Those who have clearly grasped the unity of this esotericism have intellectually overcome the difference between religions; but since they are not made of pure intellect and still have a historical-temporal existence as flesh and blood people, they remain subordinated to their respective religious tradition, without being able to merge or mix it with any other. The classic example is the great Sufi master Muhyi-al-din Ibn’ Arabi. Explicitly stating that his heart could assume all forms—that of the Hindu Brahman, that of the Kabbalist Rabbi, that of the Christian monk, or any other—he remained, in his life as a real and concrete individual, entirely faithful to the strictest Islamic orthodoxy.

But that's where the trouble starts.

## II.

This conception demands, besides the “horizontal” differentiation between the various traditions in time and space, a “vertical” or hierarchical distinction between the “inferior” and “superior” parts of each one. The “lower,” or exoteric, parts are historically conditioned, and by them the traditions move away from each other to the point of mutual hostility and total incompatibility. The “higher,” esoteric parts, reflect the unchanging eternity of Truth, where all traditions converge and meet.

There is, in short, a popular religion, made up of rites and rules of conduct, equal for all members of the community; and an elite religion, only for “qualified” people, who behind the symbols and laws can grasp the ultimate “meaning” of revelation. By practicing the aggregation rites that integrate them into the religious tradition, and by obeying the rules, the men of the people obtain the post-mortem “salvation” of their souls. Through initiation rites, the members of the elite obtain in life, and far beyond mere “salvation,” the spiritual realization that takes them away from the simple “individual state” of existence to transfigure them into the Ultimate Reality itself, or God.

It is good not to talk too much about these things before the general public, who may be scandalized by the decipherment of a mystery that must remain opaque for their own spiritual protection. The story of the Sufi Mansur Al-Hallaj (858-922) is well known, who after reaching the ultimate “spiritual realization,” came out shouting “Ana al-Haqq!” (“I am the Truth”) and was beheaded by the exoteric authorities. Al-Haqq does not only mean “the truth” in the generic and abstract sense. It is one of the ninety-nine “Names of God” printed in the Koran, so that Al-Hallaj’s statement was literally equivalent to “I am God.” From the point of view of esoteric orthodoxy, this resulted in denying the Koranic principle of the oneness of God, and constituted a crime that was punished by death. Later Islamic jurists admitted that statements made by Sufis in a state of “mystical rapture” escaped the purview of ordinary justice and were to be accepted as undecipherable mysteries.

In the explicit, legal, and official sense, the distinction between exotericism and esotericism exists only in one tradition: Islam. It corresponds to the distinction between shari’ah and tariqat. On one side, the religious law obligatory for all; on the other, the spiritual “way,” of free choice, only for interested and gifted people. The application of this distinction to all other traditions is merely suggestive or analogical—a figure of speech, not a proper descriptive concept. With that the whole edifice of “perennialism” begins to sway a bit.

Are there, for example, exoterism and esoterism in the Hindu tradition, precisely the one whose vocabulary René Guénon uses most frequently, because he thinks that Hinduism has achieved maximum clarity in the exposition of metaphysical doctrine? Evidently not. The caste distinction is something completely different. First, because entry into the upper caste is not free choice: the subject is born shudra, vaishya, kshatryia or brâhmaṇa and remains so forever. Second, because accidentally members of the lower castes can reach the highest levels of spiritual attainment without changing caste. Third, because there is nothing secret or discreet about the upper caste rites, or brâhmaṇa: any Joe-Shmo can know about them; he is just not allowed to practice them.

Is there such a thing as “Christian esotericism?” Things get formidably complicated. There were and there are, here and there, esoteric organizations professing to be Christian and which, by means of special rites, different from the sacraments of the Church, transmit initiations. The Companionship, the Fedeli d’Amore, Freemasonry and the Templar Order are examples. More modernly, numerous occultists, such as Madame Blavatski, Rudolf Steiner and Georges Ivanovich Gurdjieff have presented their teachings as modalities of Christian esotericism.

But there remain a few facts that are enough to demolish these claims.

First of all, there is no trace of any Christian esoteric organization in the first ten centuries of the Church. Secondly, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself stated flatly, “I have taught nothing in secret.” Even His parables, whose meaning was not immediately evident to everyone, were spoken in public, not to a reserved circle. How is it possible then that the core of the Savior’s teaching was kept secret for ten—or twenty—centuries?

In contrast, in Islam the difference between exotericism and esotericism is clear from the very first moment. Upon seeing a group of the Prophet’s companions practicing certain strange rites, different from the five daily prayers, the faithful went to ask him what they were about. He explained that they were voluntary devotions, meritorious but not obligatory. This was the first sign of the existence of tasawwuf or “Sufism,” Islamic esotericism.

Third, and most decisive: the sacraments of the Church are not mere “rites of aggregation.” They are initiatory in their own right. They give access not only to the community of the faithful—or to their “egregora” or collective consciousness—but, *Deo juvante*, to the most intimate knowledge of the Ultimate Reality to which a human being can aspire. “It is no longer I who exist,” says the Apostle, “it is Christ who exists in me.”

John Paul II, in his Catechism, explicitly states that the sacraments are the steps “of Christian initiation;” and it is inconceivable that in such a formally doctrinal text he would use the term as a mere figure of speech.

Father Juan González Arintero, in two memorable books that probably constitute the summit of mystical literature in the 20th century, demonstrates with abundant arguments and examples that the way of the sacraments was opened precisely to give everyone, without exception, access to the highest levels of spiritual realization. The distinction between exoteric and esoteric is only used here as a metaphor to designate the different spiritual benefit obtained by this or that individual according to his aptitudes, his commitment and the movements of divine Grace.

All Christians who have received the sacraments are, therefore, initiates, in the strict sense that perennialism gives to this word. The difference between the various spiritual results obtained can be explained by a concept developed by René Guénon himself, that of virtual initiation. Not all initiation rites immediately produce their corresponding spiritual results. These effects may remain withheld for a long time until some external factor—or the evolution of the recipient itself—calls them into full manifestation.

To complicate things a little further, Schuon himself recognized that the Christian sacraments had initiatory scope. For one to appreciate how thorny this question is for the Perennialist school, it is enough to recall that, when Schuon's opinion on the subject was published, Guénon reacted with indignation and fury, even breaking off relations with his disciple and continuator.

Guénon continued to maintain that the Christian sacraments were only rites of aggregation and that authentic initiations only existed in certain secret or discrete organizations, such as the Companionship or Freemasonry. To support this thesis, he invented one of the most artificial historical hypotheses anyone has ever seen—that Christianity initially emerged as an esotericism; but in view of the general decadence of Greco-Roman religion, it was forced *ex post facto* to popularize itself, eventually being reduced to an exotericism. There is absolutely no sign that this ever happened. Quite the contrary, Jesus spoke openly to the crowds from the very beginning of His preaching, and the sacraments have not undergone any substantial changes in form or content over the ages. Whatever his errors may have been in other areas, on this point Schuon was right.

It is also only as a figure of speech that the distinction of exotericism and esotericism—or of aggregation rites and initiation rites—can apply to Judaism, since the cabalistic mystery cultists there are none other than the very priests of the official cult.

So inappropriate is the application of this pair of concepts to extra-Islamic territory that members of the Perennialist school itself have ended up having to acknowledge the existence of “exo-esoteric” and even “exoteric” initiations alongside the properly “esoteric” ones, which is enough to show that these concepts serve little purpose.

Guénon's lack of reasonable arguments, and his disproportionate reaction to what could have been a discussion among friends, suggest that in this episode he might have been hiding something. Unable to argue clearly, he appealed to an absurd hypothesis and tried to reduce the interlocutor to silence by a display of authority, which Schuon politely rejected.

What was the reason why Guénon would have chosen to forcibly fit all traditions into a pair of concepts that did not properly apply to any of them except Islam in particular? Why did this man, so judicious in everything else, allow himself such arbitrariness, thus putting himself in a vulnerable position that was

jeopardized as soon as Schuon raised the question of sacramental initiations? He almost certainly had reasons for doing so which, at least at that time, could not be openly discussed.

But even before clarifying this point, another question needs to be raised.

III.

That materially different traditions converge toward the same set of metaphysical principles is something that can no longer be seriously doubted. The thesis of the Transcendent Unity of Religions is victorious in every respect.

There is only one detail: What exactly is metaphysics? I do not use the term as the denomination of an academic discipline, but in the very special and precise sense that it has in the works of Guénon and Schuon. What is metaphysics? It is the structure of universal reality, which descends from the infinite and eternal First Principle to its innumerable reflections in the manifested world, through a series of levels or planes of existence.

The fact that it is essentially the same in all traditions indicates that there is a normal perception of the basic structure of reality, common to all men, of any age or culture.

This perception requires a clear consciousness, or at least a presentiment of the scalarity of reality, that is, of the distinctions between different planes or levels of reality, from the sensible objects of immediate perception to the ultimate Reality, the absolute, eternal, immutable and infinite Principle, passing through a series of intermediate degrees: historical, terrestrial, cosmic, angelic, etc.

The perfect submission of human subjectivity to this structure is implied in all traditions as a conditio sine qua non of religious life and, even more so, of spiritual realization. Its denial, mutilation or alteration is the root of all the errors and follies of humanity.

This is why Schuon proposes a distinction between essential heresy and accidental heresy. The word "heresy" comes from a Greek root that has the meanings of "to choose" and "to decide." A heresiarch is

someone who, of his own volition, chooses from the total truth the parts that interest him and ignores the others.

Accidental heresy, according to Schuon, is the denial, mutilation or alteration of the canons of a particular tradition, such as monophysitism in Christianity (the theory that Jesus had only divine nature, not human nature) or associationism in Islam (associating God with other beings).

Essential heresy is the denial, mutilation or alteration of the very fabric of reality—an error, therefore, condemned not only by this or that particular tradition, but by all of them. Materialism or relativism, for example.

This is all very well, but there is a logical problem. If metaphysics is common to all traditions, how can it be the top and supreme perfection of each of them? By definition, the perfection of a species cannot be in its genus—it has to be in its specific difference. The perfection of the lion and the flea cannot reside in the simple fact that they are both animals.

It is admissible that in the individual's initiatory climb, the arrival at the Supreme Reality, which raises him above his individual state and absorbs him into the very Being of divinity, is the culmination of his efforts. It would also correspond, according to perennialism, to the moment when the differences between spiritual traditions are definitively transcended, while continuing to apply to the empirical existence of the initiate on the earthly plane. It is Muhyi-al-din Ibn 'Arabi being Christian, Zoroastrian or Jewish "inside," without ceasing to be orthodoxy Muslim "outside."

But, for this very reason, metaphysics can only be the culmination of traditions, as such, if we accept an indistinction between the order of Being and the order of knowing, which, according to Aristotle, are inverses. The top of the initiation ladder cannot be, at the same time, the culmination of religions because, being common to all of them, it is only the genus to which they belong and not the supreme perfection specific to each one.

More reasonable would be to suppose that the primordial Tradition is the common basis not only of all spiritual traditions, but of all cultures and, ultimately, of the core of sound intelligence present in all human beings. Starting from this base, or origin, the various traditions develop in different directions, each seeking to reflect more perfectly the absolute Principle and to give men the means of returning to it. In this sense, the culmination of each tradition is not the Principle itself, but the success it achieves in

the operation of return. And there is no reason to suppose that, of the various species, all express equally well the perfection of the genus: fleas and lions are equally animal' but the flea does not express the perfection of animality as well as the lion, to say nothing of the human being.

Schuon asserts that the claim of each religion to be “better” than the others is only justified by the fact that they are all “legitimate;” that is, they reflect in their own way the Primordial Tradition; but that, seen on the scale of eternity and the absolute, this claim is illusory. However, if the perfection of a species cannot reside in its genus alone, but rather in its specific difference, there is no reason to take for granted that all species equally represent the perfection of the genus. All religions refer to a Primordial Tradition. Five, but do they all represent it equally well? The question is entirely legitimate; and nowhere has the Perennialist school offered—or tried to offer—an acceptable answer to it. In fact, it has not even asked the question. Will we find even in these high places the phenomenon of the “ban on asking” that Eric Voegelin discerned in mass ideologies?

#### IV.

“The generation of the Traditionalist School gathered around Frithjof Schuon,” writes Charles Upton, “presented and revealed the religions in their celestial essences, *sub specie æternitatis*.”

If the celestial essences of the religions are substantially the same, the difference between them is purely terrestrial and contingent; the particular forms of each having nothing sacred in themselves, without the nourishment they receive from the Primordial Tradition: only the one, the Religio Perennis, is true in the strictest sense. The others are symbols or imperfect appearances of it, clothed in its various earthly incarnations.

But,” continues Upton, “these revelations are considered branches of the Primordial Tradition; but this Tradition is not presently in force as a religious system; it is not a religion that can be practiced. The only viable spiritual paths exist in the form of—or within—the present living revelations: Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.”

But these paths lead only to “salvation” in a post-mortem life. To climb a little higher in the present life, one must, without abandoning them, join an esoteric organization and practice, besides the rites and commandments of the popular religion, some special rites and commandments of an initiatory character.

In other words, popular religion is a certificate of qualification required of the postulant at the entrance to the initiation path. For the Muslim, this is not a big problem. Although they have a separate existence, tariqas (turuq in Arabic) are generally recognized as legitimate by the official religion, so that the interested believer can move freely between the two types of practices.

For the Hindu, this is not a problem either; even though there is no proper Hindu esotericism, Hinduism accepts and absorbs all the practices of other religions, so that—apart from the political conflicts between Hindus and Muslims—nothing prevents a Hindu from joining a tariqa, Freemasonry, a Chinese Triad, or any other esoteric organization without changing his status in his society of origin.

In the case of a Catholic, however, things get complicated. According to Guénon, all Christian initiation organizations disappeared after the Middle Ages, leaving the poor faithful limited to a spiritually capricious exotericism. All that remained were the remnants of extinct organizations and... Freemasonry.

It turns out that a sentence of Pope Clement XII, in 1738, condemned to automatic excommunication any faithful Catholic who affiliated with Freemasonry (or any other secret society). The decision was reinforced by Pope Leo X in 1890 and formalized by the 1917 Code of Canon Law. The new Code of Pope John Paul II, in 1983, spoke only of “secret societies,” without mentioning Freemasonry by name, which briefly gave the impression that the excommunication had been suspended, until the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in November of that same year, clarified that this was not the case at all; that the prohibition to join Freemasonry remained in force.

In other words, the faithful Catholic who read René Guénon and believed in him, seeing in the loss of the initiatory dimension the root of all the evils of the modern world, was pressed to the wall by the choice between giving up esotericism once and for all, being content with exotericism more and more reduced to an external moralism, or seeking Masonic initiation and being excommunicated; that is, losing the exoteric affiliation which, according to Guénon himself, was the *conditio sine qua non* for entering esotericism.

The conflict was not only of a legal order. Although it had remote origins in professedly Christian esoteric organizations, Freemasonry had become, in various parts of the world, an ostensibly and violently anti-Catholic force, encouraging persecutions and killings of Catholics, especially in France

(during the Revolution and then again in the early 20th century); in Mexico (where this provoked the Cristero War); and in Spain, where, with the barely disguised connivance of the Masonic republican government, priests and the faithful were killed in large numbers, and many churches destroyed even before the Civil War broke out.

That is to say: the Catholic who affiliated with Freemasonry not only incurred automatic excommunication, but became a traitor to his murdered coreligionists.

Catholic Guenonians like Jean Tourniac went to great lengths to prove that Masonic doctrines were compatible with Catholicism; but, of course, this remained theoretical. Talks between Catholic and Masonic leaders in search of an agreement came to nothing. Excommunication was still in force, and the moral hazard was still very high.

Beginning in the 1960s, when these problems began to become the subject of more open discussion in the circles of those interested in traditionalism, the perenialist group began to suggest to the trapped Catholic the following possible solutions:

Drop everything and convert to Islam.

Seek shelter in the Russian Orthodox Church, where there is still a residue of esotericism and whose sacraments, after all, are accepted as valid by the Catholic Church.

Join the multi-faith tariqa of Schuon, where you can practice Islamic initiation rites without formal conversion and while keeping at a prudent distance from exoteric Muslims.

The first option was certainly the most traumatic. After all, Schuon himself had written that “changing religion is not like changing country—it is like changing planet.”

The second was more comfortable, but it ran into an obstacle that I have never seen any Perenialist author even mention—the Russian Orthodox Church was infested with KGB agents, and it was almost impossible for the newcomer to find his way through that savage jungle of conspiracies and pretenses. Not coincidentally, the KGB was at that very moment organizing and training Islamic terrorist organizations for war against the Christian West.

That left the third, the easiest and most natural. Schuon's tariqa was, in fact, full of members of Catholic origin—starting with Schuon himself and some of his closest collaborators, such as Martin Lings, Titus Burckhardt, and Rama P. Coomaraswamy, of whom the first two converted to Islam, the third remained a Catholic at least in public, while still paying the sheikh the statutory vow of total obedience required in the tariqas.

In the souls of those who remained Catholics—ex professo or in heart only—the plan that René Guénon had been outlining for the entire West since 1924 was thus being realized on a microscopic scale.

V.

After describing with the somber colors of a genuine Apocalypse the spiritual degradation of civilization in the West, attributing it to the loss of the “true metaphysics” and the links between the Catholic Church and the Primordial Tradition (links that could only have been maintained through initiatory organizations), René Guénon foresaw three possible developments for the state of affairs in the West:

The definitive fall into barbarism.

The restoration of Catholic tradition, under the discreet guidance of Islamic spiritual masters.

Total Islamization, either through infiltration and propaganda or through military occupation.

These three options were basically reduced to two: either a plunge into barbarism or submission to Islam, either discreetly or ostentatiously.

The outbreak of World War II seemed to show that the West preferred the first option' and it is an ironic detail that important Islamic religious authorities gave the Führer their full support, especially on the question of the extermination of the Jews. Macabre coincidence or self-fulfilling prophecy? I don't know.

After the War, the close collaboration between Islamic governments and Communist regimes in the joint anti-Western effort came to be so notorious that there is no need to dwell on this point. It is also worth remembering that today the world left, which is committed to corrupting the West “until it stinks,” as André Breton advocated, is the same one that ostensibly supports the Muslim occupation of the West through mass immigration, as well as boycotting by all means any serious effort to combat Islamic

terrorism, so that there is between the two blocs a kind of Leninist agreement to “foster corruption and denounce it.” Again, the same question from the previous paragraph applies, with the same answer.

For the aspirant from a Catholic background, all the tariqa offered was the choice between becoming a Muslim or being a Catholic under Muslim guidance. The same choice that Guénon was offering to the entire Western world.

I believe that this makes Guénon’s intention to squeeze all religions, especially the Christian one, into the forced mold of an Islamic descriptive concept, the exoterism-esoterism distinction, clearer. Indeed, how can one dominate an entire civilization without first framing it within the intellectual coordinate system of the dominating civilization, where it will cease to be an autonomous totality to become part of a comprehensive map? It is also obvious that it was not enough to do this in theory; the most valuable, most intellectually active elements of the target civilization’s elite had to be won over to this new view of things. Only when the latter began to understand themselves in the dominator’s terms, instead of their own, would they be ripe to accept, without further reaction, a wider operation of cultural occupation. All the more so because the reduction of Christianity to the binomial exoterism-esoterism, accompanied by the gloomy diagnosis of the loss of the esoteric dimension, inexorably culminated in the conclusion that the “restoration of Christianity,” of its connections with the Primordial Tradition and therefore of the higher dimensions of its spirituality, could only take place under the direction of a “living esoterism,” that is, Sufism. To use Guénon’s own terms, it was necessary to submit the West to the “spiritual authority” of Islam before submitting it to its “temporal power.”

Schuon’s theory that the Christian sacraments retained their initiatory power seemed to mitigate somewhat the force of the Islamizing argument, but in fact it did not do so at all. Without the proper spiritual instruction, which only a “living esoterism” could offer him, the bearer of a “virtual initiation” remained unaware of having received it and not only remained paralyzed in the middle of the initiation climb, but risked, as a result, suffering all sorts of spiritual and psychic disturbances. Only Sufi spirituality—embodied, in this case, in the person of Schuon—could save Catholics from themselves.

The Islamization of the West—discreet or overt, peaceful or violent—is the central, and indeed the only, objective of René Guénon’s entire work. The entire work converges on this goal, not as a mere logical conclusion, but as a kind of only way out to which the reader—and, ideally, the entire West—is being led, within the walls of a labyrinthine construction, by a sense of inexorable fatality. Apart from this objective, his work is nothing more than a collection of purposeless theoretical speculations, an edifice of beautiful and unrealizable spiritual possibilities, which he always denied.

If an explicit confession were necessary to confirm this, it would suffice to recall that at the very moment when Schuon was returning from Algeria with the title of “sheikh,” vaunting his intention to “Islamize Europe,” Guénon declared that the foundation of Schuon’s tariqa in Lausanne, Switzerland, was the first and only fruit produced by his decades-long effort.

## VI.

What can make this goal nebulous or even invisible to the public eye are two factors:

First: Guénon repeatedly affirmed his total contempt for any political activity, current, or ideology, assuring that his interests had nothing to do with the struggle for power, and his turn exclusively to the sphere of the spiritual and the eternal. This seems to place him, in the eyes of many, incomparably above the current dispute between Islamic countries and the West.

This way of seeing is not exactly false, it is just empty. It is obvious that Guénon is not disputing political power. He is disputing something that is infinitely above it and of which, as he himself explains, political power is only a secondary, almost negligible, reflection—he is disputing spiritual authority. He is disputing with the Catholic Church, placing himself far above it and claiming to guide it from the sublime heights of Sufi spirituality (not necessarily in person, of course).

He is very explicit on this point. The Catholic Church, at some point in its history, he says, has lost contact with the Primordial Tradition and no longer even has an understanding of the “higher parts” of metaphysics; it stops at pure ontology, or theory of Being, without penetrating the supreme mysteries of Nonbeing (Schuon prefers to say “Suprabeing”).

I have already explained on other occasions what seems to me to be the intrinsic absurdity of the doctrine of Non-Being, and I will not return to this subject here. What matters for the moment is to point out that, according to Guénon, Catholicism, from this initial mutilation, came to decline sharply until it was reduced to a mere sentimental devotion for the masses.

Since only those who can raise it from this abyss are the ones who still possess the original connection with the Primordial Tradition, it is evident that the salvation of the Church and, through her, of the entire West, can only come from outside. From where, precisely?

Not from Buddhism, since Guénon does not even consider it a fully valid tradition.

Nor from Hinduism, because it cannot be practiced outside India nor by anyone who is not of Indian nationality. All that Hinduism can provide is a deeper understanding of metaphysical doctrine—and indeed Guénon resorts abundantly to Hindu texts for this—but mere theoretical understanding, while indispensable, cannot by itself even remotely provide authentic “metaphysical realization.”

Of Judaism, even less so, for it would be inconceivable that the Church, having been born of it, would return to its mother’s womb without *ipso facto* annulling itself and ceasing to exist.

From Freemasonry? Impossible, not only because of the incompatibilities pointed out above and never overcome, but because, according to Guénon, Masonic initiations are only of “Small Mysteries,” secrets of the cosmos and society that do not even remotely touch the heights of the supreme metaphysical realization, the “Great Mysteries.”

From obstacle to obstacle—there is no need to examine all the alternatives—the inexorable conclusion is that the labyrinth of impossibilities has only one way out—Catholicism can only be returned to its original integrity if it consents to submit itself to the guidance of Islamic masters. Either that, or the occupation of the West by Muslims. *Tertium non datur*.

That, en passant, Guénon and his followers made several valuable contributions even to the understanding of Catholicism by Catholic intellectuals themselves, especially with regard to symbolism and sacred art, is something that no one in his right mind could deny.

But there again, that is nothing to be surprised about. What authority could a Sufi master claim to exercise over Catholics if, at least on some select points, he did not prove to understand their religion better than they did themselves?

Guénon’s “Catholic” articles published in *Regnabit* between 1925 and 1927 do not prove, or even suggest, that he accepted the independence, much less the superiority of Catholicism over Islam. They only prove that, at that period, he still believed in the possibility of directing the course of things in the

Catholic Church by means of gentle persuasion and infiltration. His departure for Egypt in 1930, with the firm decision not to return and to communicate with his public henceforth only through the journal *Études Traditionnelles*, marked the moment when he lost this hope and, integrating himself more and more into Egyptian esoteric circles (even marrying the daughter of the prestigious Sheikh Elish El-Kebir), passed the ball back to the Islamic authorities who had by far guided his actions in the European framework. How things evolved from that point to the adoption of the policy of terrorism and “occupation by immigration” (which, of course, would never have happened without the blessing of the Islamic spiritual authorities), is a story that we do not know and that can only be told, perhaps, several decades from now. What is absolutely certain is that Guénon, from the very beginning of his public activity, declared that he did not speak in his own name but strictly followed the guidance of “qualified representatives of the oriental traditions,” among whom, it is now known, was mainly Sheikh El-Kebir himself. It is utter nonsense to say that Guénon “converted to Islam” in 1930. He had been a regular member of a tariqa at least since he was twenty-one, which is enough to show that he had been long prepared for the very difficult mission he was about to undertake.

## VII.

The second factor that makes it difficult to perceive Guénon’s identity as an Islamic agent is the very impact of his work on his disciples. Qualified as “the most dazzling intellectual miracle of our time,” this work sheds so many unforeseen lights on the religious phenomenon and on the spiritual decadence of the West, and so great is its contrast with all modern atheistic or Christian thought, that the temptation to regard it really as a miracle, a divine intervention in the course of history, becomes almost irresistible. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in *Knowledge and the Sacred*, does not hesitate to present the entire intellectual history of the West as if it were a long, groping, half-hearted preparation for the advent of Guenonian lights. Viewed in this way, Guénon’s work seems like a supra-historical message coming from the dawn of time, from the Primordial Tradition itself, and not from a contemporary Egyptian sheikh.

The desire to erase his contemporary roots and to hover above historical contingencies is manifest in several passages of this work, and is further reinforced by several expressions of contempt for the “mere” historical perspective, according to Guénon an illusory veil of passing appearances covering up the reality of eternal things. He even criticizes the attachment of the Western mentality to “facts” as if it were a vice of thought.

Jean Robin characteristically proclaims Guenonism a providential intervention and “the last chance for the West.” It is an inalienable right of the enthusiastic disciple to celebrate the master’s work with the most emphatic qualifiers. But a qualifier means nothing when separated from the substance it qualifies.

It is one thing to speak generically of a “last chance for the West”—and we all know that the West needs one. But it is quite another to make it clear that this is not just any chance, an abstract and generic “restoration of spirituality,” but rather salvation through Islamization. Jean Robin simply omits this point.

It is also very fair to privilege the eternal and immutable above the temporal and transitory. But any faithful Catholic accustomed to the sacrament of confession understands that the leap to the eternal, without passing through awareness of the factual details of earthly life, so often humiliating and depressing, is not spirituality, it is angelism. The apostle who affirms “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” is the same one who confesses to carrying “a thorn in the flesh” to the end of his days.

The desire to fly into the world of eternal archetypes by leaping over concrete historical reality appears not only in the hagiographic profiles of “René Guénon’s mission,” but in at least three books by important perenialist authors on Islam.

Ideals and Realities of Islam by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Comprendre l’Islam by Schuon, and Moorish Culture in Spain by Titus Burckhardt, barely conceal their rhetorical strategy of showing Muslim life only for the eternal archetypes it symbolizes; contrasting them, explicitly or implicitly, with the gross factual miseries of the materialistic West. It is all even a little naive. Even a child realizes that it is not fair to compare the virtues of one with the defects of the other, instead of virtues with virtues and defects with defects.

All this makes it difficult, both for the newcomer reader and sometimes for the spokesmen of Perenialism themselves, to admit the obvious: the work of René Guénon can have all the providential and salvific character one wants, on the condition that one clearly admits the obvious—that, in the end, it has never offered any other way of salvation for the West except Islamization.

It is also true that any intelligent Christian, Catholic or otherwise, can benefit from the teachings of René Guénon without adhering to the Guénonian project. But how can one refuse adherence without knowing or wanting to know that the project exists? Every useful idiot is an idiot and useful to the same extent that he denies the existence of the one who uses it.

Many Christians, Catholic or not, have been so outraged by the teachings of René Guénon that they have made several attempts to refute and even deride him. These attempts only proved the intellectual superiority of the opponent and fell into ridicule or oblivion.

In this respect, Guénon's disciples were not entirely wrong in considering him unsurpassable (the "infallible compass," Michel Valsân said). But Guénon need neither be fought nor defeated. By adopting the pseudonym "Sphinx" in his early writings, he knew that those who did not decipher his message would be swallowed up and reduced to obedience. Those who lurch between cries of revolt will not fail to render him obedience, begrudgingly or even unconsciously. Once deciphered, however, the Sphinx has no remedy but to gently release its prey, which will emerge from its clutches not only free, but strengthened.

## COUNTER-INITIATION: CRITICAL REMARKS ON SOME ASPECTS OF THE DOCTRINE OF RENÉ GUÉNON

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Originally published in the journal *Milý Angel* #3 – *Konets Sveta* ('Sweet Angel: The End of the World', Moscow: Arktogeiia, 1998). Subsequently republished as an appendix to the second edition of the book *Puti Absoliuta* ("The Ways of the Absolute") in the *Absoliutnaia Rodina* trilogy ("Absolute Homeland", Moscow: Arktogeiia, 1999).

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Preliminary remarks: the necessity of correcting Traditionalism

The question of "counter-initiation" is the most shrouded and ambiguous in all of Traditionalist thought. Perhaps this is a consequence of the very reality which Traditionalists, following Guénon, denote with the term "counter-initiation."

The meaning of counter-initiation is set out by René Guénon in his book *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*. In brief, we can say that Guénon understands counter-initiation to be the sum of secret organizations which, although in possession of initiatic and esoteric data, nonetheless direct their activities and efforts towards a goal which is the direct opposite of normal initiation. In other words, instead of striving towards the absolute, they head towards fatal disappearance and dissolution amidst the "reign of quantity" in its external twilight. In line with Islamic esotericism, Guénon called the hierarchs of counter-initiation *Awliya es-Shaytan*, that is to say the "saints of Satan." In Guénon's point of view, representatives of counter-initiation stand behind all the negative tendencies of modern civilization and are secretly administering the course of affairs down the path of degradation, materialization, and spiritual perversion.

According to Tradition, the logic of the cyclical process inevitably boils down to a trajectory of degradation, from the Golden Age to the Iron Age. As follows, there should be various conscious forces contributing to this process just as, conversely, the forces of true initiation and genuine esotericism try to impede this fatal decline by all means. This historical dualism of Guénon's in no way affects the metaphysical unity of the Principle, insofar as it belongs to the sphere of manifestation, where the main law is that of duality. This duality at the very heart of manifestation is overcome only upon going beyond the manifest into the sphere of the transcendental. We cannot discard the dualism within the world.

Thus, the role of counter- initiation is partly justified insofar as it is rooted not in arbitrariness, but in the very providential necessity tied to the laws of the universe.

This purely theoretical aspect of the doctrine of counter-initiation is completely flawless from a logical point of view and is confirmed by all the various doctrines of sacred traditions dealing with “demons”, “the devil”, “evil spirits”, the “Antichrist”, etc. But everything becomes much more complicated when we attempt to move from theory to practice and name specific organizations or secret societies as examples of counter-initiation. This is only part of the problem. Before we can clarify this subtle question, it is necessary to attentively examine what René Guénon meant by “initiation” and “esotericism.”

According to Guénon, the historical variance of sacred forms – religions, traditions, etc. – is a consequence of the differing qualities of the human and historical environments into which the rays of the One Non-Human Truth are projected. In other words, for Guénon, all traditions, as one approaches their center, transcend confessional differences and almost always merge into something unified. Guénon called this the “Primordial Tradition” (la Tradition Primordiale). It is this Tradition, according to Guénon, that constitutes the secret essence of all religions. In a certain sense, this is true. Any careful study of the symbolism of Tradition, its rituals and doctrines, leads one to the idea that all sacred teachings have some kind of common element or paradigm which is somewhat lost sight of when one arrives at more narrow dogmatic aspects and matters of detail. The thesis of the “unity of Tradition” is particularly convincing in current circumstances, as the modern world has built a civilization whose basis strikingly contrasts everything that might be called Tradition(al). In other words, Integral Traditionalism and the appeal to the One Tradition are reliable to the extent to that they contrast the modern world to all those civilizational forms that are founded on sacred elements. Indeed, there are many more similarities than differences between the various traditions and religions when compared to the contrasting backdrop of modern, completely de-sacralized civilization. This postulate is obvious. The question is: to what extent is this convergence in the face of a common enemy a consequence of esoteric unity?

In other words, is the difference between the most sacred traditions merely the result of faults in the cosmic environment at certain moments in the cycle? Are there not some deeper reasons behind this?

One glaring example of the relevance of such doubt can be seen in Guénon’s hesitation as to whether Buddhism should be counted an authentic tradition or not. Guénon initially relegated Buddhism to the category of antinomian heresies, but later recognized it to be a genuine tradition. The question at hand is not even that of Buddhism, but the fact that Guénon’s very own uncertainty exhibits a certain

conditionality of his method whenever the matter at hand concerns concrete historical traditions and their dogmatic principles. If even Guénon could be mistaken on the question of Buddhism – which remained for him largely an abstraction, for the analysis of which Guénon relied on the opinions of his Hindu informants who, like all Hindu Traditionalists, are distinguished by their acutely anti-Buddhist orientations – then it cannot be excluded that such errors may occur in the case of other religions as well.

Our own studies have led us to the conclusion that Guénon was not quite right in his analysis in two other cases. Firstly, when Guénon denied the Christian Church an initiatic dimension – and he dated the loss of this dimension, present in early Christianity, to the era of the first Ecumenical Councils – he was clearly relying exclusively on the history and historiography of the Catholic branch (with the later deviation of Protestantism). Guénon clearly ignored the metaphysical and initiatic reality of Orthodoxy, which differs from Western Christianity sharply and on the most fundamental positions. Guénon equated Christianity with Catholicism and inappropriately projected the proportions of the Catholic organization, including the mystical nature of its rituals and theological specifics, onto Christianity as a whole. This rendered his views on the matter completely incorrect. [1]

Secondly, Guénon was quick to recognize Jewish Kabbalah to bear the quality of genuine esoterism which, in his opinion, is distinguished by universalism and is beyond any particularisms. But in fact, Kabbalah insists on the ethnic specialness of Jews, the uniqueness of their fate, and their metaphysical opposition to all other peoples and religions no less (if not more) than the Talmud and exoteric Judaism. This clearly contradicts Guénon's definition of esoterism, according to which principles of universal unity and the merging of all spiritual and religious forms into a common concept should predominate. Even in its most transcendental aspects, Kabbalah affirms not unity, but a radical and indelible metaphysical-ethnic dualism.

Moreover, on a more general plane, Guénon's assessments of certain peoples – such as the Ancient Greeks, the Japanese, the Germans, Anglo-Saxons, and Slavs – were at times so subjective and arbitrary that Guénon's striving to base some of his conclusions as to the orthodoxy or non-orthodoxy of various traditional forms on these appraisals calls into question everything in Traditionalism related to the application of theoretical considerations to the practical sphere.

The absence of universal counter-initiation

The differences between religious forms can constitute far more of a profound factor than the conditions of exotericism, and can be rooted in metaphysics itself. If, by virtue of the specificity of their traditions, synthesis can be accomplished rather easily with Hinduism and Islamic esoterism (while all other traditions are interpreted in terms exclusively peculiar to them), then the matter stands somewhat differently with other religions. Hinduism and Islam allowed Guénon to construct a logical and non-contradictory picture, but one which becomes less apparent when we try to apply it to different religions and their specific approaches to metaphysics.

For Guénon and the Traditionalists who follow him, the situation is thus: the One Metaphysical Tradition, which constitutes the essence of universal esoterism, is the inner kernel of all orthodox traditions. Dogmatic religions and other forms of exoteric traditions are external shells covering in diverse ways this unity of content (esoterism and initiation). On the pole opposite of universal esoterism is “counter-initiation”, which entails not simply the rejection of this or that religious or exoteric form, but universalism itself. Thus, the very notion of “counter- initiation” is inseparable from the postulation of the esoteric unity of all traditions.

However, outside of esoteric Islamic and Hindu contexts, such logic cannot be accepted unequivocally, as the metaphysics of other traditions do not recognize any esoteric solidarity with other religious forms. In fact, the universalism of Sufism and Hinduism is not so obvious as it may seem at first glance. The price of recognizing the orthodoxy of other religious forms is affirming that they are “distorted”, and treating their dogma in the spirit and letter of the specific esoterism peculiar to Hinduism and Sufism. For example, the Hindu approach to Christology practically equates Christ with an avatar, which, in a purely Christian dogmatic framework, is equivalent to the “monophysite” view. Islam, on the contrary, proceeding from a strict monotheism, adheres to a “Nestorian” (“Arian”) Christological scheme. In both cases, the Orthodox Christian formula which ultimately leads to its own, altogether different metaphysical perspective is denied [2]. Thus, the universalism proclaimed by Traditionalists turns out to be not so total and unambiguous as one would like.

Furthermore, Hinduism bases its tradition on a formula that is inverse to that of the Iranian tradition, despite deriving from the same source. As is well known, even in the very names for gods and demons, there is an inverse analogy between Zoroastrianism and Hinduism. Moreover, Hinduism considers Buddhism to be a heterodoxy (a view to which Guénon himself adhered for quite a long time). As follows, these three Eastern Indo-European traditions cannot reach agreement with one another and seamlessly establish esoteric unity. Indeed, it is quite difficult to recognize any “esoteric rightness” on the part of those who call one’s gods “demons” and vice versa (the Devas and Asura in Hinduism and Zoroastrianism are of directly contradictory elements), or who radically deny the authority of the main sacred source (as Buddhists reject the Vedas, castes, and all the foundational doctrines of Hinduism).

The situation is even more severe in the Abrahamic context. If Islam recognizes some kind of legitimacy among the traditions of the “peoples of the Book” (Judaism and Christianity) and believes Muhammad’s mission to be the last word of “Abrahamism” which corrected all previous errors, then neither Christians nor Jews recognize even the slightest authenticity of other versions of Abrahamism, which are considered heresies, lies, and evil.[3] The example of the Zohar, the highest authority of Kabbalah, easily lends towards the conviction that hostility towards Islam and Christianity is not only the case on the metaphysical and esoteric level, but here it attains the highest metaphysical tension. Accordingly, Orthodox esotericism relates to Judaism (both exoteric and esoteric) just as harshly, seeing it not only as an Otherness of external religious form, but as the embodiment of metaphysical evil and the “tradition” of the Antichrist.

Thus, beyond Sufism and Hinduism (whose universalism is also not unlimited), there is no common esotericism. This means that traditions understand “counter-initiation” to be those sacred forms which openly contradict their own metaphysics. If the exoteric evil in this case is represented by the negative points stemming from the ethical-dogmatic specifics of a given religion, then the esoteric evil (counter-initiation) would be the metaphysics of a tradition that contradicts such. All of this incredibly complicates the question of counter-initiation, which ceases to be so obvious and transparent, and in fact becomes extremely confusing.

From the point of view of Orthodox esotericism, Judaism and Kabbalah are undoubtedly counter-initiatic.[4] From the Zohar’s point of view, the esotericism of the Goyim, especially the “descendants of Ishmael and Esau” (Muslims and Christians), is “the false teaching of the demon Samael” who “leaps on the serpent Lilith.” From the point of view of Hindu esotericism, Iranian dualism is rooted in the fact that Zoroastrians worship demons, the Asura, (Iranian Ahura), whom they (Hindus) call “gods.” Buddhist esotericists, meanwhile, are convinced that the initiatic doctrines of Hinduism are the ultimate evil, insofar as they only increase the attachment of beings to Samsara – after all, the higher divine worlds are distinguished in the Buddhist perspective by an even greater illusory quality than the worlds of humans, as the absence of suffering only alienates the prospect of achieving Nirvana. In Islamic civilization, the most radical representatives of manifestationist esotericism – such as al-Hallaj, Suhrawardi, etc. – were executed as malicious heretics.

How, in such a situation, can one discern any universal counter-initiation, trace its origins, and recognize the forces and organizations serving as its cover? If the universality of esotericism (in the very least, in our cyclical situation) is not obvious and proven, then how can we speak of any universality of “counter-initiation” being the inverse projection of such?

## Inter- and intra-religious contradictions

On the one hand, there exist deep contradictions between traditional religious systems which pertain to the higher realms of metaphysics. On the other hand, these traditional forms are not immutable, but are subject to cyclical laws. Traditions pass through difficult periods of historical embodiment, among which, besides the natural stages of rise and fall, there exist even more paradoxical moments entailing the amendment of internal nature, alienation, and transformation into something essentially different while maintaining external attributes.

More often than not, these disturbing moments cannot be reduced to some “triumph of negative tendencies” as seen by the exoteric tradition and morality derived from the letter of sacred forms. For example, the Islamic tradition can degenerate without its authorities publicly denying the principle of monotheism or the mission of Muhammad, and Christians by no means need to worship other gods (or Satan) in order to break with the source and spirit of the Church. If everything were so simple, history would be an elementary, mechanical device with predictable functioning and an easily foreseen future. In fact, this is how many things are seen by those people distinguished by a naive (if not to say idiotic) view of the world, no matter whether they are “conservatives” or “progressives.” Only a deep understanding of the internal kernel of tradition, the real realization of its higher levels, allows us to isolate and grasp what is foremost and most essential, and that means accurately discriminating between the true axis of orthodoxy and alienation, deviation, simulation, and degeneration. There are no purely external criteria to this question. One should not overestimate the “devil” – if he were as simple as moralists think, he would hardly have been able to participate in human history so actively, for so long, and, most importantly, so unrecognizably.

For example, the schism of the Christian world into the Eastern and Western Churches was far from a purely exoteric event. Behind the schism lurk the most profound metaphysical reasons. The same is true for the Islamic world and the division into Shiites and Sunnis. The Sunni tradition (especially Wahhabism) believes in the high authority of Sultan Yazid, who killed Ali, i.e., Muhammad’s cousin who is the spiritual pole (qutb) for Shiites, the first Imam. Behind this contradiction lie much deeper discrepancies of a purely metaphysical nature. [5]

In a certain sense, things are no smoother in the case of Hinduism, in which Vishnuism and Shaivism are not so harmonious with relation to one another as might appear to be the case at first glance. For example, the traces of such a dualism can be seen in the Mahabharata, whose editing was, without a doubt, the work of Vishnuist circles. The Kauravas, the enemies of the Pandavas and the inveterate

villains, are portrayed as inspired by Shiva and his retinue to the point that Shiva is considered to be a “subtle essence” in contrast to the metaphysical and purely spiritual nature of Krishna, the avatar of Vishnu. The parallel with the “devil” begs itself in this case, especially if we take into consideration Guénon’s indication that the “devil” belongs to the “subtle plane.”[6]

If we apply the Traditionalist approach to other sacred forms beyond Hinduism and Sufism, we find ourselves in a situation in which it becomes impossible to speak of counter-initiation as something universal and opposed to universal esoterism without falling into mythomania or moralistic dualism which, theoretically, should have been overcome insofar as we are considering the sphere of esoterism. In other words, every sacred form endowed with metaphysical uniqueness formulates in its own way its own theory of what “counter-initiation” is for it (and not only for it). At the same time, the positions of different traditions can coincide in some aspects, while in others they may diverge. Thus, we arrive at the affirmation of an absence of any one counter-initiatic doctrine or organization. Everything that is habitually included in the notion of “counter-initiation” turns out to be a plural, complex, and multipolar reality. The definition of the nature and form of a counter-initiatic doctrine thus derives from the metaphysical particularity of each concrete tradition.

There is no denying the fact that, in recent centuries, there has been a glaringly overarching, broad process which undoubtedly represents a clearly pronounced tendency towards the construction of an anti-traditional society based on principles which are radically opposed to the sum of those which constitute the basis of any tradition.

But there is one exception here: Judaism. In the religious and metaphysical perspective of Judaism, the last centuries, starting in 1240 and especially since 1300, are seen as the prelude to messianic triumph. The fall of Christian civilization and the political liberation of Jewry (not to mention the contemporary successes of political Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel) are seen as none other than the greatest metaphysical progress. Thus, on a matter over which the majority of traditions fully concur with one another, there is the exception of Judaism.

The external revival of confessional religions in recent years, following several centuries of active processes of de-sacralization and secularization, also fits poorly into Traditionalist logic. Although this [renewed] interest in religion is not as easily exposable of a parody as Neo-spiritualism and “New Age”, it is clearly not a true spiritual rebirth.

In short, the problem of the “deviation of esotericism”, or counter-initiation, is complicated not only by inter-confessional contradictions, whose origins can be traced back to metaphysics, but also internal transformations within these traditions relative to the stages of their history.

On top of all of this, there exist anomalous cases (Judaism, the new interest in religions in the West, etc.) which seemingly contradict the quite obvious tendency of progressive secularization on the basis of which Guénon attempted to substantiate his theory of counter-initiation and the latter’s planetary plan to prepare the “reign of the Antichrist.”

Counter-initiation and initiation are in solidarity with one another up to a certain point

Guénon’s concept of counter-initiation is based on a scheme to which he adhered in relation to more general questions pertaining to the structure of Tradition. Guénon constantly bore in mind the following tripartite model:

1. Principle

2. Intermediary space

3. Periphery

In the center of the circle (or at the top of the anthropological and cosmic hierarchy, the vertical) is initiation, authentic esotericism, the Primordial Tradition, the one metaphysics. This is the inner sphere, the sphere of the initiated beyond confessional differences – the sphere of those who are to be found beyond the threshold of genuine esoteric organizations.

On the periphery (the horizontal plane) are the profane and the un-initiated. For them, the oneness of truth is hidden behind a variety of forms and labyrinths of moral and ethical standards. These are ordinary people who are not conscious of the true nature of things and events.

Finally, lying beyond the periphery, at the lower point of the vertical axis, is a kind of “anti-center.” This is counter-initiation, the place of the “saints of Satan.” Counter-initiation unites various tendencies not in a light synthesis, but in a dark mixture of infernal parody.

This model is obviously transparent and convincing. But the first difficulties with it arise when we attempt to explain the historical and geographical localization of counter-initiatic centers. At this point, it turns out, it is quite difficult to distinguish such centers from properly initiatic societies and orders. Determining on which side of the periphery – the inner or outer, the upper or lower – can be found this or that initiatic organization reveals itself to be extremely difficult (if not altogether impossible), and all external criteria can easily be simulated. Guénon specified that true esoterism is always metaphysically oriented, while counter-initiation remains on the level of cosmology or the “subtle world.” However, an enormous distance separates the profane world and the world of metaphysical principles. In the early stages, it is absolutely impossible to predict for sure whether an initiate will reach the end of this path to the actual metaphysical levels, or whether they will get stuck in the intermediary spheres. And if they “get stuck”, then how do they then differ from those who represent “counter-initiation”?

In other words, up to a certain point, and rather far from the sphere of the competence of the profane, the paths of initiation and counter-initiation are not only parallel, but essentially one. With respect to the orientations of “above” and “below” (which at first might seem to be convincing criteria) it should be noted that they are not indicative in direct initiatic experience, since ascent in the borderline sphere between the worldly and otherworldly is often accomplished by means of descent, a departure which leads straight into the abyss.[7]

If one makes it to the end of this path, the adept attains effective metaphysical realization. If one goes astray, all the attributes of counter-initiation will be glaring.

In other words, out of this simple tripartite scheme arises a more complex and less edifying picture, in which the main emphasis is put not on the orientation of movement, but on the reality of the achieved result. Thus, the problem of counter-initiation boils down to an incomplete and imperfect esoteric realization, not some kind of primordially and strictly “Satanic-oriented” secret society aiming to create and strengthen an anti-sacral civilization. The anti-sacral civilization which indeed has been built and is being built today, should be seen as the result of the overlapping of many incomplete realizations, first and foremost of an esoteric nature, the solidarity of which is obvious to all those who have been left half-satisfied with incomplete tendencies in their own sacred form.

The preponderance of profanism, fed by overall degeneration, is only a consequence of the degeneration of initiatic organizations themselves which, contradicting their primordial orientation, are now content with intermediate surrogates and unrealized potencies instead of unceasingly and heroically striving towards the center of metaphysics. At the same time, that very “demonizing” force commonly referred to as “devilish” and “satanic” can hardly be held responsible for participating in this entire process. In fact, the most terrible and formidable results of perversion and de-sacralization are those achieved by people who have the best intentions and are convinced that they are orthodox bearers of the most obvious good. Every initiate who treats their spiritual path with affection, every cleric who considers his tradition and its dogma to be an ethical or moral convention, and every Traditionalist who settles down with reciting the phrases of their master, which are in appearance correct but rendered meaningless by the mental laziness of their followers – all of these types little by little build the structures of counter-initiation and sever the metaphysical apex from the pyramid of initiatic realization.

Those whom it is easiest to single-out as being “representatives of counter-initiation” on the basis of purely external criteria – e.g., open “Luciferians” or “Satanists” – sometimes exhibit tragedy, pain, non-conformism, and the ability to stare the terrible truth of apocalyptic reality straight in the eyes. Hence why they cannot fulfill the role of the main “scapegoats” for Traditionalists. Of course, some of them may be in solidarity with processes of de-sacralization, but this is more of an exception. More often than not, at least among those who take the matter seriously, the point is that, on the contrary, these types are still about rising up against de- sacralization; they stand against conformism with the degenerate world – a world to which many representatives of “orthodox” traditions, oddly enough, easily adapt and in which they manage to perfectly comfortably arrange themselves. More often than not, religious non-conformists (“heretics”, “Satanists”, etc.) are seeking the totality of sacral experience which the representatives of orthodoxy cannot offer them. This is not their fault, but their misfortune, and the true fault lies with those who have allowed authentic tradition to be turned into a flat facade behind which there is simply nothing. Perhaps it is none other than these “dubious” forces and groups who are grimly, desperately, perplexedly, stubbornly, yet heroically pursuing esotericism and initiation deep within reality, while the profane and the moralizing conformists who remain on the periphery of initiation are the ones hindering this path by all means.

If initiation and counter-initiation can be distinguished only in terms of the concrete experience of spiritual realization, then no external criteria can help on this matter. This conclusion begs itself especially if we recognize the universality of esotericism, a point on which Guénon insisted. This conclusion remains valid when we apply it to the esotericism of one sacred form taken individually. When we take into consideration the metaphysical contradictions which exist between different forms, then the matter becomes even more complicated.

## From the Red Donkey to the Roman Pope

The main examples of counter-initiation to which Guénon pointed included the cult of the Egyptian god Set, whose remnants have survived since the most ancient times along with multiple snake cults in the Middle East. In Guénon's perspective, the mysterious brotherhood of the Red Donkey (or Red Dragon) exists to this day and is secretly directing the main processes of civilization in an infernal vein. If we digress from the "detective" flavor of this conceptualization, another consideration presents itself: How could an esoteric group of people engaged in the sacred – albeit in such an infernal, serpentine, and possibly fragmentary dimension – have provoked the modern world's complete ignorance of the sacred, and contributed to the widespread assertion of the primacy of quantity and the radically anti-initiatic approach characteristic of the modern way of life?

Compared to the maniacal system of global lies which we see in the modern mass media, secular utilitarian culture, and everyday lifestyles, any "snake-worshippers" would be an exotic and quite sympathetic group of romantic marginals. There must be a reality behind the anti-sacral aggression of the modern world which is much more formidable and much more thorough than the machinations of some exotic "black magicians." It is hardly likely that the scraps of ancient cults, even the most sinister ones, could be responsible for the anti-sacral collapse of the modern world. It is hardly likely that a dark and obviously minute sect yields such universality to the point that, in theory, it is capable of effectively influencing the most important events of world history and, most importantly, shaping the prevailing intellectual climate. If something of this sort really has taken place, then such an organization could not possibly have remained unnoticed, and there would be in circulation certain information about it which, although distorted, approximate, and amiss, would nonetheless be extensive.

It is still another matter if we take the bearers of some kind of metaphysical tradition that is radically opposite to the dominant religious culture to claim the role of counter-initiation. For example, an altogether respectable and pious Pars (Zoroastrian) could end up in India and, in one way or another, gain access to influence over the most important spheres.<sup>[8]</sup> In the context of Hinduism, he would fulfill an openly counter-initiatic function, insofar as Zoroastrian metaphysics is founded on the principle of Dvaita, whereas the metaphysical axis of Hinduism is Advaita. Such metaphysical subversion would be much more destructive than, say, the antinomies posed by radical Shaivist sects who, while being ethically questionable for their ritual devouring of people, sinister necromantic practices in wastelands and cemeteries, their Tantric orgies, etc., do not call into doubt the main metaphysical line of Advaita-Vedanta – on the contrary, they strengthen, affirm, and defend it.

The activities of a Kabbalist Jew within, say, the Islamic tradition or a Christian country, would bear the same counter-initiatic character, and the (negative) efficiency of such would be higher in relation to the depth and sophistication with which the Kabbalist understands the metaphysics of his own tradition (and vice versa).<sup>[9]</sup> Strictly speaking, an Orthodox metaphysician who is perfectly conscious of all the metaphysical implications of the dogma of the Trinity and who understands the whole depth of the contradictions between the Christian Gospel and the alienated creationism of Judaism and Islam, would by the will of fate become involved in the most important cultural-religious questions in the countries and cultures associated with the strict Abrahamic tradition, and could all together deal irreparable damage to their official ideology (and its limits in culture and politics) – naturally, this would be “damage” from the point of view of the stability and preservation of Abrahamic creativity in its older form. In practice, the presence of such overt or covert religious (and esoteric) groups in different states is an obvious fact, while the “snake-worshipers” are either completely unknown or are extravagant marginal oddities.

Now let us turn to Western civilization, which is the cradle of anti-sacral tendencies. In the West, the counter-initiatic tendencies which produced the monstrous result that we see today developed in several stages. The first stage, associated with Orthodox eschatology, was neglected by Guénon, who had a clearly inadequate opinion of the Christian tradition. This first stage consisted of the fall of Rome from Orthodoxy, the changing of the Symbol of Faith by Charlemagne, and the transition from the Orthodox and eschatological concept of the “symphony of powers” (associated with the metaphysics of the “withholder”, the Katechon) to the Papist (Guelphian) model, against which stood the Ghibelline Emperors of the Hohenstaufen who were just as dear to Guénon as they are to us. [10] Thus, the main sources of counter-initiation in the West should be sought in Catholic Scholasticism and the Vatican.

Unlike Orthodoxy, Catholicism lost its esoteric component, and this unleashed a whole spectrum of initiatic organizations of various stripes (Hermetic, proto-Masonic, etc.). Given that these initiatic organizations stemmed from an extra-Christian context (from pre-Christian cults and the Islamic and Jewish traditions), any alliance with the exoteric church was founded not on synthesis and organic unity, but on conformism and conventions. This Catholic civilization was so inorganic and unstable that even in its better periods (such as the Middle Ages), it harbored a number of dubious and at times openly counter-initiatic elements.

This unsustainable compromise was ultimately shaken, and both components of the Western tradition came into open contradiction. Catholicism rejected non-Christian esoterism and finally descended to the level of contradictory, secularized Judeo-Christian morality. Autonomous esoterism, in the form of Freemasonry, became a destructive, rationalistic apparatus in essence anti-Christian and anti-esoteric. These halves of the disintegrating ensemble were marked by counter-initiatic features: in the very least, in the majority of cases the spiritual path towards metaphysical realization could not be stopped at the

first stages, but it was simulated, forged, alienated, and turned into its opposite. The very first and most significant chord of such degeneration was the rejection of the completeness of Orthodox metaphysics. This was the most decisive step in the direction of counter-initiation within the Christian world.

After having remained for quite some time within the realm of fully-fledged, unified (at once Orthodox and Catholic) Christianity, which had preserved the fullness of its authentic metaphysics and initiation, the peoples and states of the West eventually, in one catastrophic moment, severed this chain. This was enshrined in the introduction of the dogma of the Filioque and in the sacredly-unauthorized conferment of the status of “Emperor” to the Frankish kings before their kind – this destroyed the symphony of powers in the West. Catholic (and later altogether secularized-Protestant) moralism, plus the anti-clerical, bureaucratic, philanthropic- demagogic rationalism of Masonry – all of this was much more counter-initiatic from the standpoint of fully-fledged Orthodox metaphysics than any splashes of anti-Church, pagan, or even “Luciferian” cults in the West, which perhaps represented but paroxysms of nostalgia for the complete and total Tradition, not even a hint of which had remained in the West since time immemorial.

This combination of Western anti-metaphysical Christianity (Catholicism and especially Anglo-Saxon Protestantism) with rationalistic Masonry (with the active participation of the Jewish factor, which played a significant conceptual role in the degradation of the West – after all, the fall of Edom, the “Christian world”, is the condition of the triumph of Judaic messianism [11]) is what lies at the heart of the poisonous paradigm of the modern world. The role of “Satanists” or “representatives of the Order of Set” in all of this is not only negligible, but generally naught, especially since the very fact of such an order’s existence is presumptive and based on extremely dubious evidence. Guénon cited the illustration of an artist from Cairo depicting a strange monster, the statue of which he allegedly saw in a secret sanctuary.[12] What would Guénon have said about the paintings of Dali, Ernst, or thousands of other avant-garde artists who depicted monstrous creatures on their canvases and told thousands of hallucinatory and narcotic tales?

Very telling in this regard is the story of Léo Taxil, the scandalous author of the late 19th century who was behind the forged revelations of the machinations of “Satanists.” For the Catholics, Leo Taxil described the secrets of “Satanic Freemasonry”, while for Masons he exposed the “perversions” and “black book magic” of the Catholic clergy. In fact, beyond his clearly adventurous personal aims, Taxil quite cleverly showed how representatives of both Western organizations (one embodying exotericism, the other esotericism) were not so much “devil-worshipers” as gullible fools. This grotesque idiocy on the part of both conservatives and progressives is perhaps the most expressive sign of the parody which Guénon himself called the easily recognizable “seal of the devil.”

In fact, Traditionalists and Guénon's followers have not been able to avoid the same fate, as they uncritically repeat various (and often frankly disputable) maxims of the master and have reached the very same "scholastic parody", the signs of which were clearly noticed by the much wiser and non-conformist, although no less controversial Baron Julius Evola.

#### The absence of counter-initiatic symbolism in the Primordial Tradition

Now a few words about the Primordial Tradition. From our point of view, the contours of this Tradition were outlined with amazing clarity in the works of the German Professor Herman Wirth, a review of whose book Guénon published in *Études traditionnelles*.[13] According to Wirth, all existing mythological plots, symbols, religious dogma and rituals, and moreover all human languages and alphabets, evolved from a single calendric proto-form: the Sacred Circle, accompanied by an arrangement of proto-runic signs.[14] This proto-form was a description of the natural phenomena observed by humanity at the North Pole on the ancient disappeared continent of Hyperborea (or Arktogaa). Thus, out of an abstract concept, the Primordial Tradition became a tangible and concrete reality of a paradigm whose main contours were extremely convincingly and voluminously revealed by Herman Wirth.[15]

What interests us in the Hyperborean calendric proto-form is that realm which is associated with the dark, nocturnal sectors, corresponding to the Polar Night and its related symbolism. This is the period of the winter solstice, or Great Yule, the main festival, symbolic and ritual center of the whole structure of the Primordial Tradition. Counter-initiation, according to Guénon's definition, is related to the negative aspects of universal symbolism and, as follows, in the Hyperborean complex corresponds to those realities describing the state of the Polar Night, the decline of the sun, and other symbolic analogues of this event. The snake and wolf often function as such symbols, frequently imagined as swallowing the sun in the polar winter. This darkness is also identifiable with Mother Earth, from which all living beings come and whence all return to be reborn again.

This primordial picture, which is strictly cyclical and harmonious, preceded the division of this symbolic complex into positive and negative elements. The snake, the wolf, darkness, the underground realms (where the sun descends), death, and night do not have strictly negative significations. All aspects of the cycle are equally important and necessary – the sunset is just as sacred as the sunrise, and without the sun's "dying" there can be no spring, no rebirth in the New Year. Therefore, the same symbols have both negative and positive aspects. This is an essential point: at hand is not an artificial theological concept seeking to consciously identify positive in negative and negative in positive (like the famous Chinese symbol of Yin-Yang), but rather a special state of consciousness which, in principle, does not know the

very idea of negative.[16] It is precisely by virtue of this state that Tradition is indeed Primordial and Integral, that is, preceding any particular interpretation. The possibility for different interpretations of this primordial symbolism is embedded in the overall picture, and such interpretations are what constitute the content (and background) of historical religions and mythologies which evolved into stable symbolical and doctrinal complexes at the cost of metaphysically and ethically emphasizing only certain aspects of the one Hyperborean proto-form to the detriment of others.

It can be said that the “Hyperborean Tradition” was simultaneously dual and non-dual, trinitarian and unitary, monotheistic and polytheistic, matriarchal and patriarchal, sedentary and nomadic. Only later did it split into several branches separated from and opposed to one another.

The Primordial Tradition does not annul the metaphysical differences between traditions, since it is in this regard strictly neutral. It provides a general context; it employs a system of correspondences and symbolic series which allow one to explain the most mysterious and darkest aspects of symbolism, mythologies, religious doctrines, and sacred tropes. With regards to metaphysics, this Primordial Tradition is limited to being a mere statement of fact. The metaphysical question attains its real intensity in completely different conditions, those removed as far as possible from the Golden Age of the polar civilization. This, in fact, is why it is impossible to agree with Guénon on the esoteric unity of traditions, since they are not unified on a metaphysical level, but rather unified in the sense of descending from a single sacred cult-symbolical complex, a universal language, the basic element at the origins of all the varieties of human culture and human religion. The use of this language can serve to express the most diverse theological and metaphysical constructs, but they all concern one and the same archetypal structure, which they merely interpret and whose metaphysical accents they rearrange in different ways.

As follows, the symbolic complex which would be associated with counter-initiation, in its most universal aspect, should be that relating to the Hyperborean mystery of Yule. Strictly negatively interpreting this complex might lead to grotesque distortions, to the point that the most important and sacred aspects are treated as “counter-initiatic.” This, according to Herman Wirth, is what happened with the Christian tradition when it equated various “solar-thresholding” Hyperborean tropes with demonic realities, even though their symbolisms are strikingly reminiscent of the calendric history of the birth of the Son of God (the winter solstice). For instance, the demon’s tail was a vestige of the solar-solstice rune connoting the lower part of the polar year and the roots of the world tree. The cauldrons in which the demons cooked sinners were derived from the trope of the winter cauldron (or vessel) of the gods – the cauldron of the Celtic god Dagda which never runs empty. This is a typical winter-solstice motif (and the New Year rune itself was still called Dagda in the Normans’ time, and was depicted as a bowl or cauldron). The horns of the “devil” are a symbol of the spring Resurrection of the sun, as they are the symbolic analogue of the two raised hands – the spring rune “Ka.”[17] And so on.

These considerations show that it is impossible to judge the counter-initiatic character of one or another symbol or symbolical complex on purely formal grounds, since in Hyperborean symbolism, which lies at the heart of all sacred symbolism, there are no such symbols.

## Conclusion

Summarizing our brief analysis, it should be clear that it is necessary to radically reconsider Guénon's theory of counter-initiation and carefully consider the various standpoints involved in this matter. This problem is closely connected to other theses of Guénon's which, upon attentive study and application to concrete historical religions and initiatic schools, turn out to be too rough, inaccurate, or frankly erroneous. At the same time, this revision in no way tarnishes the high authority of René Guénon. Without his works and most important theses and interpretive models, the whole picture of esoterism and metaphysics would be hopelessly confused today. The point is not to debunk the master, as some of his ungrateful students, such as Frithjof Schuon, have sought to do. On the contrary, it is necessary to refine and hone the great intuitions of this genius human being in order to cleanse his teachings of all that has turned out wrong, and in order to make shine with new strength and freshness those aspects which are expressions of the purest truth. Guénon bequeathed to us an invaluable tool, an excellent methodology for studying Tradition. Thanks to him, we can determine the common denominators of the enormous materials of theology, the history of religions, initiation, etc., with which we have to deal, and which would otherwise remain hopelessly contradictory fragments defying any systematization (not to mention neo-Spiritualist reconstructions or the theories of profane historians and ethnologists).

Guénon remains the main and key author. But if, following serious reflections and the results of careful research, we arrive at conclusions which do not concur with his views but correct them, then it is pointless to try to hide and pretend that everything remains unchanged. The question of counter-initiation is highly important and extremely relevant. So is the question of the existence (or non-existence) of a real metaphysical unity of traditions. This text is merely an introduction to this problem, but as an outline for further research it is of colossal significance. We hope to develop this topic in subsequent works.

In the meanwhile, let us remark that an adequate view of counter-initiation, a clarification of its nature, essence, and "localization", will lead us to the most horrifying secrets which, while hidden behind the dubious myth of the modern world, are ready to find their nightmarish, chilling incarnation in front of a hopelessly slumbering humanity drowsily wandering towards slaughter. Contrary to the naive stories of the "Order of the Red Donkey" and exotic and relatively harmless "Luciferians", the true mission of

counter-initiation is dizzyingly large-scale, effective, and ubiquitous. It is preparing a terrible fate for all peoples and civilizations. But in order to recognize this approaching catastrophe, it is necessary to look at things soberly and intently beyond the romantic haze of residual occultism and the “detective plot” of cheap horror novels.

Nothing rejoices the “enemy of humankind” more than the deafening stupidity of those who hastily decide to embark on the path of struggle against him without seriously weighing all the circumstances and assessing the whole volume of that unfathomable and terrible problem which St. Paul the Apostle called the “mystery of iniquity.”

Footnotes:

[1] We addressed this topic in detail in: Alexander Dugin, *Metafizika Blagoi Vesti. Pravoslavny ezoterizm* (The Metaphysics of the Gospel: Orthodox Esotericism, Moscow: Arktogeiia, 1996). This work contains a detailed scrutiny of Guénon’s Christological views arising from his confessional belonging to Islam, not from any correspondences between their “univocal esoteric truth.” Generally speaking, despite the fact that Guénon wrote very little about the Islamic tradition, the majority of his theses on the esoteric question arose precisely out of his Islamic views on things. Hindu Advaita-Vedanta and Sufi Islam were most dear to Guénon. The specific approaches to esotericism proper to these two traditions considerably shaped Guénon’s preferences and analyses in the sphere of historical religions and their dogmas. Regardless of how logical or harmonic these two systems might be, they still far from exhaust all the possible variations of esoteric and initiatic doctrines.

[2] See: Dugin, *Metafizika Blagoi Vesti*.

[3] Christianity is counted among the Abrahamic traditions only in the Islamic perspective and some Judeo-Christian currents. Orthodoxy cannot recognize such a title insofar as it is clearly conscious of its internal spiritual nature as a Melchizedekian, pre-Abrahamic, and supra- Abrahamic tradition.

[4] Dugin, *Metafizika Blagoi Vesti*, chapter 41. [5] Ibid. `

[6] Is this too really the case? The logic of our analysis suggests that the matter is somewhat more complex.

[7] We can recall the case of Dante's initiatic journey where, at the very bottom of the crater of hell, he began to descend down Satan's body even lower, ultimately reaching not the center of the abyss, but the surface of the earth near Purgatory and the hill of earthly paradise. This category also contains a number of symbols which situate paradise under the earth, demons at the tops of the mountains, etc.

[8] For example, the husband of Indira Gandhi was a Pars (Zoroastrian).

[9] This is the case with the Dönme, the followers of the Jewish pseudo-messiah Sabbatai Zevi, who outwardly followed their leader in adopting Islam, but who, when heading the Turkish state in the 20th century, immediately abolished Islam as the state religion and proclaimed the creation of a "civilization of the Western type" in Turkey. Even though they were absolutely traditional with regards to their esoteric Kabbalist community and loyal to the general context of the Jewish Diaspora, the Dönme carried out what is from a purely Islamic perspective an anti-Islamic, profane mission.

[10] See Dugin, *Metafizika Blagoi Vesti*.

[11] See the article "The Messianism of Kabbalah: The Metaphysics of the Nation, the Messiah, and the End Times in the Zohar" in *Mily Angel* 3 (1998).

[12] Here is a fragment from Guénon's letter to a certain Hillel in 1930 which describes this history: "Here behind al-Azhar (a university in Cairo) there is an old gentleman who strikingly resembles the portraits of Ancient Greek philosophers and produces strange paintings. He once showed us a drawing of a dragon with the head of a bearded man in a 16th century hat with six small heads from various animals protruding from his beard. It is especially curious that this figure clearly resembles an image found in *Revue internationale des sociétés secrètes* as an illustration of the book *L'élue du dragon*. This illustration is supposed to have been taken from some ancient book...But the real gem is that this gentleman claims to have seen this head elsewhere and painted it exactly like the original!"

[13] See: *Mily Angel* 1 (1991).

[14] See: Herman Wirth, "Das Heilige Jahr" in Der Aufgang der Menschheit (Jena: Eugen Diedrichs, 1928). Translated into Russian by Alexander Dugin as "Sviashchennyi God" and published in Mily Angel 3 (1998). See also Alexander Dugin, "Kosmicheskii Spasitel'" ("The Cosmic Savior") in the same number.

[15] See Alexander Dugin, Giperboreiskaiia teoriia ("The Hyperborean Theory", Moscow: Arktogeia, 1993).

[16] Contemporary linguistics divides types of thinking into two main varieties – "digital" and "analog." "Digital" thinking precisely corresponds to profanism and materialism, operates with the abstract categories of "there is" and "there is not", and functions according to the laws of formal logic (the law of the excluded third, the law of identity, etc.). Philosophers call this "classical rationality." Analog thinking became a scientific category over the course of the study of archaic "primitive" peoples, cultures, and mythologies. Analog thinking corresponds to the world of Tradition and retains connection with traces of the Hyperborean tradition. It knows no "pure negation." "Not" therefore means "another yes." Pure absence is unimaginable, as the very concept of "absence" immediately evokes the image of "another presence." Analog thinking first affirms the whole image, and only then deconstructs it into categories of "presence", "absence", "positive", "negative", and even "male", "female", "big", and "small." In analog thinking, there is no strict distinction between the subject of action and the object of action, between the substance and the attribute, the action and the substantive. Thus, in our example, the sun, its disappearance, and its absence act as something whole and integral. The affirmation of the sun already contains its negation (setting in winter), and the negation of the sun (winter darkness) is an affirmation which testifies to the meaning of the sun. On the basis of this logic, the primordial symbolism in principle was not subject to moral interpretation. It was a system of interrelated, integral, sacred elements, none of which is endowed with a value-priority. Everything in it was an expression of the one sacred Being, the Light of the World, at different stages of its cyclical pulse.

[17] See Dugin, "Kosmicheskii Spasitel'", op cit.

## A Note on René Guénon

by Frithjof Schuon

The question has been asked why Guénon “chose the Islamic path” and not another; the “material” reply is that he really had no choice, given that he did not admit the initiatic nature of the Christian sacraments and that Hindu initiation was closed to him because of the caste system; given also that at that period Buddhism appeared to him to be a heterodoxy. The key to the problem is that Guénon was seeking an initiation and nothing else; Islam offered this to him, with all the essential and secondary elements that must normally accompany it. Again, it is not certain that Guénon would have entered Islam had he not settled in a Muslim country; he had already been given an Islamic initiation in France through the intermediation of Abdul-Hadi, and at that time he did not dream of practicing the Muslim religion. Thus, in accepting a Shadilite initiation, it was initiation that Guénon chose, and not a “path”.

Besides there is, in the expression “chose a path”, when applied to a case like that of Guénon, something inadequate, tiresome and awkward-sounding; for Guénon was intrinsically a “pneumatic” of the “gnostic” or “jñâni” category; and, in this case, there is no question of a “path” or at least, if there is, the meaning is so altered that the expression itself becomes misleading. A pneumatic is in a way the “incarnation” of a spiritual archetype, which means that he is born with a state of knowledge which, for other people, would actually be the goal, and not the point of departure; the pneumatic does not “go forward” towards something “other than himself”; he stays where he is in order to become fully what he himself is — namely his archetype — by ridding himself, one after the other, of veils or outer surfaces, shackles imposed by the ambience or perhaps by heredity. He becomes rid of them by means of ritual supports — “sacraments”, one might say — not forgetting meditation and prayer; but his situation is nonetheless quite other than that of ordinary men, even prodigiously gifted ones. From another point of view it must be recognized that a born gnostic is by nature more or less independent, not only as regards the “letter” but also as regards the “law”; and this does not make his relation with the ambience any simpler, either psychologically or socially.

At this point the following objection has to be parried: does not the “path” consist for every man in getting rid of obstacles and in “becoming oneself”? Yes and no; that is to say: metaphysically it is so, but not humanly because, I repeat, the pneumatic “realizes” or “actualizes” what he “is”, whereas the non-pneumatic realizes what he “must become” — a difference at once “absolute” and “relative” about which one could argue indefinitely.

Another objection — or question — is the following: how are we to explain the imperfections and gaps — altogether surprising — in Guénon's writing, given the quality of the author's substance? The fact is that these gaps were by no means of an order opposed to this quality; they were, one might say, "accidental" and "superimposed" and certainly had nothing passionnal or worldly about them. It was a matter partly of traumatisms, intensified by the lack of compensatory factors in the soul and in the ambience.

One may well wonder, even so, why Providence allowed there to be flaws in Guénon's writings which seem at odds with the profound personal character of the author; the answer is that Providence would never have permitted — and this can be said without temerity — a Guénonian corpus that would have no positive results; we are thinking here of his influence attested to in the most diverse circles, and that is the very least that can be said. Guénon was the victim of a certain dogging by fate, but his essential message was not in vain and could never be so, and that is all that matters.

Guénon was like a personification, not of straightforward spiritu-ality, but of intellectual certitude in its own right; or of metaphysical self-evidence in a mathematical mode, and this explains the tenor of his teaching, which is abstract and reminiscent of mathematics, as well as explaining — indirectly and because of the lack of compensatory features — certain of his traits of character. No doubt, he had the right to be "one-sided" but this constitution went ill with the broad sweep of his mission, or with what he believed to be his mission; he was neither a psychologist nor an esthete — in the best sense of these terms — which is to say that he underestimated both aesthetic values and moral values, particularly in relation to their spiritual functions. He had an inborn distaste for everything that is human and "individual", and there are certain points on which this affected his metaphysics as when, for example, he felt himself bound to deny that the "human state" has a "privileged position", or that the "mind" — the essence of which is reason — constitutes a privilege for man; in reality, it is the presence of the faculty of reason that proves the "central" and "total" character of the human state and it would not exist without this character, which is its entire *raison d'être*.

However that may be, it is important, in recording flaws of this kind, not to lose sight of two things: the irreplaceable worth of what makes up the essence of Guénon's writings, and the author's gnostic or pneumatic substance.

Guénon was quite right to declare that the Vedanta is the most direct expression of pure metaphysics and, in a certain respect, the most assimilable; no attachment to any non-Hindu tradition obliges us to ignore it or to pretend to ignore it. In the realm of the monotheistic Semitic religions there is one esoterism "of fact" and another "by right"; it is the latter which — whether or not it is "seen for what it is" — corresponds to the wisdom of the Vedanta; de facto esoterism is the esoterism that has come

about from what has in fact been said or written, with such veilings and side-tracking as are almost bound to be demanded by a particular framework of theology and, above all, by a particular religious upâya. It was doubtless esoterism *de jure* that the Qabbalists had in mind when they said that, if the esoteric tradition were lost, the sages could restore it.

I have had occasion more than once to point out that esoterism displays two aspects, one being an extension of exoterism and the other alien to it to the point of occasionally opposing it; for if it be true that the form “is” in a certain way the essence, the essence on the contrary is by no means the form; the drop is water, but water is not the drop. “Error alone is handed on”, said Lao-tzu; likewise, Guénon did not hesitate to say in the review “*La Gnose*” that the historical religions are “so many heresies” compared with the “primordial and unanimous Tradition”, and he declares in “*le Roi du Monde*” that “true esoterism is quite another thing than outward religion and, if it has certain relationships with it, this can only be insofar as it finds a mode of symbolical expression in religious forms; it matters little, moreover, that these forms should belong to this religion or that. . .” Guénon speaks of “true esoterism”, and thus admits the existence of a modified esoterism and that is what I am referring to when I speak, in certain of my books, of “average sufism”; a somewhat loose expression, but in practice adequate.

Let us come back now to the question of the “pneumatic”, quite apart from any personal application of the term: the quality of the born-gnostic involves not only modes but also degrees; there is the difference between the jñâni and the bhakta on the one hand and, on the other, differences of plenitude or breadth in the manifestation of the archetype. In any case, the pneumatic is situated, by his nature, on the vertical and timeless axis — where there is no “before” or “after” — so that the archetype which he personifies or “incarnates”, and which is his true “himself” or “his very self” can, at any moment, pierce through the contingent, individual envelope; it is therefore really “himself” who is speaking. The real gnostic does not attribute any “state” to himself, for he is without ambition and without ostentation; he has a tendency rather — through an “instinct for holding back” — to disguise his nature inasmuch as he has, in any case, awareness of “cosmic play” (*lila*) and it is hard for him to take secular and worldly persons seriously, that is to say, “horizontal” beings who are full of self-confidence and who remain, “humanists” that they are, below the vocation of man.

What the natural gnostic seeks, from the point of view of “realization”, is much less a “path” than a “framework” — a traditional, sacramental and liturgical setting which will allow him to be ever more genuinely “himself”, namely a particular archetype of celestial “iconostasis”. This puts us in mind of the sacred art of India and the Far East which demonstrates in supernaturally evocative fashion the heavenly models of earthly spirituality; therein lies, in fact, the *raison d'être* of that art which is at once “mathematical” and “musical” and which is founded upon the principle of the “*darsana*”, the visual and intuitive assimilation of the symbol-sacrament. Moreover, this symbol does not belong to art alone but

rises up also — and a priori — from animate and inanimate nature for there is, in all beauty, a liberating and, in the final account, saving element; which enables us to voice the esoteric paraphrase: "He that hath eyes to see, let him see!"

"Know thyself" was the inscription written above the portico of the Temple of Delphi; that is, know thine immortal essence but also, by that very token, know thine archetype. This injunction no doubt applies in principle to every man, but it applies to the pneumatic in a far more direct manner, in the sense that he has, by definition, awareness of his celestial model in spite of the flaws which his earthly shell may have undergone in contact with an all too uncongenial ambience. Paradox is part of the economy of this world below, given that the limitlessness of Universal Possibility necessarily implies unexpected, if not incomprehensible, combinations of things; phenomena can be what they are, but *vincit omnia veritas*.

Frithjof Schuon

#### STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Vol 17 Numbers 1 & 2

Hassan Suliman

Student of the Sophia PerennisAuthor has 314 answers and 477.4K answer viewsUpdated 2y

He did consider himself a muslim, lots of people in Cairo witnessed him never missing a prayer in the mosque unless he was very ill.

He married the daughter of cheikh Mohamed Ibrahim. He had 2 daughters named Leila and Khadidja but of course that happened after 1930, when he moved to Egypt.

However, since he wrote to Ivan Agelii, we also have written proof that he mastered the teachings of Islam between 1910 and 1912. His conversion to Islam in 1912, when he took the name of Abdul Wahid Yahya, is also well documented.

EDIT: I guess I jumped to conclusions too fast. The are clues pointing out the fact that Guénon practiced Islam before moving to Cairo, however, as Mathieu Dupré pointed out in comments, the environment Guénon lived can show us the opposite:

"Except that after being accepted into sufism, Guénon married to a catholic wife, in a catholic marriage.

There is no evidence whatsoever that his wife (a fervent catholic) knew about his affiliation with sufism, and it is known that Guénon's entourage only discovered the latter with the publication of The Symbolism of the Cross (his first book written since Guénon's relocation to Cairo) and its inscription to his sheikh (Abder-Rahman Elīsh El-Kebīr).

Also, in France, at this time, it would have been very difficult for someone to practice Islam (openly, at least), moreover if this person was a convert from catholicism. Especially for someone like Guénon, who was teaching classes, sometimes in private (catholic) school..."

We have 11 letters from Rene Guenon to Julius Evola in the span from 1930 to 1951. In earlier letters to Guido de Giorgio, we saw Guenon's frustration with some of Evola's views. Here, Guenon confronts Evola directly, although more politely than in his letters to de Giorgio. Evola claims to have read all of Guenon's books; nevertheless, it seems he either misunderstood or rejected some significant aspects of Guenon's view. I believe there is some of both.

For example, Evola does not seem to understand Guenon's notion of the Intellect and thus shows little interest in ideas like the Supreme Identity. On the other hand, Evola is committed to his own philosophical system which differs from Guenon's metaphysical writings in important ways. In a letter to Mircea Eliade, as we will soon see, Evola points out indeed that his doctrine is contained in his philosophy of the Absolute Individual.

The first of the letters follows:

24 August 1930  
Cairo, Egypt

You must have thought that I would not respond to your letter, which reached me in Paris a little more than a year ago.

The truth is that at that time I was quite ill and, subsequently, different unforeseen difficulties and commitments of every type made me always delay every correspondence that was not absolutely urgent. Time flew by quickly and I never succeeded in doing everything I wanted to. I'm taking advantage of the fact that I am close to a little stable in this residence to finally write you, asking you to excuse this excessive delay.

I have to tell you how little I was able to understand at all the interest that you showed in the reading of my books.

Obviously, the point of view you are assuming is quite distinctive and certainly cannot be mine, but I am pleased to see that that has not prevented you from getting rid of the anti-Oriental prejudice that, by your own admission, you used to hold. I wish that many others in the West would have the same attitude and come to understand the ancient doctrines of the Orient.

You ask me about [Jacques] Maritain; notwithstanding everything, I have always had friendly relations with him; as to ideas, we are in agreement especially on a negative point of view, that is, on anti-modernity. Apart from that, even he, disgracefully, is full of prejudices against the Orient; at least he was, because it seems that those prejudices since a short time ago have been attenuated; but, something strange, it is fed by a type of fear in the face of what one does not know, and it is a disagreeable thing, because it prevents him from broadening his own point of view.

But permit me to point out to you, from the moment that you read all my books that, after The Crisis of the Modern World, there is another, Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power, what was published last year.

Currently, I am working on The Symbolism of the Cross that will definitely be published toward the end of this year.

Excuse the briefness of my letter; I would like to be able to more or less get up to date with our correspondence.

23 February 1934  
Cairo, Egypt

Forgive me once again for being so late in responding to your letter that I received with pleasure after such a long silence. But I have suffered from an

acute eyesight weakness, and your letter reached me exactly at the moment when I was able to read it only after a very long time. The quantity of things of every type that had accumulated while I found myself in that impossible situation of working is such that, ever since, I have not yet succeeded in freeing myself from it and to regain that lost time.

I thank you for all your appreciations in regard to my works; and I think that in effect we can find ourselves in agreement, at least, on what concerns the conditions of the current world and the necessity of a return to the tradition and spirituality, if indeed it is still possible for the West, at the point in which things have currently reached.

As far as living far from Europe, I cannot perhaps precisely take into account certain tendencies; I must confess that I do not excessively trust in a rene that, as much as I know of it, remains up to this point very superficial and somewhat confused: above all, except for rare exceptions, it is about vague and poorly defined aspirations, and it is very difficult to say what will result from it. But what is certain, is that we notice in very general lines how the people are no longer so satisfied with their own modern 'civilization', and that some begin to doubt the 'progressive' pretense: as far as that goes, it is insufficient, nevertheless it is already at least something à !

Regarding the problems brought up in your letter, permit me to tell you with great frankness that these difficulties appear to me especially to derive from the fact that you do not make a very clear distinction between the religious point of view of the one hand, and the metaphysical or initiatic, on the other. Whatever their relationships might be in certain respects, it is never necessary to confuse or mix them, since they refer to totally different domains, and they cannot consequently interfere with each other. The domain that defines religious truth belongs to what Hindu doctrine calls 'non-supreme' knowledge; it is sufficient to put everything in its place and in its order because there is no conflict possible. Above all, it is necessary not to forget that mysticism belongs totally to the religious ambit; any comparison is therefore not possible between mysticism and metaphysics.

The two ways, without considering the very relevant differences of their modalities, are not, in reality, absolutely marked out to reach the same goal; and the 'mystical union' is not the jivan mukta, no more than 'salvation' is 'Liberation'.

Everything that is religious, including mysticism, concerns individual possibilities, in the indefinite extension of which they are susceptible and does not go beyond them; on the other hand that is its reason for being. On the contrary, the reason for metaphysical realization is to proceed beyond [individual possibilities]; and this is why the one can serve as the base of the other. Nor was it the case for Christian esoterism of the Middle Ages, as it was always for Islamic esoterism; and, in this regard, I cited this aphorism that seems to me to be perfectly adapted to the argument: As long as a man desires Paradise or has fear of Hell, he will not be able to aspire to the least grade of initiation à .

I must moreover bring to your attention the fact that the religious point of view is necessarily tied to certain historical contingencies, while the metaphysical point of view refers exclusively to the order of principles. To speak of à *multiple avatars* à , is to stick to the domain of appearances; nevertheless, in absolute reality, they are 'the same thing'; the Christ principle is not multiple, whatever it can be made of its terrestrial manifestations or other types. The à *Mediator* à , according to all traditions, is the 'Universal Man', which is also the Christ; whatever the name by which he is called changes nothing, and I do not see what difficulty there can be in regard to this.

The ascetic way would be, in its type, more comparable to the initiatic way of what is not mysticism, if only in that it implies a method and a positive

effort. Mysticism, for its part, is instead totally the opposite because of its passive character. The ascetic way can therefore be a preparation for a realization of another order, much more than the mystical way, which would even seem even incompatible with that goal.

But I do not think on the other hand that we can assert that some of what passes beyond elementary religion is open to all; asceticism belongs only to some, and mysticism to some other. As to what is beyond the religious domain, it is obvious that it concerns a much more restricted number of persons. Whoever finds his fulfillment at a certain level would make a very great error to try to pass beyond it. That concerns the question of a necessary hierarchy, against which all sophisms of democratic egalitarianism are impotent, though many of Catholics themselves today unfortunately are affected by it: and there are perhaps still a few of them who even suspect it.

In regard to your objection inherent to the domain of pure intellectuality, is it quite certain that it is even what it has as a goal? In that case it is still necessary to make an essential distinction: the texts that you cite are revolts against profane knowledge, not against sacred knowledge; and we absolutely do not confuse what is simply rational with what is purely intellectual. When I speak of profane knowledge, I understand by it, naturally, everything that is philosophy; the less the spirit is blocked from all those things, the better, certainly, and from the initiatic point of view even more than the religious. It would be necessary perhaps to include also a good part of theology, insofar as it contains many useless subtleties and is of a still quasi-philosophical nature. In any case, everything that is discussion and controversy is of a purely profane spirit. That said, it is necessary to add that pure intellectuality eludes on the other hand the religious domain; this is another thing and it stands to reason that sentiment and action have their part in it. Yet again, it is necessary to put all things in the place that belongs to them, without allowing them any influence over a domain that is not their own.

Finally, pure intellectuality is in the same way indifferent in regards both to pride and humility, two opposed notions that are of a sentimental order in the same manner; those who pretend the contrary show clearly in that case that they do not have the least idea of what is truly intellectuality.

I see that you consider as valuable the incomprehension of P. A.; it would be somewhat difficult to find a more limited spirit than his. Moreover, what a fine way of defending Christianity by continuing to deny that its doctrine reaffirms a higher meaning, instead of the nonsense of moral and social character that one admits to often see in it! I don't see in what a similar vulgarity would presuppose the intervention of a superhuman principle; fortunately, I have for my part a better idea of Christianity than his.

It is sad to see how persons of this type look to diminish all that is higher than them ; The Truth is too high to receive the least insult.

18 April 1949  
Cairo, Egypt

About what you say in regards to Schuon's book, I don't see exactly how the affirmation of the metaphysical identity of the possible and the real could be an 'error', actually just the opposite. Nevertheless, if there is anyone to whom this should be attributed, it was I and not he, since, long before him, I devoted a whole chapter (the second) of the Multiple States of Being to this problem.

As to the esoteric character of early Christianity, of which later Christianity was only an exteriorization (i.e., no longer having anything initiatic about it); we have no doubt about that, all the more since the Islamic tradition asserts it explicitly, claiming that Christianity, in its origins, was tariqa [way] and not sharia [law]. The absence of sharia is in fact evident from the moment that it had to supply it through an adaption of Roman law (whence 'canon

law' was derived), therefore with the contribution of something that was completely unrelated to Christianity (and it is necessary to note in this regard that the word in Arabic *aqnun* is still used today, in contrast to *sharia*, to define every law that is not integrated in the tradition).

After my latest books (especially the Perspectives on Initiation and the Reign of Quantity, since in the Great Triad I only used two or three articles), there currently remain very few of my articles, as you noted, that have not yet been republished, at least among those that were intended to be copied in Ur. As for the articles on the *Fedeli d'Amore*, I must say that I had the intention for a long time to include them in a new edition of the *Esoterism of Dante*; I was not able to find the time to systematize it, but I did not abandon them and moreover it is likely that the edition is about to go out of print very quickly.

On the problem of Masonry, I believe that it will truly be very difficult for us to agree; but there are a few things that astonish me about what you say in this question. First of all, you make me say (without any qualification, for I had made quite clear that it concerned only the West) that the only initiatic traditional organizations existing are the *Compagnonnage* and Masonry, and then you assert that I should not logically write that some Masons would seem to not take into account Oriental initiatic organizations, that otherwise exist and among which some have more or less numerous members in Europe itself. It stands to reason that it can at least write also for them. I add, to finish with this subject once and for all, that my writings can furnish to some people, unless they are associated with an initiatic organization, a theoretical knowledge of traditional doctrine that in itself is not unimportant. As to the Masons, they have had in this circle, in recent times, many more results than I myself had hoped.

Another thing: I said that in the Western world itself there still survive certain organization tied to Christian Hermetism and dating from the Middle Ages. If I have not stressed this more strongly, it is because they are so closed (one of those that I knew more in depth restricted its membership to just twelve) that the possibility of being admitted is in practice not even to be considered.

I come to another problem; if you take Masonry to be considered, or rather its origin, as an idea similar to what you express, I ask myself how you could have once had, as you had told me some time ago, the intention of developing a work on the rituals aimed at eliminating its anti-traditional elements that were introduced into it. Under these conditions it would be a totally useless task, and there is in that, I confess, something that is absolutely incomprehensible to me. [Before he was injured in Austria, Evola had been doing research on a book on Masonic rituals.]

However, what I would like you to take notice is this: the date of 1717 does not mark the origin of Masonry, but the beginning of its degeneration, something that is quite different. Furthermore, because we can speak of a utilization of *âopsychic residuesâ* in this time, it would be necessary to suppose that operative Masonry had then ceased to exist, something not true, from the moment that it subsists still today in different countries, and that in England, between 1717 and 1813, it participated effectively to complete certain things and to straighten up others, at least in the measure in which that was still possible in a Masonry reduced to being only speculative. In reality, the schism of 1717 involved just four Lodges, while there still existed a number of much higher Lodges that did not take part in it. On the other hand, where a regular and continuous filiation exists, the degeneration did not interrupt the initiatic transmission; it only reduced its efficacy, at least in general lines, because in spite of everything there could always be exceptions. As to the anti-traditional action of which you speak, it would be necessary in this regard to make some precise distinctions, e.g., between the Anglo-Saxon and Latin Masons; but, in any case, that only proves the incomprehension of the great part of the members of one or another Masonic organization, simply a question of fact and not of principle. Fundamentally, what could be said is that Masonry was the

victim of infiltrations of the modern spirit, as in the exoteric order even the Catholic Church is in its current state even to a greater degree.

Of course, it is that I do not want at all to attempt to persuade you or anybody, only to make you see that the problem is much more complex than what you seem to believe.

Regarding the 'initiatic strain' you mention, without denying at all their existence (and what I just said of certain existent Hermetic groups could otherwise be connected to them), I have to say that, for many reasons, I am very skeptical in the great number of cases, and that even the examples you cited are among those that seem to me to be more than dubious. Eliphas Levi was a Mason, and certain English circles with which he was in relationship were, to summarize, study groups, without a proper initiatic character, and were reserved exclusively to Masons. Apart from that, I never found the least proof that he had received any other regular initiation, and all the stories that some have told about this can only be placed in the category of occultist fables.

Meyrink was certainly in the current of very numerous traditional ideas, especially of a Jewish source; but, not to mention that this presupposes precisely an initiation (I do not think that he was able to receive a truly Cabalistic initiation, the only thing without doubt to be taken in consideration in a case of the type), the burlesque manner and caricature with which he often presented these ideas leaves a truly sinister impression (a shame that I cannot tell you by letter all the efforts that I made to remediate certain detrimental consequences of The Green Face). Besides, his relations with the school of Bo Yin Ra (whose true origin I am probably the only one who knows, because I noticed that his own disciples did not know it) are not certainly a very favorable indication.

As for Kremmerz, there would be much to say, and it would require too much time. But what I saw of his writings and even certain rituals that were too clearly à œfabricatedâ , gave me the impression of something of rather scant consistency, and that recalls the worst parts of Eliphas Levi's work; in any case, the different groups into which his disciples split give the impression of not knowing absolutely how to direct themselves, and some admit to finding themselves at a true impasse.

I will add that, every time that it concerned self-styled Egyptian organizations, there were more serious reasons to be suspicious of them, because nothing authentic is found there and not even, quite often, of any consistency. As for an initiation received outside of the ordinary way of joining a known organization, there are certainly some examples of them, but in these cases it was a question of extremely rare exceptions, and no one can be confident of finding himself in a similar condition to avoid a normal tie; to think of it differently would be self-delusion in a very serious way. As for me, since the age of 22 or 23, I have been attached with some initiatic organization both Oriental and Western, from which you can take account that the supposition you advanced could not in any way be applied to my situation.

The doctrinal question that you speak about at the end of your letter is, fundamentally, less difficult than what it seems at first view: every à œtrue manâ has instead realized all the possibilities of the human state, but each one following a way that is congenial to him and thanks to which he differentiates himself from the others. Moreover, if it were not so, how could there be a place here, in our world, also for other beings that have not reached this level? The same thing can also be applied, at another level, for the à œtranscendent manâ or the jivan mukta; but then it is a matter of the totality of the possibilities of all the states.

Only, what is real, as weird as it can seem, is in fact that beings who have reached the same level can then be, in a certain sense, à œindistinguishableâ from the outside, as far as it concerns the corporeal appearance. It happens in effect that they encompass a 'type' that no longer has any individuality, and

that occurs above all for those who carry out certain special functions: the 'type' is then that of the same function, something can make one believe that it is always the same being to exercise it over the course of a period of several centuries, while the reality is something completely different.

According to what you explained to me this time, it seems that you consider the words 'possible' and 'real' in the sense of 'non-manifested' and 'manifested'; if that were so, one could say that it is merely a question of terminology and that, in spite of this expressive difference, we are basically in agreement on the point in question. However, such a use of the words 'possible' and 'real', in a sense much different from how we use it, does not seem to be acceptable, because the non-manifested is not only just as real, but even more real than the manifested.

What I said last time regarding my ties with initiatic organizations (even though I don't really like to speak of these things that ultimately can be of interest to no one outside of myself) was in response to what you wrote: most often out of that secret society those capable of greater comprehension with respect to initiatic things were found, something that perhaps was verified in your own situation.

That made me think you gave yourself the idea that, in my case, it could be a question of one of those pretended initiations without any regular ties, which, in my opinion, I could consider only purely imaginary. By the way, I will point out to you that, in Perspectives, I dedicated an entire chapter to explain the reasons why the word 'secret society' is absolutely unacceptable in cases of the type of those which you referred to.

You think that, in Perspectives, we do not speak of Christian Hermetic organizations; but to the contrary, I expressly mentioned them even in the note to which you referenced and, if I didn't talk about it more, it is because those whose existence I was able to come to know admits such a restricted number of members that they can be considered as inaccessible for all practical purposes. I also see that you have not well understood in what sense I spoke of 'complex problems'. I only wanted to say with what in reality they have many more elements than what can be known through a study made 'from the outside'; it is therefore totally contrary to something that could be defined as you thought.

As for the source itself of the question concerning Masonry, I clearly mean that I do not at all claim to convince you, and that otherwise you would have no interest in it. You say that in that case, it is a question for you only of the truth, but it is also the same even for me. You know moreover that I have never been concerned to entice anyone to join one or another organization, no more than to distance him from them. I only said in a very clear way that that could not be my role. I never had the time nor the interest to be concerned with individual cases and I always refused to give particular advise to anyone, for this thing as for any other. That said, I must however make two or three observations on what you tell me this time, and first of all on what concerns the other grades, since the true nature of the relationship between those and Masonry seems to elude you. When I speak of Masonry without further clarifications, it is always about Masonry properly called, including only the three grades of Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason, to which can only be added the English grades of Mark and Royal Arch, totally unknown in 'continental' Masonry.

Regarding the many other grades like those you refer to, it is obvious that internally there are some things of a quite different character, and that the connection which you wanted to establish between the different 'system' is completely artificial. I am furthermore less inclined to question what I myself wrote formally in a recent article; but, as that is the way with which all these things ended up by agglomerating themselves around Masonry, they do not form an integral part of it to any qualification and consequently it is not what is in question. Another point on which I would like to bring your attention is that when you say that the Lodges that had not adhered to the 'speculative'.

schisms were not able to do anything to stop or rectify its consequences, it seems that you do not take into account things that nevertheless cover a certain importance, like the reestablishment of the grade of Master, totally unknown by those of 1717, or the action of the Ancients Great Lodge, whose independent existence continued up until 1813. To say so frankly, I have the impression that you always think only of what Masonry became at a certain period in Italy and France, and that you have no idea at all what concerns Anglo-Saxon Masonry.

To move on to other issues, I confess that I do not understand at all what realizations you mean concerning Eliphas Levi; in fact, like his filiation (or rather like drawing inspirations in his writings, since he himself died before that), there was nothing other than the occultist French movement of the end of the XIX century and the beginning of the XX, on whose insignificance I think we find ourselves in agreement.

For Kremmerz, I know well that a very unclear story is concealed underneath, but that it gives rise to many doubts, at least because I was never able to find any proof about the real existence of the organization to which he would have belonged. In any case, even if he had personally received an authentic initiation, that would still demonstrate nothing for the organization he founded, insofar as there were other cases of the same type (e.g., that of Inayat Khan, who belonged to a regular tariqa in India, but whose self-styled 'Order of Sufis' corresponded absolutely to nothing); everything that I can say, is that his rituals are more or less 'Egyptian' like those of Cagliostro!

There could nevertheless be certain realizations totally within that circle, as you say, but they do not go beyond the psychic domain, something that entails nothing of the truly initiated. I add that, after Kremmerz' death, the different groups into which his organization divided appear absolutely not to know where to turn. I notice that, concerning Eliphas Levi, I forgot to cite the use of his works by Albert Pike; but in that case it is a matter of an influence exercised (otherwise indirectly) on the interpretation of the other grades of the Scottish Rite, something that does not proceed even in the direction you have seen.

There are certainly cases in which an influence of the counter-initiation is quite visible, and among them, it is necessary to include those in which traditional information is present in a manner of a willful parody. This is above all Meyrink's case, something that, well intended, does not mean that he was perforce conscious of the influence that was exercised over him. Here is why I am amazed that you seem to have a certain esteem in regard to Meyrink, and all the more so, since he had belonged to Bo Yin Ra's movement, for which you clearly had no regard.

NOTE: As long ago as 1924, Evola reviewed some of Bo Yin Ra's works. Although Evola did not render a fully positive judgment, he conceded that his doctrine had some interesting points.

In this regard, it is necessary on the other hand for me to make a rectification: certainly there was in Bo Yin Ra a little bit of charlatanism and mystification, but there was at least still more to him, because he was connected with a very strange organization that had its own headquarters in parts of Turkestan and represented a more or less deviant type of Tantrism. About that, I can certainly be certain (and perhaps I am the only one), at the time when the future Bo Yin Ra was still called Joseph Schneider and studied painting in Paris, some members of the organization in discussion made it known to me one day that he was the only European to be a part of it. Later, I also saw the portrait that Bo Yin Ra had made of his 'Master' and that it was perfectly recognizable for me; in such occasions, I was able on the other hand to question whether even his most intimate disciples knew absolutely anything at all about that, and I was very aware of letting them in on what I myself knew of it.

[Discussions about publishing, translations, and the proofs of Revolt omitted]

Regarding Revolt, you are doubtlessly correct: it will be simpler if you send me the proofs and I send back my observations after reading them, because otherwise you may have already modified something that I had noted.

Inayat Khan, whom I also knew, was regularly associated with the tariqah Chishtiya, one of the most widespread in India and totally orthodox; something that did not prevent the organization he founded to be completely the fruit of his fantasy and lacking any value; the name, a *order of Sufisâ* that he gave it is also truly absurd.

As for the Masonic question, I think like you that it is useless to revisit it again. I only point out that as you say yourself this time, it is good to understand how it is not possible to speak of 'Masonry' meaning a type of global entity, that in reality does not exist, or rather, if you prefer, exists only in the line of principle and which one cannot attribute it to any more or less exterior action: the refusal by some of its branches to recognize others whose deviations they criticize sufficiently proves on the other hand that there does not exist in this regard any unity.

The problem of the possible and the real seems very simple and obvious to me, but, of course, under the condition of examining it from the metaphysical point of view. It is obvious that, from the philosophical point of view, one can always think anything whatsoever and discuss a problem endlessly without ever reaching a conclusion; it is even what characterizes profane speculation, and I have never been able to entertain any interest for those so-called 'problems' that fundamentally have only a verbal existence.

Melchizedek corresponds, in Islamic esoterism, to the function of the Qutb, as I have otherwise explained in King of the World. On the other hand, El-Khider is the Master of the Afrad, which are found outside the jurisdiction of the Qutb and is said that they are not even known by it; in this regard, the Koranic story of the meeting between El-Khidr and Moses (Surat El-Kalif) is otherwise very significant. The way of the Afrad is something absolutely exceptional, and no one can choose it on his own initiative. It is about an initiation received beyond the ordinary means and belongs in reality to another chain (perhaps you can find an article of Abdul-Hadi in which he deals with these two chains, even if his definitions are not perhaps very clear).

In the Jewish Kabbalah, the same distinction is found expressed through the duality of Metatron and Sandalphon.

The invisible Imam is something completely different: those who admit his existence generally think that it is he who has to appear as the Mahdi. He is on the other hand defined as 'el-Muntazer', that could mean, the 'expected one', but that is interpreted almost always as 'he who waits'.

Doctrinal infallibility belongs to whoever exercises legitimately a traditional function, naturally within the limits of that same function.

The issue of 'impeccability' is quite different, and it is usually considered, at least in orthodox tradition, as reserved to the Prophet: if it happens that he sometimes performs some acts that could seem reprehensible from an exterior point of view, it is only a question of an appearance, and such actions should in reality justify for the reason that elude the understanding of ordinary men.

I can provide you some news about Mircea Eliade: he published, as you might know, three articles from his journal Zalmoxis, the last of which in 1942. After that, he spent the rest of the war in Portugal, and subsequently he returned to Paris where he still is today. He has had many items published recently: *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, the *Myth of the Eternal Return*, and the *History of Religious Ideas* (which I have not yet had time to read), without mentioning the

many important articles in the *Revue de la Histoire des Religions*. I don't have his address, but I think I can easily find it out and will then let you know.

As for Leon de Poncins, it is a matter of a rather unpleasant story. Shortly before the war, a certain Eve Louquet was his secretary who took part in a group of dangerous sorcerers. He himself was a victim of these people and concerning the people who by chance saw him again around 1940, they reported to me that he seemed to have undergone a true collapse. I never knew what became of him since, but, in such conditions, I have many doubts that he can still be alive. [He actually outlived both Guenon and Evola. ~ ed.]

What is strange is that in the same period, one of the individuals in question tried to start a correspondence with me for some reason. At that time I did not know what it was about, but very soon the affair appeared suspicious to me, so that I immediately gave him a clean break.

I recently had the chance to speak about you with Mr. M., who has for more than a year been representing Argentina in Cairo and he informed me that he had known you at one time.

He intends to translate *Man and his Becoming* into Spanish; up until now, only the General Introduction has been translated into that language, in a version published in Buenos Aires during the war.

Since you asked me my age, I am 62 years old; I knew that you had to be younger than I, but I didn't think that the difference was so great. [Evola was 51 at the time.] As for my photograph, I am sorry that I cannot satisfy your request, but the truth is that I don't have any, and for many reasons. In fact, first of all what could be called a matter of principle that commits me, as you say, to give no importance to anything that is of a simply individual character. But, beyond that, I am also cautious that it could present some danger. About 15 years ago, I was informed that a certain Jewish lawyer was poking all around here to procure one of my photographs, claiming to be willing to pay any price. I never knew what he truly wanted to do with it, but what is certain in any case is that his intentions were not at all benevolent. Since one never knows where a photograph can end up, I concluded from the episode that it was much more prudent to not take one.

29 October 1949  
Cairo, Egypt

I received your letter of 4 September about eight days ago; I wonder if you were able to reach Eliade, since I rushed to send you his address in Capri. A short time after I wrote you, I knew that he had already returned to Paris; it seems that he did not take a very long vacation.

[Discussions and complaints about publishing and editors omitted]

Abdul-Hadiâ's article, which I spoke about, entitled *Pages dedicated to Mercury*, was republished in 'Etudes Traditionnelles', but I realized that occurred only after the war, which explains the reason why you aren't familiar with him.

As for 'impeccability', it goes without saying that it must belong equally to all who have reached a certain spiritual level. But, excluding the case of the prophetic mission, the possession of such a state concerns only the person who received it, and no one else can speak of its merit or care about it, hence the absence of every explicit affirmation in this regard in orthodox doctrine.

If I learn something about Leon de Poncins, I will let you know, but I still don't know what happened to him. I believed, I no longer know exactly why, that he had to retreat to Switzerland during the war, but I was not able to confirm that.

Regarding evil spells, there is a great difference between true sorcerers like

those with whom he had to deal and simple occultists. The latter, notwithstanding all their pretenses, never reach any effective result. There have often been some of them who attempted to do something against me and, also like you, I never heard anything about it at all.

On the other hand, when you think that things of that type should not be able to strike those who have a true spiritual vocation (however I don't think that can be said to have been that the case of Leon de Poncins), it is also necessary to make a distinction: if you want to speak of the psychic and mental side, you are absolutely correct, but things are quite different from the corporeal point of view and anyone can always be struck in this regard. Furthermore, since it has been passed down that some sorcerers succeeded in sickening the Prophet himself, I don't even see who could boast of being secure from their attacks.

Thomas Palamidessi, whose writings you inserted into your letter, is again obviously another charlatan of the type of those who currently abound everywhere. But what is astonishing is that he again appropriated ideas found in your and other's books, to use them in a way that can only discredit them; in such conditions, the works that he publishes should not require much effort to write.

I heard about Meher Baba in the past and his vow of silence, which does not seem to prevent him from responding in other ways to the questions that are asked of him, but I did not know that he has reappeared in recent times. I do not know if he ever was associated with any regular initiatic organization, but it seems dubious to me because he is a Parsi. Nothing of the type seems to exist among the Parsis of India, who moreover have conserved only rather incomplete fragments of their tradition (I speak of the Parsis of India, because those of central Asia have quite other knowledge, even if they keep it hidden).

I am quite astonished about how much you tell me in regards to Karoly Kerenyi, because I remember that in the past he had spoken very favorably about me; it had to be in 1939 or 1940, and at that occasion he had sent me his book Religion in Antiquity. On the other hand I reviewed it, but because of the suspension of 'Etudes Traditionnelle', I was able to publish it only after its resumption.

As for Carl Jung, his influence unfortunately is gaining ground everywhere, in France as in Italy and Switzerland, and he seems to me still more dangerous than Freud because of his pseudo-spiritual pretense. Recently I had to write an article about the deformations of the very idea of Tradition provoked by his theory of the 'collective unconscious'.

The Golden Dawn was a self-styled Hermetic organization that fundamentally did not seem to have a very serious character, because it was from its beginnings an authentic mystification. It is true that this could serve to conceal some rather suspect things. Internally, the principle role was developed by MacGregor and his wife (Bergson's sister). Only much later was Crowley introduced to it, as he also did in many other things. Even when it was not about rather insignificant pseudo-initiations (perhaps that was not at all the case for the Golden Dawn), his involvement introduced truly sinister influences into it, if only making of it something much more dangerous. The Golden Dawn has ceased to exist, following a misunderstanding among its members, but a part of them followed it up under the name of Stella Matutina.

To come back to Aleister Crowley, what you told me reminds me of the story that turned up in 1931 (I believe at least that was the exact date): while he was in Portugal, he suddenly disappeared. They found his clothes on the border of the sea, something that made them believe he had drowned. But it was only a simulated death, since they were no longer concerned about him and did not try to find out where he had gone. Actually, he went to Berlin to play the role of secret adviser to Hitler who was then at his beginning. It is probably this that had given rise to certain tales about the Golden Dawn, but in reality it was only about Crowley, because it does not seem that a certain English colonel named Etherton, who was then his 'colleague', had ever had the least

relationship with that organisation.

A little later, Crowley founded the Saturn Lodge in Germany; have you ever heard of it? There he called himself Master Therion, and his signature was to mega Therion (the Great Beast), something that in Greek gives exactly the numeric value 666.

Rene Guenon and the “Seven Towers of Satan”

antimason

Nov '22

There is such a thing as sacred geography. It studies not just geographical objects, but places of power that can have both positive and negative energy. Our planet is a complex multi-layered organism, and each layer has a certain energy charge.

In places of displacement of the earth’s crust, ancient volcanic craters, tectonic faults, glaciers or falls of celestial bodies, the forces of the deep layers break out of their level and affect what is happening on the surface.

Research by Rene Guenon

René Jean-Marie-Joseph Guénon (1886-1951) was a French philosopher, author of works on metaphysics, traditionalism, symbolism, and initiation. He is considered to be the ancestor of integral traditionalism – a line of thought, the foundation of which is the position of the existence of the Primordial tradition or “Eternal Wisdom” – the metaphysical doctrine of the First Principle.

In 1906, nineteen-year-old Guénon met the occultist Gerard Ankoss (Papus), joined the Martinist Order, but soon left it. In 1908 he participated in the Congress of Masons and Spiritualists, where he made new acquaintances and expanded his knowledge in the field of Eastern philosophy. In 1910, the 24-year-old Guénon became acquainted with the Sufi tradition through the Arabic theologian Abder Rahman el-Kebir. In addition, Guénon becomes aware of the Taoist tradition.

In 1912, not thinking at all about practicing Islam, Guénon was initiated into the Sufi tariqat of Shazilia, named Abdel-Wahid Yahya (Servant of the One). In the article “Notes on René Guénon” there is an answer to the question of why Guénon chose the “Islamic way”: Guénon had no choice: he did not recognize the initiatic nature of Christian sacraments, Buddhism at that time he considered heterodox teaching, and Hindu initiation was inaccessible to him because of the caste system. It is not known whether Guénon would have converted to Islam without settling in a Muslim country, since he needed

initiation: the Sufi order gave him this opportunity, as well as all the necessary and secondary accompanying details. Entering the tariqat of Shazilia, he chose initiation, not the “Islamic way”.

After converting to Islam, Guénon specialized in Eastern metaphysics, mainly in southern Eurasia. At the age of 44, he moved to Cairo, Egypt. In 1934, six years after the death of his first wife, he married the daughter of the merchant Muhammad Ibrahim, descended from the descendants of the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, the Fatimids. Guénon had two daughters in 1944 and 1947, and a son in 1949 (another son was born four months after Guénon’s death in 1951). In 1950, doctors suspected he had blood poisoning. On January 7, 1951, René Guénon died, pronouncing the word “Allah” before his death.

#### Theory: The Crisis of the Modern World

Guénon was looking for a primordial (original) religious tradition, which, in his opinion, humanity had greatly distorted in the course of the historical process. The French philosopher studied the ancient Egyptian religious system especially closely, being sure that it is one of the oldest, or rather borrowed from one of the pre-religions. In addition, Guénon was dedicated to the subtlety of Sufism, an esoteric Muslim movement.

The basis of Henon’s historiosophy is the position of a naturally descending, degrading movement of the world process from the initial “Earth paradise” to the final catastrophe, which, however, will be the moment of the “pole reversal” and the beginning of a new cycle. The deviation of the West from the “normal”, traditional system of existence was finally determined in the XIV century. The current world is the “kingdom of quantity”, the weakening of the qualitative principle and the strengthening of the quantitative. All kinds of human activity – science, art, crafts, money circulation, originally carried out in connection with “superhuman” principles and based on tradition, acquire, at variance with it, a purely profane character.

In *The Crisis of the Modern World* (1927), Guénon describes the state of humanity at the beginning of the 20th century as the Dark Age foreshadowed by all traditional doctrines. Its features are given by the author in the titles of the chapters of the book – “social chaos”, “individualism”, “profane science”, “material civilization”, the primacy of “action” over “knowledge”, “expansion of the West”.

#### The Seven Towers

The French philosopher René Guénon also dealt with the topic of breakthrough points of negative energy, the so-called “towers of Satan”. According to the information collected by Guénon, there are seven “towers of Satan” on the planet – seven centers with powerful negative energy. According to Guénon, the towers are a kind of antithesis of the seven poles of the Sufi tradition, shrines with a reverse sign, “places of power”, providing a connection between black magicians and the prince of Darkness and supporting centers of counter-initiation, headed by “Satan’s saints”, devil worshipers in the true sense of the word, those who are preparing the arrival of the Antichrist. The theme of the towers of Satan is raised by Genon in one of the publications and repeatedly in the correspondence of the 30s., From which we learn about their location.

This is where seven fallen angels fell from heaven. By the way, from the position of geology there should be holes in the earth’s crust. It is believed that with the help of the energy of these breakthroughs, you can contact the spirits of the underworld and master the dark force that can give power over the world. The search for such areas was actively engaged in the Third Reich. Many esotericists are convinced that such organizations as, for example, Masonic pursue the same goal.

Here is what Guénon writes about the location of these metaphysical objects:

“They are arranged in the form of an arc, circumnavigating Europe at some distance: one part of it is in the area of Niger, which in the time of the ancient Egyptians said that the most terrible sorcerers come from there; the second is in Sudan, in a mountainous region inhabited by “lycanthropes” (werewolves) in the amount of about 20,000 people (I knew eyewitnesses of this phenomenon here); the third and fourth are in Asia Minor, one in Syria, the other in Mesopotamia; the fifth is in Turkestan; and the last two should be located even northerly, closer to the Urals or in the western part of Siberia, but I must admit that to date I have not been able to find out their exact geographical location.”

Most likely, the number seven appears, since it has a sacred meaning, and in general on the planet there should be, of course, more such zones. They are not all satanic. But since the sources available to Genon talked about specific seven, we will try to determine their localization first.

Where are the towers of Satan?

I/ II. The first two are the Niger and Sudan regions. The territory of Niger is composed of Precambrian volcanic rocks, in many places coming to the surface. About 10 thousand years ago - before the Sahara dried up, the Kiffian civilization flourished here - one of the oldest highly developed cultures of tall people. On the territory of Niger there are deposits of iron, uranium and oil.

Sudan is also the habitat of one of the oldest civilizations - meroe. Its inhabitants were related to the Egyptians. The country is located in the upper reaches of the Nile and has access to the Red Sea, so the Meroe civilization had the skills of navigation. Here, on the oldest elevated plateau, there are exits of the Archean layers, in which there are gold deposits. There are also oil fields in Sudan. The entire territory is subject to strong geological shifts, as it is located on a sliding tectonic fault - rift.

Regarding rifts: this phenomenon is characterized by the displacement of blocks and melting of the earth's crust, as a result, giant magma fields come to the surface, which can boil for thousands of years - this is a mantle plume. From huge ancient plumes with many small craters, the territories of Finland and Norway are composed. On Lake Saimaa in Finland, some of the craters are located on islands, sometimes their depth reaches 80 meters, and these are tangible places of power, where the Eastern sages did not have access. But the Finns have always been considered a people with extraordinary magical abilities.

The third tower of Satan is Syria. On its territory passes the Somali fault (which then goes through Italy, Germany and the Netherlands). According to the research findings of L.N. Gumilev, the legendary Shambhala is Syria. Here is the oldest volcanic massif El Druze. On these shores in ancient times lived the Phoenicians - a mysterious people of seafarers, who had colonies throughout the Mediterranean, but went on voyages around Africa, and maybe further.

Fourth tower: Mesopotamia, Sumer - the present Iraq. It borders Syria. Another land of the oldest civilizations that lived here during the Neolithic period. Archaeologists find in this area temples of unthinkable antiquity, with strange sculptures and frescoes that have a pronounced demonic bias. The Sumerian legend of Gilgamesh served as the basis for writing the Bible. True, the author of the Bible deliberately or mistakenly made some distortions in the original text. On this land lived the warlike people of the Assyrians, and then the Persians. Here is the legendary Babylon with its unfinished tower. Alexander the Great died in this city at the age of 32.

The fifth tower of Satan: Turkestan. This concept included the Asian republics of the USSR. This is a densely populated area, except for the mountains, so we turn to the climbers for information. Victory

Peak (7439 meters, the highest point of the Tien Shan) is one of the deadliest mountains on the planet. There was not a single season that the ascent was not accompanied by the death of people. If in a year no one died, then no one rose. The climbers were torn apart and whole bunches, most of them are not found.

The ridges of the Tien Shan are composed of sedimentary, metamorphic and eruptive rocks of the Paleozoic and Precambrian: during the formation of the planet, they were the seabed. Near the very top of Victory Peak is an extremely strange natural formation, which climbers call "Obelisk". It has the shape of a cone, with influxes and flows, its dark silhouette stands out sharply against the background of snow. Judging by the contours, it may be the remains of a crater or an underwater mud geyser. In general, it gives the impression of infernal. And many tragic cases occurred in the immediate vicinity of it.

VI and VII. The sixth and seventh towers of Satan. According to Guenon, they are located "closer to the Urals or in the western part of Siberia."

Russian geologist, archaeologist and writer Ivan Efremov has several stories about the mysteries of Siberia and Altai. Among them is the "Lake of Spirits" about one strange lake with a sparkling surface, which brings a quick death to everyone who will be on its shores. Subsequently, it turned out that the anomaly of this natural object was that mercury was in the lake instead of water. This field began to be used for the needs of industry. It is likely that it is in the zone of one of the holes in the earth's crust.

We think it makes sense to explore the area of Lake Baikal, which, like Sudan and Syria, is the site of a rift fault. There are many mysterious places associated with ancient legends and the emergence of great nations. Orkhon runic writing was born on Baikal, one of its examples is the grave of the great Turkic hero Kul-Tegin, who began his career as a successful strategist and military leader at the age of 16. A few centuries later, these runes were almost unchanged brought to Scandinavia by the god Odin, the supreme As.

Therefore, it seems logical to look for power objects not only in hard-to-reach points of the Earth, but also in Europe itself.

Objects of force created by man and living beings

The great saint of Russia, Sergius of Radonezh, at the founding of the monasteries, wandered for a long time through the forests until he found a positive geomagnetic zone. He could feel it. In a fertile place, Sergius cleared a piece of land and built the first hut and chapel, adding his own to the natural light force. Then the brethren came to him and a new monastery was created.

Few people know that Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was not only a pilot and author of "The Little Prince", but also a very capable esoteric. About the technique of occurrence of objects of force, he tells in his book-proverb "Citadel".

For example, in a rocky desert there is a piece of rock. It serves as a refuge from the sun for small animals that saturate it with the energy of their level. Caravans pass by and mark this stone as a milestone on their way: they look for it with their eyes in advance, for them it means the passed stage of the difficult path. And at some point, the stone accumulates so many of these small energy impulses that it begins to give them away. If there is a person with hypersensitivity nearby, he will pay attention to this and the stone can become an object of worship, will accumulate even more energy and begin to influence the environment.

In the same way, the objects of dark power were altar stones, on which bloody sacrifices were made. These stones were dedicated to certain gods, they were asked for help in case of enemy attacks and asked them to direct their destructive power to the enemy.

Of course, there were specialists - priests: an untrained person in contact with the beyond could get into trouble, hurt, first of all, himself and his offspring. So far, Siberian shamans are extremely disapproving of the uninitiated, who perform ethnic dances with tambourines. They argue that by using a non-case magical tool, you can bring trouble.

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Ali Turgiev "The Towers of Satan"

from Joy of Satan Ministries:

The Seven Towers of Satan (Ziarahs) represent the seven chakras. The tower with the "sharp, fluted point" symbolizes the heart chakra. The trapezoid, which is actually the uncapped pyramid, symbolizes Satan's unfinished work. Here is an excerpt from The Satanic Rituals: From their mecca-the tomb of their first leader, Sheik Adi-situated on Mount Lalesh near the ancient city of Nineveh, the Yezidi empire stretched in an invisible band approximately three hundred miles wide to the Mediterranean junction of Turkey and Syria on one end, and the mountains of the Caucasus in Russia on the other. At intervals along this strip were seven towers-the Towers of Satan (Ziarahs)-six of them trapezoidal in form, and one, the "center" on Mount Lalesh, shaped like a sharp, fluted point. Each tower was topped by a brilliant heliographic reflector, and was intended to serve as a "power house" from whence a Satanic magician could beam his will to the "descendants of Adam," and influence human events in the outside world. High Priestess Maxine Dietrich

# The Enigma of René Guénon and Agarttha

As we said, in 1956, Paul Chacornac wrote Guénon's first biography, where the spiritist modality used for the foundation of the OTR was described. As Marcel Clavelle declared, he helped Chacornac with Guénon's biography; in his unpublished "Document," Clavelle gave his personal opinion trying to explain this episode: or Guénon influenced the medium's mind, or Guénon himself caused the spiritist phenomenon.

The "Ordre du Temple rénové" was founded in the year 1908. *The Golem* of Gustav Meyrink was published in 1914; in 1909, Mark Twain wrote the *Letters from the Earth* that was published posthumously. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century actively prepared the last phase of the *Kali-yuga*, and had as main objective to create a paramount confusion. In that period, the solidification of the world, illustrated by an obtuse and dark materialism, was corroborated by the commencement of the dissolving process, to which the spiritist movement belonged. The confusion aimed at the annihilation of the true spirituality, of the true esotericism, and therefore, the episode of OTR could easily (and wrongly) be considered just a spiritist application, with René Guénon as its exponent.

The counter-initiatory forces have no access to the "power of discrimination." On the contrary, they use indiscriminately all the tools they can get, and because they need to create confusion, these tools can appear as opposing each other. Some of these tools are writers like Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), Mark Twain (1835-1910), Gustav Meyrink (1868-1932) and Alfred Kubin (1877-1959).

Ātmā, the universal spirit, which is not different from *Brahma*, is concealed to our eyes by three main veils that – the Hindu tradition explains – represent its "limitative conditions" and correspond to the three-partition of the universal manifestation (the "Three Worlds") and to the accordingly tripartite constitution of the total being (*Corpus-Anima-Spiritus*). The "waking" and the "dream" states,<sup>1</sup> components of the changeable and perishable individuality, embody the external grosser veils. Closer to Ātmā is a diaphanous veil, the "deep sleep" state, a state without dreams and full of bliss (*ananda*), but beyond these three states there is the supreme and unconditioned one, "The Fourth," where Ātmā dwells in itself.<sup>2</sup> These last two are essential for a complete initiation and

<sup>1</sup> *Māndūkya Up.* I, 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Māndūkya Up.* I, 5-7.

## L'Enigme René Guénon et l'Agarththa (IV)

spiritual realization. The “deep sleep” state, corresponding to Dante’s *Paradiso*, leads to the Gate of Liberation, yet it is still a limitative state and the truly effective and total liberation through the Sundoor aims at *Turiya*, “The Fourth” state.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the grosser states are inadequate for a full initiation and in the best case they could provide support for a realization of the *Lesser Mysteries*.

In the domain of the *Lesser Mysteries*, the danger is tremendous. The “waking” and “dream” states constitute the realm where the satanic forces have access and, the closer the end of time is, the stronger they act. The communication with the superior states breaks and the path towards *Turiya* (or at least towards the “deep sleep” state) is lost, which facilitates the chaos and confusion in the individual order. And the corporeal sheath, the grossest, is not the most vulnerable, even if the lower appetites and desires are its emanations; but the psychical sheath, with all those sentiments and emotions, and especially the mind represents the favourite place for mixed influences. The mind is the fanatic supporter of duality that permits the devil to feel legitimated. “As in dream the mind acts through Mâyâ presenting the appearance of duality, so also in the waking state the mind acts, through Mâyâ (the art of illusion), presenting the appearance of duality” and only in the “deep sleep” state the mind ceases to act and “becomes identical with fearless Brahma.”<sup>4</sup> An untamed mind maintains the illusion of reality; that is what happens in the “waking” and “dream” states.

It is desirable then to abandon the illusion and look upwards to the everlasting and nondual Principle. Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* repeatedly illustrated the above fundamental doctrine. Illusion, “country of dreams,” chaos and confusion, sports, characterize this special night; yet at the end order is restored and a new luminous cycle is ready to begin, proving the ties with the Principle. Dante travels through Hell (where there is no hope), yet at the end he rises to Heaven, reaching the Celestial Paradise. “No hope” is only for those lost into the labyrinthine “outside darkness,” those who look downwards and not upwards, those who wander without a guide or having a deceiving one. With the evolvement of the cycle, more and more often the interest is directed towards Hell, ghosts, dreams and “chthonic gods”; the tendency (*guna*) *tamas* (error, inertia, darkness and ignorance) dominates, and these who follow *tamas* go downwards, says *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* (XIV.18). For the *tamasic* individuals, the monster’s jaws are the Jaws of Death and not the Gate of Liberation, and the Existence is a chaos containing nightmares, spirits, fear and death.

This kind of limitation due to the ignorance of the decaying world happens equally for extensive and secondary cycles. We note it with the “evolution” in time of Western literature. Alexandre Dumas, Jules Verne, Bram Stoker, Edgar Poe, even if they provide dwelling for some traditional symbols in their works, all are more concerned to look downwards. For Melville, the quest of the white whale is a fearful enterprise, *Moby Dick* illustrating the Jaws of Death. For Verne, the journey through Hell leads to illusion and destruction. In Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, Hermione, whose illusory “image” is a statue, a perfect copy of herself, symbolizes *Madonna Intelligenza* and *Shekinah* (the

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<sup>3</sup> “The Fourth” state corresponds to Meister Eckhart’s Godhead, the divine abyss, where God appears without names and attributes (Eckhart, *Sermons*, I, 56).

<sup>4</sup> *Mândûkya Up.* III.29-35.

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“divine presence” of the *Kabbalah*), the immortal Knowledge and Tradition descending to initiate a new cycle and establish a new spiritual center. Hermione is absolutely real, infinitely more real than the world. When Paulina, the Initiatress, commands her to descend, she says: “Music, awake her: strike!”<sup>5</sup> The music has divine powers providing resurrection and life. For Verne, on the contrary, music causes death and then, like Stilla’s image, is just an illusion, a devil’s trick. In the same way, Dumas and Stoker, instead of suggesting a luminous way upwards, maintain their stories at the level of graveyards, vampires and death.<sup>6</sup> In the modern times, especially these authors, with interest in extraordinary tales, give the opportunity to the traditional symbols to find refuge in their work and, despite the authors’ attraction to the *tamasic* domain, a spiritual symbolism is very likely to hide under the fictional surface.<sup>7</sup> Beside the rare authors who still consciously know some genuine traditional data, the majority are more or less innocent transmitters and it is the reader’s responsibility to be capable to unveil or restore a sacred meaning where it is the case. Not sentimentalism and profane analysis, but the power of discrimination in accordance with the sacred writings of divine inspiration should be the infallible guide – say the seers. The power of discrimination (symbolized by the *Hamsa* in the Hindu tradition and by the *Qur'an* in Islam) guarantees the right choice between heavenly (supernal) and terrestrial (infernal) symbols, between the immortal and mortal twin, between the wheat and the darnel,<sup>8</sup> which could cohabit together, as it happens in Christ’s parable. The same cohabitation appears in the literary works, which always imposes a selective approach. It does not mean that such works are in any way genuine traditional or initiatory stories; it is a fundamental mistake to consider that the work itself, because some traditional symbols are hiding there, is a traditional one or an initiatory one; on the contrary, this type of “literature” is usually just a “parody” of the genuine sacred stories and is infested with infernal influences, aiming at confusing the reader.

Edgar Allan Poe’s *Pym* is mostly concerned with evil and infernal trials. In *Ms. Found in a Bottle*, Poe describes the pole, the center, as a fearful abyss, a whirlpool in which, amid a bellowing and thundering of ocean and tempest, the ship, whirling in concentric circles, is falling down. Mark Twain wrote in 1896 a similar story, unfinished, called *The Enchanted Sea-Wilderness*, in which he depicts an infernal abyss, close to the South Pole, and named the “Devil’s Race Track.”<sup>9</sup> The sea voyage starts at the winter solstice and it is directed southward; eventually, the brig reaches the “bewitched domain” of circular shape, being “in the whirl and suck of the Devil’s Race-Track.” The “Great Dark”

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<sup>5</sup> V.III.

<sup>6</sup> It seems that E. T. A. Hoffmann played a very suspect role in all of this. His work influenced not only Dumas, Verne and Poe, but also Freud and Carl Jung.

<sup>7</sup> It is a kind of a game. The devil’s parody of the spiritual domain and sacred rituals, its monkey-like symbols, constitute an attempt to confuse and delude, in a vain hope to eliminate the celestial influences. The devil is tricky, a master of deception, and altering the divine symbols and mystifying their meaning, it tries to take control over the sacred kernel. On the other hand, the traditional symbols take advantage of this parody to remain alive and accessible to a true quest. The inferior influences have no access to the spiritual and celestial domain, only to the psychical one, therefore the traditional symbols, even covered with dirt or devilish illusions, will preserve their divine significances.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 13:24-30.

<sup>9</sup> *The Devil's Race-Track: Mark Twain's Great Dark Writings*, Univ. of California Press, 1980, p. 29.

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governs there, but in the center there is “a trap” called the “Everlasting Sunday” where ghost-ships keep rotating and a forever bright sky replaces the darkness. Like in Poe’s *Pym*, black and white alternates, marking the “center,” but in Twain’s case it is more obvious the infernal character of the abyss; even the “Everlasting Sunday,” which normally should symbolize the eternity and peace of the spiritual and paradisiacal center, is a “ghostland.”<sup>10</sup>

Another unfinished story, so-called *The Great Dark*,<sup>11</sup> presents an illusory world seen through a microscope, which reminds of Verne’s telescope that opened the window to illusion and evil. In this story, Mark Twain introduces a “master puppeteer” named the “Superintendent of Dreams,” who in *The Mysterious Stranger* becomes the Little Satan.<sup>12</sup> *The Great Dark* uses, like *The Enchanted Sea-Wilderness*, *Pym*’s skeleton: a ship aiming at the South Pole, enters a zone of total darkness (the Great Dark) and is sailing toward a Great White Glare, a zone of “disastrous bright light.”<sup>13</sup> As Melville’s fearful white, Twain’s light is not the spiritual illumination but a terrible, demonic light.<sup>14</sup> This story seems to be not about “ghostland” but about the “country of dreams,” suggesting that life is an illusion, and showing the confusion between “waking” and “dream” states.<sup>15</sup> Twain appears in agreement with the Hindu tradition and Zhuang Zi, yet for him there is no other reality. This limitation to the individual order, without any link to the supernal levels of more consistent reality, facilitates the *tamasic* actions, which try to replace the traditional symbolism with counterfeits and deceiving meanings.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Twain’s “country of dreams” is also a “ghostland,” during the process of confining everything to the psycho-physical domain the spiritual order (the “deep sleep” state as super-individual, celestial world) being replaced with “spiritism” or other hoax, which can be crowded into the individual plane.<sup>17</sup> For that reason the “Superintendent of Dreams” is described as a spirit, a ghost.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In August 1896, Mark Twain’s favourite daughter, Susy, dies. This misfortune and others made Twain turn to spiritism and develop his “dark” writings. He is not an isolate case; tragic deaths in the family made many others to find consolation in spiritism (Guénon, *L’Erreur*, p. 372). For Twain, the “ghostland” is interwoven with the “country of dreams” and he studied William James’ theory about dreams (note that James at the end of his life became involved with spiritism). See John S. Tuckey, *Mark Twain and Little Satan*, Purdue Univ. Studies, 1963, p. 27 and Guénon, *L’Erreur*, p. 89.

<sup>11</sup> See Bernard DeVoto’s commentary in Mark Twain, *Letters from the Earth*, Crest Book, 1964, p. 231 ff.

<sup>12</sup> “Little Satan” is a suitable expression used by Tuckey.

<sup>13</sup> Twain, *Letters*, p. 227.

<sup>14</sup> That is not surprising, thinking of some occultist movements, in Twain’s time, which praised Lucifer as “light-carrier” and “Creative Intelligence” (Guénon, *L’Erreur*, p. 303). Unfortunately, this Lucifer isn’t different from Satan, which makes his “light” a satanic light.

<sup>15</sup> Henry, the main character of the story, considers the miniature sea voyage only a dream, not real life, but his wife, Alice, regards their previous life as a dream and this one, on the ship, as real (Twain, *Letters*, p. 207-8).

<sup>16</sup> As we said before, there is no perfect deception; there is always a hint to reveal the truth. For example, in Twain’s unfinished story, Turner, the mate, thinks, “that the world has come to an end,” because there is no sun or moon or stars (Twain, *Letters*, p. 200). This remark is enough to warn us. At the end of a cycle, the link with the Principle is extremely damaged and everything is limited to the individual order, which implicitly explains Twain’s attitude.

<sup>17</sup> Another “hoax” could be the theory of subconscious. G. K. Watkins, comparing Poe’s *Pym* to Twain’s *The Great Dark*, (*God and Circumstances*, Peter Lang Publishing, 1989), makes the common error to

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Twain's "Superintendent of Dreams" is a kind of Puck, but he plays an ambitious role, which ruins the symbolism. He is not under a higher command, because there is no higher level. He creates a microscopic world, the "little people" constituting here the corporeal order, even if it is a "dream world." The character is more obvious in *The Mysterious Stranger*, where he is Satan but called Traum (German "dream"); he is a boy, who creates a "small" world with small people and animals made of clay, indicating that Twain thought of him as Creator, yet even if he is presented as an angel and Lucifer's nephew, there is no mistake: he is the Devil.<sup>19</sup>

Gustav Meyrink makes good company with Verne, Poe and Twain. He also uses some traditional symbols, but it is obvious that his work is a "parody" of the genuine initiatory stories and creates a terrible confusion. Like Jules Verne in his works *The Carpathian Castle* and *Mathias Sandorf*, Gustav Meyrink uses (in fact, abuses) the symbolism of the center. Verne's and Meyrink's center is a pseudo-center, an "occultist" center, a caricature and a mockery, a suspect center influenced by the counter-initiatory forces, and we have to use our power of discrimination to understand Guénon's sayings that the "counter-initiation" derived from the unique source to which every initiation is attached," which indicates how dangerous such a pseudo-center could be.

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confound the subconscious with spirituality, that is, to confound the "below" with the "above." Spirituality belongs to the "super-conscious" and to the "super-rational" (see Shri Aurobindo, *Le guide du Yoga*, Albin Michel, 1970, pp. 115-6, Guénon, *Le règne*, pp. 303-313, and Burckhardt, *Mirror*, pp. 45-67).

<sup>18</sup> Twain, *Letters*, p. 195. Normally, the "dream" state, as part of the psychical domain, is open to influences coming from "above" and "below." The former are, as Titus Burckhardt says, "the dreams coming from the Angel"; they carry a genuine spiritual symbolism and sometimes they have a providential meaning (see Joseph's dream about Christ's conception, *Matthew* 1:20). The latter are "dreams of satanic impulsion, containing palpable caricatures of sacred forms" and opposing the "dreams of divine or angelic inspiration." The satanic dreams bring a sensation of "obsession and vertigo; it is the attraction of an abyss" (Burckhardt, *Mirror*, p. 57). In some ancient *Mysteries*, this abyss was described as mire, symbolizing Hell, but it is a huge difference between the initiate "descending to Hell" and then ascending to Paradise, and the profane "falling into the mire." Descending to Hell, the neophyte transforms and integrates his inferior levels; falling into the mire, the profane is caught by the mire without hope of salvation (Guénon, *Le règne*, p. 310). This very abyss, a parody of the center, is described by Poe and Twain in some works as a whirlpool, a Hell without salvation, indicating the "fall into the mire."

<sup>19</sup> Mark Twain names the village where Satan appears "Eseldorf," which means in German "the Ass' village." The village represents for Twain the whole mankind and the name suggests the degradation of the world and the evil and stupidity of the human race as Little Satan states it. But "Eseldorf" is a sign that betrays Satan: where else could the Devil land, if not in Bottom's village? The village is "in the middle of that sleep," which indicates the "country of dreams" (See Mark Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger*, Signet Classics, 1962, p. 161). Twain describes also a castle there, which is a copy of Dracula's castle; the oldest serving-man in the castle tells the children about ghosts, vampires, and other horrors he had seen in that region (*ibid.* p. 165). Little Satan is described creating a miniature world and destroying it after, without remorse, like a playful child (*ibid.* pp. 168-9, 173); but he is a spirit (*ibid.* p. 175). At the end of the story, Little Satan makes the terrible statement that no other world exists but this one (that means no supernal levels and no God), and that life is just a dream, a vision; in fact, nothing exists but a *thought* (*ibid.* p. 252). As we mentioned before, the mind is a favourite field of action for devil, so Little Satan's affirmations that "there is no God, no universe, no human race, no heaven, no hell," and "it is all a dream" and "nothing exists but you, and you are but a *thought*" (*ibid.* p. 253), seem pretty devilish.

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In a letter to Julius Evola (from 1949), René Guénon wrote: “There are cases in which the influence of counter-initiation is clearly visible. Among these cases we must include those in which the traditional elements are presented in an intentionally ‘parodist’ form; this is, in particular, the case of Meyrink, which, of course, does not mean that he was clearly aware of the influence which was exercised upon him. Therefore, I am surprised to learn that you seem to respect Meyrink.”<sup>20</sup>

When Meyrink’s last book, *Der Engel vom westlichen Fenster* (*The Angel of the West Window*), was translated in French, it was published with a *Foreword* by Julius Evola, and this *Preface* shows how such books can create confusion, even in the case of people like Evola, who knew well Guénon’s teachings. However, Evola himself had his contribution to the general confusion, with his wrong ideas about initiation, Masonry and the spiritual authority. Even though Evola tried to highlight some of Meyrink’s errors, the *Preface* remains dubious, especially at the end when Evola compares Agartha from Guénon’s *Le Roi du monde* to Meyrink’s Elsbethstein.<sup>21</sup> Meyrink’s center is, in the best case, a pseudo-Agartha; nonetheless, it is instructive to see how Meyrink abuses the traditional symbols. For example, in Evola’s opinion (expressed in his *Foreword*)<sup>22</sup> the novel transmits a real teaching when, at the end, denounces the Angel to be just an echo, an illusion,<sup>23</sup> a spiritist error. What Evola could not see is that the title, which represents the quintessence of the work, is *The Angel of the West Window*, emphasizing the importance of this “Angel,” and if Meyrink at the end negates it, he negates the whole book. Not to say that the idea to use the term “angel” for this ghost is not only inadequate, but directly diabolical. And even if it seems that Meyrink eventually rejects the “Angel,” his book extensively presents spiritist sessions.<sup>24</sup>

*The Angel of the West Window* continued the confusion created by Verne, Poe, and Twain, and influenced the modern antitraditional authors. We see from the beginning the importance of the “documents,”<sup>25</sup> a modern and profane idea, used by malevolent authors with regards to Masonry, Templars, and initiation. Here it is not only about the modern mentality, which cannot accept anything that is not “corporeal” and cannot understand

<sup>20</sup> Julius Evola, *René Guénon, A Teacher for Modern Times*, Sure Fire Press, 1994, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> “[Meyrink] talks about a supreme center of the world (Elsbethstein, an analogue idea to that of Agartha)” (Gustave Meyrink, *L’Ange à la fenêtre d’Occident*, La Colombe, 1962, p. 17). We should add that, inexplicable, Julius Evola considered Gustave Meyrink as expressing in his work some “magico-initiatory teachings” (Julius Evola, *Masques et visages du spiritualisme contemporain*, Les Éditions de l’homme, 1972, p. 271)

<sup>22</sup> See also *Masques et visages*, p. 288.

<sup>23</sup> That is what Meyrink says at the end of his book (Gustav Meyrink, *L’ange de la fenêtre d’Occident*, Le Rocher, 1986, pp. 292, 312-313). We see here the same pattern that Twain used in *The Great Dark*, where the conclusion was that everything is illusion, but, in comparison with the sacred writings, there is nothing beyond this illusion. The Angel could be compared to Twain’s “Superintendent of Dreams.”

<sup>24</sup> *L’ange de la fenêtre d’Occident*, p. 138. Marcel Clavelle (Jean Reyor) published in 1932, in *Le Voile d’Isis*, an article about Meyrink, and it is depressing to read that this collaborator of Guénon could say that Meyrink’s *Green Face* offers practical guidance with respect to the initiatory process (Jean Reyor, *Études et recherches traditionnelles*, Éditions Traditionnelles, 1991, p. 179); however, this is another proof that Reyor’s opinion cannot be trusted or at least that his opinions should be regarded with caution.

<sup>25</sup> *L’ange de la fenêtre d’Occident*, p. 7.

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that the genuine spirituality and initiation do not need “documents,”<sup>26</sup> but it is a result of the influence of the counter-initiatory forces. Meyrink introduces a character called Lipotine or Nitchevo,<sup>27</sup> a name similar to Verne’s Nemo; in Russian, *nitchevo* means “nothing”; *nemo* comes from Latin and means “nobody.” As in Twain’s case, the (malefic) dream plays an important role<sup>28</sup>; but also the abyss, the Templars<sup>29</sup> and the Baphomet, which becomes a substitute for the Principle, the head turned backward, the blood, Tula,<sup>30</sup> St. Patrick and St. Dunstan,<sup>31</sup> are elements participating at the general confusion.<sup>32</sup> Meyrink makes of Bartlett Green a mock imitation of Christ.<sup>33</sup> Even though Evola tried to defend Meyrink, this one uses the erroneous theory of reincarnation,<sup>34</sup> and expressions like “the satanic astral body,”<sup>35</sup> “Golden Rose,”<sup>36</sup> “vampirism,”<sup>37</sup> “the Lodge of the West Window,”<sup>38</sup> and “the realization of Baphomet.”<sup>39</sup> We find in this work the same pattern used today in books like *The Da Vinci Code, Mysteries and Secrets of the Masons* and many others, where Alchemy, Rose-Cross, Masonry, Templars, etc. are mixed in a horrible way. But *The Angel of the West Window* is more than a sinister mixture; it is a “parody”<sup>40</sup>; and even more, it transmits an upside down symbolism, which represents the actual “Satanism.” In opposition to Solomon’s Temple, where there are three windows / doors open to the three of the cardinal points, Meyrink describes a room of a castle having the East, South and North windows immured.<sup>41</sup> The Alchemy is combined with Chemistry,<sup>42</sup> the Pentagram is abused,<sup>43</sup> the angels are ghost, and the spiritual forces are magnetic forces.<sup>44</sup> At the end, it is said: “Brother, you have crossed

<sup>26</sup> Soon we will see authors trying to make us believe that Jesus Christ or the Templars made DVDs and hid them somewhere.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> “The Knights Templar of the New Grail,” see *ibid.* p. 254.

<sup>30</sup> And also Thule of Greenland, *ibid.* pp. 84-5.

<sup>31</sup> It is known that both, St. Patrick and St. Dunstan, were connected by some authors to Glastonbury. “St. Patrick’s well,” often used by Meyrink, is, in this case, similar to the abyss of Poe and Twain, or to Dumas’ “le trou de l’enfer.” *Ibid.* pp. 21, 30-31, 133.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 13-14.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 60-61, 63 (Green is resurrected), 65 (he comes back to visit the main character of the book, but he is a ghost).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p. 70.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. 102.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 114. Guénon revealed the imposture of an organization like *Rose-Croix d’Or* (*Aperçus sur l’initiation*, p. 246). Also, the symbol of the Rose-Cross is suggested by Meyrink at page 282.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 233.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 257.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 158.

<sup>40</sup> It presents a parody of initiation (see *ibid.* p. 175).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p. 139.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 147, 150.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 140.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 173.

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the threshold of initiation with your face turned backwards.”<sup>45</sup> In fact, in a genuine spiritual realization, the neophyte must not look back, and all the initiatory stories are adamant in warning about it.

The author spends a tremendous effort narrating about the Angel to conclude in the end that the Angel is an illusion. The same effort is spent in all the modern occultist books about the “Secret,” which in the end appears to be something very disappointing, a *nitchevo*. *L'Énigme René Guénon et les “Supérieurs Inconnus,” Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire mondiale “souterraine,”* written by “Louis de Maistre,” is not different in this respect; on the contrary, it is the best illustration, since the effort was a long one, covering a length of 1000 pages.<sup>46</sup>

“Louis de Maistre,” in search for Guénon’s “sources” with regard to the Lord of the World, mentions Gustav Meyrink and his novel *The Walpurgis Night*, where he alluded to the “Emperor of the World,” and the reader is left with the impression that Meyrink was one of the “other” sources for Guénon’s *Le Roi du Monde*.<sup>47</sup> But “Maistre” cannot develop this devilish suggestion, since René Guénon clearly denounced Meyrink, so he tries to work out his scheme using another similar individual: Alfred Kubin, a friend of Meyrink. “Maistre” declares: “Kubin’s book [*Die andere Seite*, “the other side”] ... has a superior load and visionary power in comparison to Gustav Meyrink’s work, for example.”<sup>48</sup> In fact, the “superiority” of Kubin is “inferiority,” since, in comparison to Meyrink, he is even deeper sunken into the realm of the counter-initiatory forces. For “Louis de Maistre” the almost 1000 pages were not enough to clarify the “enigma Guénon,” and another book was published under another pseudonym: Alexandre de Dánann, *Un envoyé de la Loge Blanche, Bô Yin Râ*,<sup>49</sup> where again Gustav Meyrink and Alfred Kubin were mentioned,<sup>50</sup> even though this time it is suggested a comparison between Bô Yin Râ’s book, *The Book of the living God*, and Guénon’s *Le Roi du Monde*.<sup>51</sup>

Without any doubt, *Le Roi du Monde* was the most disputed and attacked work of Guénon, and the notion of Agartha the most criticized; a lot of energy, hate and malevolent suggestions were used to annihilate this notion. Also, as we already said, creating confusion was a very convenient scheme, which could make Agartha to appear as a fantasy and Guénon as an “occultist” no better than Bô Yin Râ or Meyrink.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 315.

<sup>46</sup> This is not new. When Baron Hund promised to reveal his great secret, everybody was thinking of something magic and miraculous, yet his secret was that every Mason is a Knight Templar. René Guénon was very explicit about what an initiatory secret real is. Today, many execrable books about Masonry abuse the word “secret” in their titles, but it is only a revival of the title of a book written at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>47</sup> *L'Énigme René Guénon*, p. 108.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p. 139.

<sup>49</sup> Archè, Milano, 2004. *L'Énigme René Guénon et les “Supérieurs Inconnus,” Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire mondiale “souterraine,”* was also published in 2004 at Archè.

<sup>50</sup> *Un envoyé de la Loge Blanche, Bô Yin Râ*, pp. 22, 69, 93.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26. Also, the author, ceaselessly in search for Guénon’s “sources,” advanced the hypothesis that maybe René Guénon’s idea about the initiation and the counter-initiation came from the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor and Taychou Marou (*ibid.* p. 49).

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However, the hidden objective was not only to present Guénon as a common individual interested in all kind of occultist subjects, but to suggest his connection to the counter-initiation.

Therefore, if we ask the question ‘why should “Maistre” spend time writing about Alfred Kubin?’, the answer is obvious: his objective is, of course, to create confusion; but, moreover, his efforts aim at creating a parallel between Guénon and Kubin, not by comparing their works, but by suggesting similarities in respect to their lives, and then, by implying that they had a similar mentality.

“Louis de Maistre” titles his chapter about Kubin “Alfred Kubin the ‘prophet’ of Agartha,”<sup>52</sup> which is a wretched and malevolent title, and suggests, of course, a similitude between Guénon and Kubin. There are other elements, not openly specified but insinuated: Kubin had health problems when he was young and was very sensitive; and so was Guénon. Kubin was called “the hermit of Zwickledt”<sup>53</sup>; Guénon was called by “Maistre”’s friends “the hermit of Duqqi.”<sup>54</sup>

For the reader interested in Kubin, “Maistre”’s chapter does not help much; for the reader interested in Guénon, the chapter is out of place and futile. Hence, it seems that “Maistre” wrote this chapter for the “traditionalists” (see Guénon’s definition), occultists like “himself” and for the newcomers, aiming at corroding René Guénon’s reputation; at the same time, the author(s) had as main purpose to deteriorate the Agartha concept. To name Kubin a “prophet” of Agartha, even if the word prophet is put inside the quotation marks, is such an enormity that you have to belong to Twain’s “country of dreams” to do such a thing.

“Maistre” is not embarrassed to declare that many of the themes developed by Kubin in his novel *The Other Side* were tackled later by Guénon in his *Le règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*.<sup>55</sup> Also, he says that some of *The Other Side*’s themes present, in detail, disturbing analogies with what Guénon and Ossendowski said about Agartha.<sup>56</sup> As usually, “Maistre,” after throwing out this calumnious affirmation, fakes objectivity, and adds that these are analogies and not assimilations, and there are fundamental differences between Guénon and Kubin. If there are fundamental differences, why then introduce Kubin in “Enigma René Guénon”? Maybe because Kubin, like Meyrink and others, is more compatible with “Maistre”’s mentality and soul?

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<sup>52</sup> *L'Énigme René Guénon*, p. 133.

<sup>53</sup> Alfred Kubin, *L'Autre côté*, Jose Corti, 2007; see Laurent Évrard’s *Une lecture de L'Autre côté*, p. 368.

<sup>54</sup> Xavier Accart, *L'ermite de Duqqi*, Archè, 2001.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* p. 135.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p. 139.

Alfred Kubin, the so-called “prophet” of Agartha,<sup>1</sup> is a sad character. He has nothing to do with René Guénon, but “Louis de Maistre” tried to promote an illusory connection in order to, as we already stressed, degrade Guénon. In his **My Life**,<sup>2</sup> Kubin describes a life that is interesting only because it illustrates pseudo-tradition, pseudo-initiation and counter-initiatory influences at work. One of Kubin masters is no other than Schopenhauer, and it is well known how Guénon criticized his bad influence regarding the Buddhism.<sup>3</sup> The Buddhism Kubin discovered through Schopenhauer and Hermann Grimm, in a word, through the German school, is a pseudo-Buddhism, a deformed Buddhism, for the use of the Occident, and, as Kubin said, his “moral shakings”<sup>4</sup> made him turn to this Buddhism; there is no need to say that Kubin appears in a flagrant contrast with Guénon, his attitude is exactly what Guénon criticized without mercy.<sup>5</sup> This is enough to expect a similar thing regarding Agartha, and we ask once more: Why did “Maistre” spend time writing about Alfred Kubin?

Kubin describes his Buddhist “initiatory” practice, which, again, represents a vivid illustration of what Guénon said you should not do. However, Kubin’s Buddhist practices without a guide kept him interested for only ten days<sup>6</sup>: after that he forgot about Buddhism.

If we turn now to his *The Other Side*,<sup>7</sup> we do not find anything traditional, only a dark parody. Kubin’s “center” is called the “Dream Empire” and the “Emperor” is someone called Claus Patera,<sup>8</sup> and we see the same idea like in Mark Twain’s case. The “Dream Empire,” located in Asia, is isolated by an impenetrable wall, a parody of Cusanus’ paradisiacal wall; it is a shelter, Kubin says, for all who are against the modern world and

<sup>1</sup> *L’Énigme René Guénon*, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Kubin, *Ma vie*, Allia, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> René Guénon, *Orient et Occident*, Guy Trédaniel, 1987, pp. 139-140. See Alfred Kubin, *L’Autre côté*, Jose Corti, 2007, p. 318.

<sup>4</sup> Kubin, *Ma vie*, p. 92.

<sup>5</sup> Not to say that Kubin hated Mathematics (see *L’Autre côté*, p. 303).

<sup>6</sup> *Ma vie*, pp. 94-96.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Kubin, *L’Autre côté*, Jose Corti, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

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everything is organized with respect to a highest spiritual life.<sup>9</sup> The author is invited to travel to this “Dream Land,” a “secret” place, having as center a city called Pearl.<sup>10</sup> Of course, Patera’s palace is in the center of Pearl.<sup>11</sup> Yet, what seems to be just a parody of Agarththa, of a spiritual center, is, in fact, an anti-center, because here there is no sun or moon or stars, only a grey sky and a sombre river called The Black.<sup>12</sup> And there is no high spiritual life, on the contrary. Even though all the world religions were represented in this “Dream Land,” there was a secret religion, a kind of Free-Masonry,<sup>13</sup> and a secret Grand Temple.<sup>14</sup> Kubin introduces a strange race of people with blue eyes,<sup>15</sup> who, he suggested at the end, could have been the Master Puppeteer of this “Dream Land.” Kubin also invented an apparently opponent of Patera, the “American,” who founded a political society called “Lucifer,”<sup>16</sup> but the “American” denounced Patera as a sort of Satan.<sup>17</sup> And now Kubin uses his “imagination” to describe the agony and the end of the “Dream Land,” crowned by the fight between Patera and the American.<sup>18</sup>

We insisted to present *The Other Side* only to make sure that the reader understands how unbelievable unintelligent and devious *L'Énigme René Guénon et les “Supérieurs Inconnus,” Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire mondiale “souterraine,”* written by “Louis de Maistre,” is. As we said, it seems to us that the authors of *L'Énigme René Guénon* themselves belong to the above “Dream Land.”

How is it possible that works like *L'Énigme René Guénon* to be written and published?<sup>19</sup> Well, since we live the end of the *Kali-yuga*, there is no surprise to see such things happening. And let us be more explicit. If we look around us, we see that the today leaders of various countries, does not matter to which continent they belong, seem to be clones of one family. The present politicians are selected based on the same criteria: they have to have a special brain configuration, which supports a special mentality. These

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 21, 27.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 55-6.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 86.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 124.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 158.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 174.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 180.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 278. *The Other Side* is really boring. On the other hand, the North-American schools would love to have it for their students, since the only interesting works for the School Boards are those connected with mental illness and psychical disorders (hence their favourite painter is Van Gogh, who cut his ear). They are not alone, of course. We should mention here a curious fact: the most famous ancient sculptures exposed in the Louvre Museum are Venus de Milo and the Victory of Samothrace. Why, when there are many others similar beautiful ancient Greek sculptures, these two became the most celebrated? The only reason is that these two specific pieces have something special: Venus de Milo has no arms and the Victory of Samothrace has no head, and these kinds of mutilations are compatible with the modern mutilated mind.

<sup>19</sup> We want to mention here as exemplification one more title: *Mysteries and Secrets of the Masons*, by Lionel & Patricia Fanthorpe (The Dundurn Group, Toronto, 2006); this book is a complete waste of time, a ridiculous book, yet it was published with the support of the Canada Council for Arts and with the financial support of the Government of Canada!

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politicians are similar because they have similar, almost identical brain configurations. And therefore, the today elections are not for a candidate, but against the previous one, which means that the people “feels” that something is very wrong. But it is nothing wrong here. Since we are at the end of the *Kali-yuga*, there is a need of such leaders. Now, the last and the most inferior possibilities of manifestation have to be exhausted, and in order to accomplish this task the world needs a special type of politicians with a special type of brain. We cannot expect to have a leader who will redeem or restore the world. Because we are at the end of the *Kali-yuga*, we need fake prophets and fake heroes and fake leaders, who, with their special brains, will work to end this cycle. And we hope nobody is so naïve to believe that the groups behind these politicians have any idea of what they are doing.

For a similar reason, works like *L'Énigme René Guénon* are necessary. As we said previously, “Louis de Maistre” is not an isolate case, but belongs to a majority. The God's command: “Be fruitful, multiply”,<sup>20</sup> if, at the beginning of this cycle, started the fall and development of the world, now, at the end, helps to end the cycle.

To the same majority belongs, for example, Jean-Marc Vivenza. Probably, for the English-speaking reader this name means nothing and this is a good thing. However, for our article, which tries to show how even today the “hate” for René Guénon remained intact, a phenomenon clearly suggesting that today, more than ever, Guénon's work must be studied and, if possible, assimilated, for our article, we are saying, it is necessary to list some of the contemporary authors that participate to the above mentioned phenomenon, and Vivenza is one of them.

Today, there are various methods used to divert people from Guénon; one of them is a rather dumb on, and consists in publishing dictionaries regarding Guénon. Vivenza published in 2002 *Le Dictionnaire de René Guénon* (Le Mercure Dauphinois), and later, in 2008, Graham Rooth published his *Prophet for a Dark Age, A Companion to the Works of René Guénon* (Sussex Academic Press).<sup>21</sup> We see the devilish scheme: why study Guénon and spend a precious time, when it is at hand a “Guénon Dictionary,” with all you need? First, a dictionary in itself suggests “erudition,” and so, the reader will consider Guénon just a common scholar; second, a dictionary about metaphysics and Tradition is an insult, diverting the reader from the meaning of traditional studies and initiatory knowledge.

In 2004, Vivenza insisted with his antitraditional campaign, publishing a new book, *La Métaphysique de René Guénon*, which had two purposes: first, to suggest that there is a “Guénonian” doctrine, a “Guénonian” metaphysics, invented by René Guénon, similar to the inventions of the philosophers; second, to tempt the busy modern people, who have no time for reading, to read, instead of Guénon's many books, one book, Vivenza's book. Now, how silly this is? But it is more than a question of silliness, it is a devious way to condemn Guénon to oblivion.

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<sup>20</sup> Genesis 1:22.

<sup>21</sup> We may notice that the *Foreword* was written by an antitraditional individual, Mark Sedgwick, whose devious book *Against the Modern World* was considered by Rooth as “an excellent account...”

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In 2007, Vivenza decided that enough is enough and the time had come to give up the subtleties, which anyway were not his strength, and therefore he published a new book, *René Guénon et le Rite Ecossais Rectifié* (Les Éditions du Simorgh). On the front cover, the title is explained to make sure that everybody can see and understand what is the book about: “clarification regarding Guénon’s mistakes and misunderstandings with respect to the doctrine of Elus Coëns, the order *Ordre des Chevaliers Bienfaisants de la Cité Sainte*, and the theosophy of Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin.” Is this not something unbelievable! It is not, of course, since the fact that Vivenza, the author of a dictionary about Guénon, in which he presents Guénon’s views about Masonry, and of a book trying to explain “Guénon’s metaphysics,” becomes his open enemy, represents nothing else but a natural development of an individual, who from the beginning was antitraditional and probably worse.

Vivenza’s case is interesting because is a good illustration of what individuals like “Louis de Maistre” and others hide. In his new book, *René Guénon et le Rite Ecossais Rectifié*, Vivenza is happy to get rid of Guénon’s teachings and use a language dear to the Occultism, like “religious traditions.”<sup>22</sup> Of course, he has to mention the *Ordre du Temple rénové*, which, curiously enough, he calls it “Ordre rénové du Temple,” and considers that its creation took place in “circonstances rocambolesques.”<sup>23</sup> *Rocambolesques*?

Before to say a few more words about this book, let us stress what happened to Vivenza: he considered that the time had come to affirm loudly that his dear master is Robert Amadou. Again, for many this name means nothing, but Amadou was one of those who could not accept René Guénon’s direct way of unveiling the inconsistency, the masquerade and pseudo-spirituality of various Occultist orders. As a result of this connection with Amadou, Vivenza becomes immediately a completely uninteresting character, but his grand words (*remarquable, merveilleux, grand valeur, essence du sacerdoce primitive, éléments fondamentaux, grandes et profondes vérités, enjeux initiatiques*<sup>24</sup>), praising the Occultism, makes him a pitiable figure manipulated by the adverse forces. He also uses grand words against Guénon: *une stupéfiante ignorance, complète méconnaissance, absolue ignorance, la “cause” guénonienne*,<sup>25</sup> *l’absurdité de la plupart de ses [Guénon’s] assertions*.<sup>26</sup> At the end of his book, Vivenza affirms that he has demonstrated Guénon’s *incroyable mauvaise fois ou insondable ignorance* regarding *la perspective saint-martinienne*, but, of course, he did not prove anything, he talked to himself in a sort of frenzy, uttering with arrogance that Robert Amadou and Vivenza know better what Martinez de Pasqually wanted to express, much better than Martinez himself! They had probably direct contact with *The Other Side*!

Vivenza dares to say (and why not?) that “the author of *Aperçus sur l’initiation* sensed, even though in a confused way, that in the works of Martinès and his disciples resides a

<sup>22</sup> *René Guénon et le Rite Ecossais Rectifié*, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Pierre Laurant’s last book about Guénon has this title: *René Guénon, Les enjeux d’une lecture*.

<sup>25</sup> La “cause” guénonienne? Soon we will hear about a “Guénonian conspiracy.”

<sup>26</sup> After writing a “Guénon Dictionary,” now Vivenza scolds and gives lectures to Guénon! Obviously, he belongs to Kubin’s “Dream Land.”

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mystery of superior nature.<sup>27</sup> And Vivenza considers that he is doing a charitable work not mentioning the uncertainty regarding Guénon's orthodoxy, which he mentions anyway; indeed the charitable intention is not so charitable after all, since Vivenza lists pell-mell Guénon's wrong doings: his theory of the cycles,<sup>28</sup> his belief<sup>29</sup> in the existence of a "Lord of the World," his idea that Christ was only (?) an *avatâra*.<sup>30</sup> And he calls René Guénon either *l'occupant de la villa Dugqi au Cairo*, or the Master of Cairo (sometimes the master of Cairo). Not to say that Vivenza ascribes to Guénon all the truths found in the sacred texts; maybe he does not know, for example, that René Guénon did not write the *Upanishads*.

Should we continue? We could characterize Vivenza with his own words: *une stupéfiante ignorance, complete méconnaissance, absolue ignorance, incroyable mauvaise fois ou insondable ignorance, incapable de comprendre*, but these words are too gentle for him and also inaccurate.

What is really sad is that authors like Jean Chopitel and Christiane Gobry, who wrote a relatively inoffensive book called *René Guénon, Messager de la Tradition Primordiale et Témoin du Christ Universel* (Le Mercure Dauphinois, 2010),<sup>31</sup> started their book with a disgusting ad, prompting the readers to read Vivenza's *Dictionnaire de René Guénon*, where Vivenza "expose magistralement une bonne part des caractéristiques de l'œuvre guénonienne."<sup>32</sup> *Magistralement ???* Do they not know that Vivenza is incapable to expose by himself anything traditional?

At the end of the present article we want to mention another author, Roland Lardinois, who wrote a book called *L'invention de l'Inde, Entre ésotérisme et science* (CNRS Éditions, 2007), where among many things he mentions René Guénon. Lardinois presents "two prophetic positions," those of René Guénon and Romain Rolland. Why on earth should René Guénon<sup>33</sup> be compared or associated with Romain Rolland?<sup>34</sup> Rolland, the author says, was "initiated in the culture of India," which makes us understand the terrible confusion that reigns in the author's mind. He also talks about Guénon's "syncretism inspired by a Vedantic-Occultist traditionalism" and his function regarding a "syncretic unification."

As we see, not only the today politicians have a special kind of brain.

<sup>27</sup> *René Guénon et le Rite Ecossais Rectifié*, p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> Yes, that is exactly what Vivenza said: the theory of the cosmic cycles is Guénon's theory!

<sup>29</sup> Yes, "belief"!

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. 60.

<sup>31</sup> However, they erroneously speak about the "doctrine" of René Guénon, about his work as being for everybody (!!!), about Guénon being born in 1884 (he was born in 1886), about "El Kird" (?)

<sup>32</sup> Maybe they considered that with such an ad they rewarded Vivenza for helping them publish the book at Le Mercure Dauphinois.

<sup>33</sup> René Guénon is called Abdel Wahed Safia (p. 187), when his Islamic name is in fact *Abd al-Wahid Yahya*.

<sup>34</sup> It is well known Guénon's opinion about Romain Rolland.

# **The Heyday of René Guénon's Delusions in “The King of the World”**

Octavio da Cunha Botelho

## ABSTRACT

This study analyses part of the work of René Guénon (1886-1951), a French esoterist and compulsive comparatist, possessor of a considerable erudition, so he impressed laymen and reasonably informed readers with his writings. However, when examined more carefully, his scholarship was built on the foundations of countless metaphysical and religious beliefs, some quite fanciful, which he collectively termed "Sacred Science" and other exalting terms, so that his erudition is in the same proportion of his credulity, that is, his naivety was as great as his vast metaphysical knowledge, because for him, everything that is metaphysical is more real than what is physical, and if it is symbolic, it is more significant than what is literal, as the following study will try to show.

## Introduction

Many are those who think that erudition and good rhetoric are signs in an author that he is transmitting a safe and reliable knowledge, because he is a sage, so his ideas are true because of his vast erudition and his impressive rhetoric. However, this can be a misleading assessment, because erudition is not synonymous with mastery of a subject, someone may know a subject, but it does not automatically mean that he has mastery over it, nor is rhetoric a sign of reliable knowledge, the way of writing or speaking may be convincing in its expressiveness, but the idea behind the rhetoric may be imprecise or unverifiable at the time of its verification. Abundant scholarship and influential rhetoric impress only uninformed readers or listeners, who must trust the information conveyed, as they do not have the in-depth knowledge to judge what they read or hear.

This is one example, among many others in the esoteric and religious world, of René Guénon (1886-1951), a French esoterist and compulsive comparatist with considerable erudition, so he impressed laymen and reasonably informed readers with his writings. However, when examined more carefully, his scholarship was built on the foundations of countless metaphysical and religious beliefs, some quite fanciful, which he

collectively termed "Sacred Science" and other exalting terms, so that his erudition is in the same proportion of his credulity, that is, his naivety was as great as his vast metaphysical knowledge, because for him, everything that is metaphysical is more real than what is physical, and if it is symbolic, it is more significant than what is literal, as the following study will try to show. Hence, many of his followers became Muslims (Dickson, 2021: 589). His credulity was such that it leads us to suspect his sanity, as he came to the point of believing that he had contact with a Templar Master who died about 600 years ago. "During a séance in 1908, Guénon believed that Jacques de Molay (1243-1314 c. e.), the last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, contacted him with instructions to re-establish the Order of the Temple, supplying him with a direct source of initiation" (Dickson, 2021: 592; see also: Sedgwick, 2004: 49). After this event, Encausse (Papus) expelled Guénon from his Masonic Order.

He wrote a lot, about 30 books, if we include published books that collected articles written for magazines at different times in his life. He was already a much more read author in the past, now he is a more forgotten author, still having some influences on a few conservative individuals today. The main proof that his writings fascinate lay people more than they convince specialists was the disapproval of his doctoral thesis at the University of Sorbonne, rejected by the then

important indologist and professor Sylvain Lévi (1863-1935), in 1921 (Sedgwick, 2004: 22-3 and 271). Even with the academic rejection of his thesis, he soon after agreed to publish it, through a Catholic publishing house, with the title of *Introduction Générale à L'édude des Doctrines Hindoues* (General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines), 1921, this was his first published book (Guénon, 1921). Because of his questionable scholarship and his fantastical comparisons of doctrines and symbols, his metaphysical and comparative theories have never been accepted in academic milieu, so he is not cited for reasons that will be clarified later.

Sylvain Lévi justified the disapproval of Guénon's thesis on three grounds:

First, it ma[de] light of history and historical criticism, a critique of Guénon's methodology that was in many ways justified. Guénon did not intend to follow the pattern of the academic methods of Indology, (...) his approach was theological rather than anthropological or sociological. For Guénon, Hinduism was a vessel of spiritual truth, not a body of modified beliefs and practices that late nineteenth-century Western research recognized" (Sedgwick, 2004: 22-3 and 271). In fact, his impetus was sometimes so strong that, in some of the more exalted passages, some passages from the book *Introduction Générale à L'édude des Doctrines Hindoues* seem more like a religious preaching than an academic thesis.

Second: “Guénon’s ‘thesis’ held that Hinduism could be reduced to Vedānta. Vedānta is just one of the six Darshanas (Philosophical Schools) of Hinduism, and it especially uses the Upanishads as the end and summary of the Vedas, the most important Hindu scriptures, along with the Bhagavad Gītā and the Brahma Sūtras. These are among the first Hindu texts to be translated into French and Vedānta became widely known as a result of the inclusion of two chapters from the Bhagavad Gītā in the *Cours de Philosophie* (Course of Philosophy), 1828, by the popular French philosopher Victor Cousin. . Vedānta was widely appreciated in the nineteenth century west, mainly because it recognized no reality other than the Universal Being, unique and without limiting qualification, a characteristic with obvious appeal to those brought up in a monotheistic culture. For Lévi and other indologists, however, there are many varieties of Hinduism other than Vedanta, that Guénon chose to ignore these (other varieties) was a consequence of the context in which he had first encountered Vedanta” (Ibid, 23).

Third: “Lévi observed that Guénon was very inclined to believe in a mystical transmission of a primordial truth (une vérité première) that emerged in humanity at the beginning of the world, a belief that for Lévi was evidently ridiculous” (Ibid., 23). The following study will show how this belief of Guénon, in an unaltered transmission of a primordial truth until the present day, is difficult to

be sustained, in the face of the conclusions of historical studies, based on documents, even in Guénon's time, when, even more, in the following studies after his death. Even at the time of Sylvain Lévi and René Guénon, there were already sufficient results of historical and literary research, which pointed out the alterations in the oral and written transmissions of the Hindu texts of the past and, consequently, proved the infidelity of the traditional transmission, which is why Lévi called Guénon's thesis of "ridiculous".

Mark Sedgwick observed that "all non-traditionalist researchers who have looked at Traditionalism, since Professor Sylvain Lévi rejected Guénon's thesis in 1921, have come to the same conclusion: these people are not serious. They ignore history, and they ignore everything that doesn't fit their theories. In the words of Antoine Faivre: Traditionalism de-historizes and de-spatializes its ontological predicates. Their propensity to search everything for similarities in the hope of finally finding a hypothetical unity is evidently detrimental to critical-historical research, that is, to empirical research, which is more interested in revealing the origin, course, changes, and migrations of phenomena it studies. As Faivre recognizes: those who set out to know the 'truth' are unlikely to recognize anything unexpected they encounter on the way" (Sedgwick, 2004: 271). In turn, in a later edition, Guénon criticized the historical method and textual criticism in

Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines (Guénon, 1945: 18-20), certainly motivated by S. Lévi's justifications for failing the thesis.

The failure of his thesis was a blow to his academic career. Mark Sedgwick observed the following about Guénon's fate after this misfortune: "After Lévi's rejection of his thesis, however, Guénon had to abandon all hope of a regular academic career, the Catholic Institute was then the only forum left for him. Guénon's friends helped him get a job as a philosophy professor (...). The alliance between the Catholic Institute and Guénon could not last long" (Sedgwick, 2004: 30), due to ideological differences. So, in addition to having his thesis failed, Guénon remained an unemployed person, who needed the help of his Catholic friends to get a job, so distant from the brilliant career of those successful academics who are approved in university exams. Their biographies do not mention, however, everything indicates that René Guénon was an inflexible and stubborn student, since, during the doctorate, the doctoral student's chances of altering the arguments of his thesis, with the help of the supervisor, in order to get approval, are many. However, he did not accept to make the necessary changes, with that his thesis was considered "ridiculous".

It seems that the disapproval of his thesis marked a resentment in his later life, because, at one time or another, in his subsequent works, he always took the opportunity to criticize orientalists

and researchers who do not recognize traditionalism as a priority. Consider one of his critiques of the evolutionary mentality: "Among the specifically modern mistakes which we have often had occasion to denounce, one which is most directly opposed to all true understanding of traditional doctrines is what may be called 'historicism' which, even more, it is basically nothing more than a simple consequence of the 'evolutionist' mentality. It consists, in effect, in supposing that all things have their origins in the crudest and most rudimentary way, to subsequently undergo a progressive elaboration" (Guénon, 2002: 72). Obviously, he did not like 'historicism', as it is capable of pointing out the high degree and enormous amount of anachronisms in his speculations. Finally, the historical method triumphed, because since the initial formation of courses in religions in universities around the world, the historical method was adopted and is used until today, Guénon's traditionalist method was ignored, with that he is today considered an outcast in the academia. In conclusion, René Guénon was a frustrated academic, who then set out to write according to his personal interpretations and persuade uninformed readers. In his later publications, he took the opportunity to criticize and discredit the reader about academic studies.

## His Life

His full name was René Jean-Marie Joseph Guénon (1886-1951), after the 1939s, after his interest in Sufism, he adopted the Arabic name of Abd al-Wahid Yahya, when he moved to the city of Cairo, Egypt, in 1930, where he lived until his death in 1951, at the age of 64. His most cited biography is the one written by Paul Chacornac, editor of the magazine *Le Voile d'Isis* (The Veil of Isis), later called *Les Études Traditionnelles* (The Traditional Studies), which published many articles by Guénon, under the title of *La Vie Simple de René Guénon* (The Simple Life of René Guénon), first edition in 1958. However, as will be shown later, his life was not that simple.

He was born on November 15, 1886, in Blois, France, to a Catholic family whose ancestors had settled in that region for years. "From his birth, René Guénon was a person of fragile health (...) his state of health was always delicate. Before him, his mother had already lost a three-year-old daughter" (Chacornac, 1958: 18). A problem that hindered him in his studies, even having to abandon courses due to poor health. "His childhood caused many concerns to his parents, because of his delicate health" (Idem, 20). His health was so poor that, in 1906, he was released from military conscription. During his studies in his hometown of Blois, Guénon was "a brilliant student, always at the top of his class" (Idem, 24),

he even received an award from the Blois Society of Science and Letters. In 1902 he began to study rhetoric, the following year, 1903, he completed his course in philosophy and in 1904 he studied mathematics at a local college, with frequent health problems.

In October 1904 Guénon went to Paris and applied to the École Polytechnique. Although he was a good student in Blois, but in Paris, on the contrary, his new teachers, while recognizing his good will and his ardour for work, made him understand that he should not continue on this path. (...) the slowness of his progress in Mathematics was mainly due to his precarious health, which prevented him from regularly following the courses" (Chacornac, 1958: 27). That is, when in a more intellectual environment, Guénon did not stand out as a brilliant student, as in his small hometown. After trying other means, the teachers told him that he was still far from the exam levels (idem, 27). So, discouraged by the professors, for the time being, Guénon gave up on continuing his academic studies.

From then on, Guénon became involved with esoteric groups, so in vogue in Paris at that time. The first group to join was the Esoteric Christian Martinist Order, led by Dr. Encausse, better known by the pseudonym Papus. But, he soon became disappointed with this order claiming that it "had not received any authentic spiritual transmission". So, next he joined the Gnostic

Church of France, founded by Léonce Fabre des Essarts (Synesius), which he also did not take seriously. Even so, he was the founder and main contributor to the magazine *La Gnose* (The Gnosis), writing articles until the year 1922. After joining a Masonic lodge, he was initiated in Taoism and also in Sufism. He studied Hinduism, highlighting the Vedanta tradition, which he pointed to as the authentic preserver of the Primordial Tradition. Mark Sedgwick conjectured that Guénon may have been initiated by some Hindus in Paris. However, he doubted and concluded that “Guénon's understanding of Hinduism derived exclusively from his readings of texts and studies then available in Paris. Nowhere did Guénon claim that this was not the case, and he never visited India” (Sedgwick, 2004: 49). The initiation of Guénon by Hindus would be impossible, because, as we will see later, Hinduism is a hereditary religion, therefore Hindus do not initiate Europeans.

Released from military service due to health problems, Guénon returned to study philosophy at the Sorbonne during the First World War. In 1917, he taught philosophy for a year in Algeria. He then returned to Paris and attempted a doctorate at the Sorbonne, but, as already mentioned, it resulted in that disappointing disapproval of his thesis by Professor Sylvain Lévi in 1921. He did not give up his theory and published, through a Catholic publishing house, in the same year, 1921, his

thesis entitled *Introduction Générale à L'éude des Doctrines Hindoues* (General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines).

From 1925 onwards, Guénon became a contributor to a magazine edited by Paul Chacornac (author of his biography) called *Le Voile d'Isis* (The Veil of Isis), and after 1935, under Guénon's influence, this magazine became *Les Études Traditionnelles* (The Traditional Studies). After passing through various occult organizations, Guénon became convinced that "the occult organizations did not hold any serious teaching and were directing their members a false spiritualism that was incoherent and devoid of traditional basis. René Guénon then thought of grouping the most interesting elements of these organizations" (Chacornac, 1958: 34). For example, of Freemasonry, he once said: "Freemasonry has undergone a degeneration, the beginning of this degeneration is the transformation of Operative Freemasonry into Speculative Freemasonry" (Chacornac, 1958: 36). A sign of how he clung to tradition and rejected innovation. It was from then on that Guénon began to gradually develop his theory of the Primordial Tradition which, for him, was the source of all the spiritual wisdom of the world, something like an initial revelation, through a diversified and broad comparative process of doctrines, practices, rites and symbols, extracted from different traditions, that is, a comparative method created by him,

which pointed to a unity behind all doctrines and all truly traditional symbols, a transmission preserved by what he called Traditional Transmission, from the beginning of its revelation to the present day, most commonly found in the East, especially in Hinduism (Dickson, 2021: 589 and 593).

In September 1920, Christian theologian Père Peillaube asked Guénon to write a critique of the Theosophical Society. He accepted and the book *Le Théosophisme, Histoire d'une Pseudo-religion* (Theosophism, History of a Pseudo-Religion) was published in 1921. This book pleased the Catholic public in France, so two years later the dose was repeated, Guénon published another critic *L'Erreur Spirite* (The Spiritist Error), 1923. He liked to write so much that he even acted as a "writer by order". In 1927, he published his most read and most repeatedly published book: *La Crise du Monde Moderne* (The Crisis of the Modern World), in which he prophesies the near end of modern culture. He did not survive to witness it, but, contrary to what he predicted, approximately one hundred years after publication, modern culture remains very vigorous, despite the ups and downs of its trajectory, and the inequality in different peoples, as well as showing no signs of loss of vigour.

In 1930, Guénon left Paris for Cairo, Egypt, where he immersed himself in the Islamic world. He was initiated into a Sufi order, carried out the Islamic declaration of faith, had an oratory in his

house, took Islamic vows, attended a mosque regularly to pray and worship Allah, married a Muslim daughter of a sheikh, educated his children according to Muslim tradition, he tried to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, but was prevented from not having Egyptian citizenship and was buried according to the Muslim rite. Guénon continued as a Muslim until the end of his life in 1951. The intriguing thing is that, when we read Guénon's works, we are struck by his admiration for the Adwaita Vedānta of Hinduism, which he pointed out as the tradition that most preserves the Primordial Wisdom, then, instead of converting to Vedanta, which he so highly praised, he became a Sufi. Some of his biographers argue that Guénon once claimed that Islam was the most accessible way for a Westerner to approach Primordial Tradition. Even after converting to Islam, he continued his interest in Hinduism, writing several articles (Guénon, 2002).

The obstacle is that Adwaita Vedānta is one of the traditional schools of Hinduism, the latter is not a proselytizing religion, but a hereditary religion, that is, it is not possible to convert to Hinduism, to be a Hindu one must be the son or daughter of a Hindu couple belonging to one of the four castes. Therefore, a Frenchman such as René Guénon could not convert to Hindu Vedanta, as orthodox Hinduism does not accept converts. What he could have done, had he been interested in joining the practice of the Vedanta system, would

be to join some of the New Religious Movements inspired by Vedantine ideas and practices, emerging at that time, such as the Rāmakrshna Mission, through Swami Vivekānanda's international propagation, Sri Ramana Mahārshi's Ātman Yoga and Swami Shivānanda's Divine Life Society, as all these Advaita Vedānta-practicing groups accept Westerners as they do not follow the orthodox Hinduism of Hindu Dharmashtras, so they are not called Hindu groups, but of New Religious Movements inspired in Hinduism. However, since these are somewhat innovative groups of Hinduism, who reinterpret it, this innovation was not to the liking of Guénon, who did not accept innovations that interrupted the chain of Traditional Transmission. Therefore, for Guénon, these New Religious Movements were degenerations of the Primordial Tradition, for him purity was in orthodox Hinduism, so he was not interested in affiliation (for further details, see: Guénon, 1987b: 291-5, where he comments on the New Religious Movements Inspired by Hinduism). René Guénon died on January 7, 1951, in the city of Cairo, Egypt, at the age of 64. His last years were difficult due to his worsening health.

## His Work

In a way, we can divide it into the following themes:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some works were only published after his death in 1951.

1. Works on fundamental metaphysical principles: *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines Hindues* (General Introduction to the Studies of Hindu Doctrines, 1921), *L'Homme et son Devenir selon le Védānta* (Man and his Becoming According to Vedānta, 1925), *Le Symbolisme de la Croix* (The Symbolism of the Cross, 1931), *Les États Multiples de l'Être* (The Multiple Stages of Being, 1932), *La Métaphysique Orientale* (The Oriental Metaphysics, 1939), *Les Principes du Calcul Infinitesimal* (The Principles of Infinitesimal Calculus, 1946) and *Études sur l'Hindouisme* (Studies on Hinduism, 1967).
2. Works on esoterism and initiation: *L'Ésotérisme de Dante* (The Esoterism of Dante, 1925), *Saint Bernard* (St. Bernard, 1929), *Aperçus sur l'Initiation* (Perspectives on Initiation, 1946), *Initiation et Réalisation Spirituelle* (Initiation and Spiritual Realization, 1952), *Aperçus sur l'ésotérisme Chrétien* (Perspectives on Christian Esoterism, 1954) and *Études sur la Franc-maçonnerie et le Compagnonnage* (Volume I 1964 and Volume II 1965 – Studies on Freemasonry and Fellowship).
3. Works on symbolism: *La Grande Triade* (The Great Triad, 1946), *Symboles de la Science Sacrée* (Symbols of Sacred Science, 1962), *Formes Traditionnelles et Cycles Cosmiques* (Traditional Forms and Cosmic Cycles, 1970), *Aperçus sur l' ésotérisme Islamique et le Taoïsme* (Perspectives on Islamic Esoterism and Taoism,

1973) and *Le Roi du Monde* (The King of the World, 1927).

4. Works criticizing the modern world and neo-spiritualisms: *Orient et Occident* (East and West, 1924), *La Crise du Monde Moderne* (The Crisis of the Modern World, 1927), *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel* (Spiritual Authority and Power Temporal, 1929), *Le Théosophisme, Histoire d'une Pseudo-religion* (Theosophism, the History of a Pseudo-Religion, 1921), *L'Erreur Spirite* (The Spiritual Error, 1923) and *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps* (The Kingdom of Quantity and the Signs of the Times, 1945).<sup>2</sup>

### **The Traditionalism**

There is not just one Traditionalism, but several, that of René Guénon is just one among many. The meaning can be quite broad, ranging from someone with nostalgic ideas and customs, which they may have assimilated in their youth, to an ideological movement, in a narrower sense, that gives preference to specific old ideas and practices over specific ones that replaced them. In short, it is a form of conservatism, that is, preferring stagnation over innovation.

Mark Sedgwick divided the history of 20th century Traditionalism into three stages. The first

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<sup>2</sup> For a brief analysis of his work, see: Chacornac, 1958: 59-80.

stage was until the 1930s, when R. Guénon developed traditionalist philosophy, wrote several articles and books, and gathered a small group of followers. In the second stage, an attempt was made to put traditionalist philosophy into practice in two different contexts: Islamic Sufism, as an example of eastern metaphysics, and European fascism, as an example of revolt. In the third stage, after the 1960s, traditionalist ideas began to merge into the general culture of the West and passed from the West to the Islamic world and Russia (Sedgwick, 2004: 22). R. Guénon's Traditionalism is not, and never was, an institutionalized organization, only an ideological movement, which at one point tried to put some ideas into practice, but survived more as a movement from which each conservative took what interested him, in order to incorporate into other ideologies.

The word tradition derives from the Latin verb “trādēre”, which means “to transmit” (to posterity), “to deliver”, “to entrust”. The most common meaning is “a statement, belief, or practice handed down (especially orally) from generation to generation”. Specifically, R. Guénon's Traditionalism considers tradition in the sense of “a belief and practice handed down from time immemorial, or rather, beliefs and practices which must have been handed down but were lost to the West during the latter half of the second millennium c. e. According to Guénon's Traditionalism, the modern West is in crisis as a

result of this loss of the transmission of Tradition" (Sedgwick, 2004: 21). Strictly speaking, Guénon's contestation is not with the West in the geographical sense, but with the modern, therefore evolutionary culture that is predominant in it. For him, the solution lay in the traditional example of the East (Dickson, 2021: 595), but the West should not be orientalized, that is, absorb oriental ideas and customs, but rather rescue its own tradition, which was lost with the end of the Middle Ages and the rise of the Modern Era. For Guénon, the Middle Ages were a golden age and not a dark one. His thinking, of course, is almost the complete opposite of that of the evolutionists. For example, for him, Astronomy is not a scientific improvement of Astrology, but, contrary to what many historians and scientists consider, its degeneration, as well as Chemistry is not a development of Alchemy, but also its worsening, as many anti-progressive assessments. In short, for him progress is a cultural horror.

The theory of Traditionalism that higher wisdom was revealed in a very distant past and preserved by a few surviving traditions, therefore it is a traditional knowledge, in a way that cultural progress is the enemy of ancient wisdom, is against the explanation, by historians, that the evolution of religious culture followed the evolution of human culture over many centuries (for more information, see: Bellah, 2011). René Guénon's traditionalist theory represents a challenge to the

theory of the evolution of religious culture expounded by Robert N. Bellah in his landmark book *Religion in Human Evolution: from the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*. Axial, 2011. René Guénon said the following about evolutionism: “Evolutionism, despite multiple more or less important divergences, has become a true official dogma; it is taught as a law, which is forbidden to discuss, which in reality is nothing more than the most gratuitous and the least founded of all hypotheses” (Guénon, 1987a: 29). He admired the following phrase: “Western science is an ignorant knowledge” (Idem: 37).

The essential elements of Guénon's traditionalist philosophy are found in four of his books published between 1921 and 1927. The first was *L'introduction Générale à L'étude des Doctrines Hindoues* (A General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines) published in 1921. This was the book based on Guénon's doctoral thesis, which Sylvain Lévi failed in 1921. Therefore, it was in this first book that Guénon coined the expression Perennial Philosophy, as synonymous with a tradition that crossed all history to finally survive unchanged in few current traditions, especially in the Vedānta tradition of India (Dickson, 2021: 589), more specifically, in the Advaita Vedānta current of Adi Shankarāchārya (788-820 c. e.). This thesis Sylvain Lévi understood it as historically absurd. In the words of Mark Sedgwick: “Then, in the nineteenth century,

Perennialism was revived in a slightly modified form, with the newly discovered Vedas being regarded as their surviving textual expression. It was in this form, (...), that Guénon found Perennialism, and it is this form of Perennialism that is presented in the book *Introduction Générale*, which was rejected by Lévi, and is central to Traditionalist Philosophy" (Sedgwick, 2004: 24).

In this book, in the later revised and expanded edition, among the many theories of Guénon that were never confirmed, is his criticism of Gregocentrism, through his claim that the ancient Greeks absorbed ideas from the eastern peoples, especially the Indians, even before the Greek occupation of the region of Bactria (present-day Afghanistan) by the troops of Alexander the Great, where a fertile Greek culture thrived. His conviction was such that he went so far as to say that: "After Aristotle, the signs of Hindu influence in Greek philosophy became more and more rare, to the point of disappearing, because that philosophy (the Greek) closed itself in a sphere more and more limited and contingent, more and more distant from any real intelligentsia. (...) It was only among the Neoplatonists that eastern influences made their appearance again and it is there, in fact, that certain metaphysical ideas, such as that of the Infinite, can be found for the first time among the Greeks (Guénon, 1945: 51).

Another important book by Guénon on Traditionalism is *Orient et Occident* (East and West), from 1924, a warning for saving the West from collapse through the Eastern tradition. In the first half of the book, Guénon systematically attacked the illusion of materialism and the superstitions of progress, reason, change, and sentimental moralization. In the words of R. Guénon in *Orient et Occident* (p. 19): "Modern Western civilization appears in history as a true anomaly, among all those that we know more or less completely, this civilization is the only one that has developed a purely material culture, and this monstrous development, the beginning of which coincides with what is conventionally called the Renaissance, has been accompanied, as it should inevitably be, by a corresponding intellectual regression (...). This regression has reached such a point that Westerners today no longer know what pure intellectuality can be, and they no longer even suspect that such a thing could exist, hence their contempt, not only for Eastern civilizations, but even for the European Middle Ages..." (Guénon, 1987a: 19). For him, perfection was in the beginning, evolution was decay: "It is in the beginning that everything that appears in the spiritual and intellectual realms is found in its state of perfection, from which it has only subsequently fallen through that 'obscuraction' which necessarily accompanies each cyclical process of manifestation" (Guénon, 2002: 72).

By “pure intellectuality”, Guénon meant something close to metaphysical intelligence, which was replaced by a superstitious cult of reason, which values what is worthless. Strictly speaking, Guénon was not attacking Western civilization, in the geographical sense, but modern civilization, so the title of the book, instead of “East and West”, should be Tradition and Modernity. For, “what Guénon opposes is not the West, but the modern world, and what he hopes is not the triumph of the East, but the restoration of its proper traditional civilization to the West” (Sedgwick, 2004: 25). For Guénon, the “proper traditional civilization” of the West took place during the years of the European Middle Ages. And he prophesied the immediate end of modern civilization: “The West is in grave danger, because it is based on nothing more substantial than industrial superiority, without a spiritual foundation. Western civilization is in immediate danger of cataclysmic collapse into barbarism and consequent extinction through assimilation by more solidly founded civilizations” (Idem, 25-6 and Dickson, 2021: 595). R. Guénon, who died in 1951, did not survive to testify that his prophecy did not come true, since the triumph of modern civilization in the West was even greater in the second half of the 20th century and in the beginning of the 21st century, despite some setbacks. No modern nation has been assimilated by another “more solidly founded civilization”, that is, by a traditional civilization. The Islamic State’s

expansionist attempt to found a global Islamic empire was only a dream. The closest thing to this happened was that in some countries, which were already Muslim, they were taken over by a more radical Islam, while other countries preserved a moderate Islam. In countries that were once traditional, traditionalism gave way to secularism, and they became the countries with the highest degrees of civility, human development, schooling, quality of life and social equality (Norway, Sweden, Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, Switzerland, Japan, Korea, Singapore and others).

The second part of the book is dedicated to explaining how this collapse could be avoided, through an oligarchic solution. For him, what was needed was the formation of an “intellectual elite”, to receive the traditional teaching, through an assimilation of Eastern doctrines, in case the Western forms could not be found, in order to push the West towards the restoration of a traditional civilization.

Another book even more important for understanding Guénon's Traditionalism is *La Crise du Monde Moderne* (The Crisis of the Modern World), from 1927. This is his best-known and most read book, it has been reprinted repeatedly since its initial publication and it is possible to be found even today. Mark Sedgwick regarded it as Guénon's masterpiece. The book is an improvement on *Orient et Occident* with some

changes in terminology, style, and clarity.<sup>3</sup> For example, in this book the expression “pure intellectuality”, used in *Orient et Occident*, has been replaced by “sacred science” (Sedgwick, 2004: 28).

In this book, Guénon reinforces and deepens his thesis of an imminent collapse of the modern world: “... in other words, that a more or less profound transformation is imminent, that a change of orientation must inevitably take place soon. (...) because, for me, putting myself in a more general point of view, it is the whole modern era, as a whole, that represents a period of crisis for the world” (Guénon, 1927: 10). Later he said: “This end is certainly not the end of the world, in the full sense in which some would like to understand it, but it is at least the end of a world; and what must end is Western civilization in its present form” (Guénon, 1927: 16). About a hundred years have passed since Guénon predicted the end or the “more or less profound transformation and a change of orientation” in the Modern World, yet these events have not happened. What happened was the opposite, the Modern World has strengthened since then, which heroically endured waves of strong oriental and

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<sup>3</sup> When we compare both books, we notice that *Orient et Occident* displays a much more confusing writing and, to make matters worse, with extensive paragraphs of up to three pages, which prevents the reader from resting more often.

mystical influences, such as the Counter Culture Movement and the New Age Movement, in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and did not collapse.<sup>4</sup> If the Modern World were really so close to a civilizational collapse, as Guénon insisted, it would not have resisted the above movements, which proposed the transformation to a greater spirituality of the West, with many elements of the culture and traditional practices of the East, especially from India and China. This was the time when the greatest immigration of gurus to the West took place.

A feature frequently present in his works, both in books and in articles, is the precariousness of historical documentation, which, sometimes, is completely omitted and, when used, is selected with those quotations that only support his metaphysical theories. Therefore, his books and articles contain very few citations of works by other researchers and historians, sometimes none, and consequently never include a bibliography at the end. The results of archaeological explorations, already flourishing in his time, are never cited, as well as historical and linguistic studies, and when

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<sup>4</sup> The oriental influence was so strong that even the most popular rock band of the time, the Beatles, became involved with Indian mysticism, when its members became disciples of the then unknown guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, instructor of Transcendental Meditation, who, after meeting in India, he became known worldwide and with a large following, which led him to move to the USA.

cited, it is to criticize their validity or point out their inferiority in the face of the teachings of Traditional Culture. All this based on his idea that material knowledge is below and, therefore, subordinated to metaphysical knowledge. In short, his works are addressed to a gullible audience, which believes in the primacy of metaphysics and automatically accepts the subordination of science. With that, conservatives of different currents absorbed his ideas, in whole or in part, which, in turn, naturally, were destined to be ignored by the academic world and, among the most debauched, ridiculed by sceptics.

### **The Infidelity of the Hindu Tradition**

Tradition necessarily depends on transmission, that is, there is no tradition whatsoever without transmission from one generation to another, from this one to the next, and so on, until a tradition disappears. In the past, the transmission of knowledge was done orally, then the written form, today we have the electronic form. Before the electronic inventions of voice and image recording, the fidelity of oral transmission was almost impossible to verify, since the event was not recorded, unlike today, when we have instruments for recording the human voice. In the case of Hindu culture, whose primordiality is highlighted in the books of René Guénon, the first texts were composed and transmitted only orally in

Antiquity, only after a few centuries were these texts passed to written form. An indication that these ancient texts were extracted and memorized from oral expositions is the number of pronouns that indicate the use of signs by the speaker during dialogues, especially in the Upanishads, such as "this", "that", "these", "those", etc. , which results in a lack of definition for current translators and in discussions between interpreters.

Therefore, it is not possible to know precisely the degree of fidelity or change in the oral transmission of this period. What is possible to know are only the surviving traces in the different written versions, after the passage of these texts to written form. That is, the amount of textual and editorial differences, when comparing the recensions of the same text, indicates that, at the time of written transcription, the texts already differed due to changes or omissions that occurred during the long period of oral transmission, especially when we compare the same text transmitted in different regions and at different times. Differences can be in the length of the text, in the arrangement of chapters, in the order of paragraphs or verses, in the writing, in euphony, in the meter, in the greater or lesser presence of archaisms and in the linguistic style.

These large amounts of textual differences require the prior comparison of many manuscripts of the same work, in order to find the text closest to the original, obviously when we do not have the

autograph manuscript, in order to arrive at the critical edition. This work is known as Textual Criticism. However, few works of Hinduism have been published through this prior process of critical preparation, by comparing as many manuscripts as possible before editing. Most of the times, the work is published using only a single manuscript or a few manuscripts. So, when this extensive work of comparing many manuscripts is done, before the publication of the critical edition, many surprises emerge, as it is discovered that many previous editions do not correspond to the closest version of the probable original text, or that this version is the most altered among the manuscripts compared (see: Olivelle, 1998b: xv-xix and Witzel, 2014: 56-62).

In order to avoid that this study becomes too extensive, we will limit it to just a few points of the Hindu tradition, so admired by René Guénon. In the Vedic Antiquity of India, the different recensions of the Vedic texts led to the formation of several Vedic schools (*shākhās*). So, in Patanjali's *Mahābhāshya* there are mentioned the existence of 1,131 *shākhās* (Vedic Schools) in the past, being 21 from the *Rig Veda*, 101 from the *Yajur Veda*, 1000 from the *Sāma Veda* and 9 from the *Atharva Veda*. While the *Muktika Upanishad* (I.01.07-14) mentions 1,180 schools (*shākhās*) as follows: "The *Vedas* are mentioned as being four in number, their schools (*shākhās*) are many. So also the *Upanisads*. The *Rig-veda* has 21 *shākhās*, the

Yajur-veda 109 shākhās, the Sāma Veda 1,000 and the Atharva Veda 50. In each shākhā there is an Upanishad" (Aiyar, 2003: 01 and 209). "The Caranavyūha, a Parishita<sup>5</sup> of the Yajurveda, lists five schools (shākhās) of the Rig Veda: Shākala, Bāskala, Āshwalayana, Shankhāyana and Māndūkāyana. Other sources provide a greater number of Rigvedic schools. There are seven according to the Atharvaveda Parishita (Brereton, 2014: vol. I, 16).<sup>6</sup>

However, of these schools (shākhās), only 13 Samhitās (hymn collections) have survived to the present day: 03 from the Rig Veda (Shākala, Āshwalāyana and Shānkhāyana, the latter also called Kaushītaki),<sup>7</sup> 05 from the Yajur Veda (04

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<sup>5</sup> Supplementary text to the Samhitā (Collection of hymns). Each Veda has its Parishitas, the quantity is always changing as new texts are discovered, the most numerous collection of Parishitas is the Atharvaveda with more than 70 Parishitas.

<sup>6</sup> See the schemes with the names of the achāryas (masters) of these schools (shākhās) mentioned in the Purānas in Chaubey, 2009: vol. I, 04-6.

<sup>7</sup> B. B. Chaubey informed us that "the tradition of reciting the Āshwalayana Samhitā is completely lost and there is only one pandit, at the moment, in India, who is able to recite it in the way that it could have been recited in the past. However, with Kaushītaki (Shankhāyana) we are in a more fortunate situation as we have at least three pandits (...). They know the traditional technique of recitation well and know a handful of Sūktas and Mantras by heart, though not the entire Samhitā by heart, just by reading" (Chaubey, 2009: vol. I, VII).

from the Yajur Veda Black: Kathaka, Kapisthala, Mantrāyaniya and Taittiriya and 01 from the White Yajur Veda: Vājasaneyi), 03 from the Sāma Veda (Ranayaniya, Kauthuma and Jaiminiya) and 02 from the Atharva Veda (Shaunaka and Paippalada)<sup>8</sup> (see: Botelho: 2018: 02-3). The Rig Veda's Āshwalayana Samhitā has 209 more verses than the Rig Veda's Shākala Samhitā recension (Chaubey, 2009: vol. I, xi). S. W. Jamison and J. Brereton understood that the losses of some recensions of the Samhitā (collection of hymns) of the Rig Veda do not represent that much damage, due to the textual similarities between them, so “there is no need to regret the loss of these recensions” (Brereton, 2014: vol. I, 16).<sup>9</sup>

On Guénon's proposal that the Veda embodies a perpetual wisdom and was transmitted through the Vedanta Tradition, thus preserving the Primordial Tradition, below are the conclusions of some of the leading Vedic scholars of the present and recent past on the transmission of the Veda to nowadays. For example, Jan Gonda, in his landmark work *Change and Continuity in India*

<sup>8</sup> These numbers are eventually changed, due to new discoveries of supposedly lost texts.

<sup>9</sup> For an in-depth study of six Rgvedic Shākhās Samhitās (Collections of Hymns from the Rgvedic Schools – Āśvalāyana Samhitā, Shākala Samhitā, Bahvrcha Samhitā, Māndūkeya Samhitā, Bāshkara Samhitā and Shāṅkhāyana Samhitā), from the surviving data, see: Chaubey, 2009: vol. I, 01-146.

*Religion*, concluded just the opposite; "...notwithstanding the fact that the study of the Veda was a duty for all men belonging to the three upper classes of society, a proper understanding of that body of literature was lost at a still very distant time, a philological study of it, atrophied in the course of time, and the works of medieval commentators are, in their efforts to interpret the ancient texts formally and materially, ample evidence of ignorance and false notions, misunderstanding the meaning of the texts and the intentions of their authors, and providing anachronistic, subjective or symbolizing explanations. There is every reason to argue that India had a very incomplete and inadequate knowledge of the Veda before it was discovered by European research" (Gonda, 1997: 09). Then, next, this author went on to point out and analyse dozens of changes that took place from the Vedic period to late Hinduism. Above all, critical remarks on the theories raised to explain the numerous changes between the ancient Vedic culture and Hinduism, since the problems faced in studying the history of India are much more complicated than certain archaeologists, linguists and historians of religions<sup>10</sup> suppose, and that many hypotheses based on a predominant influence of a permanent

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<sup>10</sup> And even more so for delusional speculators like René Guénon and others.

substrate are simplistic and ill-founded, due to the numerous innovations.<sup>11</sup>

Regarding the habit of interpreting the Upanishads on the basis of medieval commentators (Shankarāchārya, Rāmanuja, Madhwāchārya, etc.), Michael Witzel and Stephanie W. Jamison noted the following problem: "...the study of these texts has largely been based on the very late commentaries of Shankara (seventh century c. e.) and others. The time, place, and cultural and religious background of the commentators are as far removed from the authors of the Upanishads (c. 500 b. c. e.) as are today's western readers of the Upanishads commentators. Furthermore, Shankara and the other medieval Adwaita writers took the ancient Upanishads as a whole and used them as scriptural supports for the monistic philosophy of their day" (Witzel, 1992: 26). See Erich Frauwallner's remarks: "In order to understand the philosophy of the Upanishads, it is not necessary, above all, to introduce late things into them.

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<sup>11</sup> Gods that have survived in the Hindu tradition for many centuries have undergone so many syncretisms and so many alterations that their initial characteristics are sometimes almost unrecognizable. This is the case of the god Shiva. Therefore, for the development of the concept of the Hindu god Shiva, from Vedic Rudra to more recent concepts, see: *The Concept of Rudra-Śiva Through the Ages* by Mahadev Chakravarti. Also, for the development of the concept of Īshwara (Director God) in Hinduism, since the first mentions in the Atharva Veda Samhitā, see: Gonda, 1997: 131-63.

Especially, it is not necessary to interpret them through the monistic idealism of Shankara, as Deussen has done. Shankara's doctrine is separated from the ancient Upanishads by a period of over a thousand years, and it relies entirely on other presuppositions and opinions that were created only in the transitional period. Furthermore, there is no uniform and harmonious philosophy in the Upanishads. Only the late Vedanta system created an artificial unity. The ancient Upanishads present only a number of isolated texts, which were individually recited as independent texts. They were broadcast repeatedly in different contexts and this proves their independence. The task science now faces is to understand these different doctrines in their originality, order and organize them, as well as explain their origins and development" (Frauwallner, 1997, vol. I: 358-9).

Furthermore, it is not accurate to consider that everything in the Veda is a primordial revelation, as Guénon imagined, since archaeological, linguistic and historical studies currently point to the fact that the Veda, in reality, is an offshoot of Indo-Iranian culture and religion, the latter also being an offshoot of Indo-European culture. S.W. Jamison and J. Brereton have clearly summarized the researchers' current conclusions that the Rgveda "stands at the end of a long tradition of Indo-Iranian and Indo-European praise poetry, most of which is mirrored in the Ancient

Avestian Gāthās attributed to Zarathustra". And further on, "The Rgveda is part of a long tradition of Indo-European praise poetry, going back to the Indo-Iranian period with roots in the Indo-European period. The Rgveda is just the surface of a very deep tradition" (Brereton, 2014: 04-5). Abundant linguistic and historical studies have shown that Vedic culture was brought to the Indian continent by the Aryans, a people derived from the Indo-European people, who moved towards Central Asia, and some groups later migrated to Iran and to the India. The Rgveda narrates the battles between these Aryan invaders, represented mainly by the Aryan god Indra, with the natives Dasas and Dayus (for more details, see: Keith, 1989: part I, 32-6; Erdosy, 1997; Brereton, 2014: Introduction and Witzel, 2001 and 2014). Now, on the other hand, if everything that is innovation is degeneration, as Guénon taught that innovation or progress is a degeneration of a tradition, then the Veda was certainly an innovation in relation to the Indo-Iranian religion, therefore a degeneration; in the same way, the Indo-Iranian religion was an innovation in relation to the Indo-European religion, therefore also a degeneration of the same and, also, the Indo-European religion could be an innovation in relation to the religion of some people before it, therefore also a degeneration, as well as the religion of this previous people could be an innovation of the religion of a people of primitive humanity, therefore also a degeneration and so *ad*

*infinitum*, in short, we will never know what the Primordial Tradition was.

### **The Infidelity of Textual and Redactional Transmission**

This is a frequent occurrence in the ancient texts of almost all traditions. However, here we will limit ourselves to a few examples of textual and redactional differences in the transmission of texts from the Hindu tradition, for which Guénon cultivated great admiration and pointed her out as a conservative of the Primordial Tradition. For, as differences in transmission arise, different recensions or versions of the same text appear. Sometimes, two recensions of the same text are so different that they even seem like two different compositions, which researchers sometimes prefer to call versions of the same work.

Also, sometimes the same verse is quoted in different texts, but with differences in wording. Dr. S. R. Sehgal pointed out, in the introduction to Ralph T. H. Griffith's English translation of the Atharvaveda, in 1985 edition, the fallibility of the Vedic tradition as follows: "Critical studies have confirmed the opinion that the Vedic tradition is not infallible, although it is protected by such aids as *swara*,<sup>12</sup> *padapātha*,<sup>13</sup> *kramapātha*,<sup>14</sup> etc. It (the

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<sup>12</sup> Accentuation.

Vedic tradition) has been affected and still has been perversely commented on by commentators. Padapātha recitation, which serves a dual purpose, namely, purity and exposition, has to some extent undergone (alterations) in the course of oral tradition. Memory failures have caused variations" (Griffith, 1985: vol. I, xxviii-xxix). He then showed some examples of redactional differences of the same verse in different Vedic works. We will mention here just one example from S. R. Sehgal: the verse I.115.01 of the Rg Veda is repeated in the two recensions of the Atharva Veda (Shaunaka and Paippalāda), whereas in the Shaunaka recension XII.02.35, there is a redactional difference in the first word of the third pāda. The repetition of the same verse in different works is a common occurrence in Vedic literature, as well as in Hindu literature in general, and the verse is sometimes reproduced with textual or redactional changes, as well as with omissions and additions. These differences may have emerged during the period of oral transmission, when errors occurred in recitation, due to memory failures, and then these textual and editorial differences were recorded in writing. Also, there may have been voluntary changes due to ideological preferences.

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<sup>13</sup> Recitation without the use of euphonic linking rules between words (sandhi rules).

<sup>14</sup> Recitation of Vedic verses through word pairs in the order they are in the verse, with the aim of increasing memorization.

S. R. Sehgal has also provided a complete table comparing the different orders of chapters, hymns and verses in the Shaunaka and Paippalāda recensions of the Atharva Veda (Griffith, 1985: vol. I, 408-24). As for the modifications from one text to another, J. Brereton and S. W. Jamison observed: “In the Rgvedic hymns, which also appear in the Atharva Veda, the latter not uncommonly shows a different order in the verses, and in both the Samavedic and Atharvavedic versions of the verses, rgvedic hymns, there may be differences in wording and grammatical forms. In these cases, with few or no exceptions, the Rgvedic version of the hymn is the oldest and the versions of the other Vedas are modifications” (Brereton, 2014: 18).<sup>15</sup>

Also, no less divergent in texts, wording, grammar, meter and interpretations are the Upanishads, texts that are sources of the Vedānta system. The variants have increased over time that even a very short Upanishad like the Īshāvasya Upanishad, with only 18 verses, according to the Kānva<sup>16</sup> and Mādhyandina recensions, shows differences in the arrangement of the verse order,

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<sup>15</sup> For the textual differences between the Shānaka and Āshwalayana recensions of the Rg Veda, see Chaubey, 2009: vol. I, XI-XVI and for the names of the achāryas (masters) of the Rgvedic shākhās mentioned in the Purānas, see the schematics on pages 04-06 of this same work.

<sup>16</sup> This was the review commented on by Adi Shankaracharya.

the wording and the number of verses (Madhwāchārya recension has 20 verses instead of 18 from the Kānva and Mādhyandina recensions), when comparing one recension with the other. So far it has been possible to find four recensions: Kānva, Mādhyandina, that of Madhwāchārya and that of Suddha Dharma Mandalam. The Kānva and Mādhyandina recensions coincide in verse order only up to verse 08, that of Madhwāchārya coincides with Kānva up to verse 16 and that of Suddha Dharma Mandalam coincides only with Kānva in verses 01, 02, 15, 16, 17 and 18.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the Kānva and Mādhyandina reviews present considerable redactional differences, as well as some meter problems and grammatical errors (to know these textual differences and these redactional errors, see: Vadekar, 1958: Vol. I, 01-5; Olivelle, 1998b: 611-3 and Botelho: 2022: 51s).

When we turn to the longer texts of the Upanishads, obviously, the textual differences between the recensions increase. A long Upanishad, such as the Brhadāranyaka Upanishad, also preserved in the Kānva and Mādhyandina recensions, has many variations in arrangement in the order of sections, chapters, and paragraphs. Patrick Olivelle prepared and published a complete comparative table of the

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<sup>17</sup> Consult the comparative table of verse orders between these four recensions in Botelho, 2022: 38-9.

arrangements in the order of sections, chapters and paragraphs among the Kānva, Mādhyandina and Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa recensions, of which the Brihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad is the final part, as well as a long section of notes, with 45 pages, on the textual, redactional, grammatical, euphonic and metric differences between the two reviews (Olivelle, 1998b: 33-5 and 487-532). The notes section on all 12 Upaniṣhads edited and translated by him totals 167 pages, which shows the large amount of textual, redactional, grammatical, euphonic and metrical variants occurring in the Major Upaniṣhads, which demonstrates that the traditional transmission is not as faithful as many think. In these notes, he pointed out and commented, among many other observations, on redactional amendments made by Western editors in an attempt to correct the incorrectly worded passages in the Upaniṣhads. He claimed that it does not seem right to him to correct these irregularities in the editing of the text, as some Western editors did, especially Otto Böhthingk, but only to maintain the traditional wording and note the defects in footnotes (for further details, see: Olivelle, 1998a), thus confirming, once again, that changes exist and are plentiful. These are a few examples of textual and redactional infidelity in the transmission of Vedic texts, far from being all cases, only a few examples mentioned here.

## The Differences in Exegesis

More problematic than the variants in the textual and editorial transmission are the divergences in the interpretations, since each current claims to be the heir of the original tradition, which makes it impossible for us to identify which is the true one. Pointing out all the interpretive differences in Hinduism would be a monstrous work, so here will be shown just one example of a tradition Guénon was so fond of, Vedanta, with its source text, the Brahma Sūtras.

Due to his admiration, Guénon overemphasized the monistic tradition of Vedānta (Adwaita Vedānta) as the main current among all Vedantine traditions, for him Adwaita Vedānta was the Vedānta par excellence (Guénon, 1945 and 2001). More broadly speaking, the Adwaita current is just one among many other Vedantine traditions, whose textual source is also found in the Brahma Sūtras (also known as Vedānta Sūtras) authored by Bādarāyana (dates in dispute). See below the list of the main classical commentators of the Brahma Sūtras and founders of interpretive currents of Vedanta with the names of their respective theological interpretations:

1. Shankarācharya (788-820 c. e.)  
Nirvisheshādwaita
2. Bhāskara (1000 c. e.) Bhedābheda
3. Yādavaprakasha (1000 c. e.) Bhedābheda
4. Rāmanuja (1140 c. e.) Vishishtādwaita

5. Madhwācharya (1238 c. e.) Dwaita
  6. Nimbārka (1250 c. e.) Dwaitādwaita
  7. Shrikantha (1270 c. e.) Shaivavishistādwaita
  8. Shrīpati (1400 c. e.)  
Bhedābhedātmakavishistādwaita
  9. Vallabha (1479-1544 c. e.) Shuddhādwaita
  10. Shuka (1550 c. e.) Bhedavāda
  11. Vijnānabhikshu (1600 c. e.)  
Ātmabrahmaikyabhedavāda
  12. Baladeva (1725 c. e.) Chintyabhedābheda.<sup>18</sup>
- Therefore, the Advaita current of Adi Shankaracharya is just one among other Vedantine currents.

### **Coincidences and Divergences in Translations**

In the same way, every confessional translator thinks his or her translation is the closest to the original text. Sometimes the translation of the same verse or the same paragraph of the same work is so different from another translator's translation that it seems as if they were translated from different verses. The Hindu texts with the most divergent translations are the Vedas. It is very difficult to find a translation of a verse from the

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<sup>18</sup> For studies on each of these classical commentaries and each of these theological interpretations of the Brahma Sūtras, consult the comprehensive studies of Ghate, 1926; Radhakrishnan, 1960; Sharma, 1971, 1974; 1978 and Hirst, 2006. In addition to these can be included the numerous recent commentaries in English by contemporary authors.

Rg Veda, for contemporary languages, that coincides with each other, so some researchers claim that the Vedas are untranslatable, since it is no longer possible to identify the meaning that those ancient composers-poets had in mind at the time of composition. See below the translations of the three verses, chosen at random, from the hymn X.12 of the Rg Veda, and compare the coincidences and divergences:

Devanāgarī Text:

ऋतं च सत्यं चाभीद्वत् तपसोऽध्यजायत् ।  
 ततो रात्र्यजायत ततः समुद्रो अर्णवः ॥ १ ॥  
 समुद्रादर्णवादधि संवत्सरो अजायत ।  
 अहोरात्राणि विदध्दिश्वस्य मिषतो वशी ॥ २ ॥  
 सूर्यचन्द्रमसौ धाता यथापूर्वमकल्पयत् ।  
 दिवं च पृथिवीं चान्तरिक्षमथो स्वः ॥ ३ ॥

Transliteration:

1.Rtam cha satyam chābhīddhātata  
 tapaso adhyajāyat  
 Tato rātryajāyata tatah samudroarnavah  
 2.Samudrādarnavādadhī samvatsaro ajāyata  
 Ahorātrāni vidadhadwishwasya mishato vashī  
 3.Sūryachandramasau dhātā  
 yathāpūrvamakalpayat  
 Divam cha prthivīm chāntarikshamatho swah

The translation by H.H. Wilson (1850):

- 1.Truth (of thought) and veracity (of speech) were born of arduous penance, hence the night was generated, hence also the ocean of waters.
2. From the ocean of waters the year was then produced, ordering nights and days, the ruler of each moment.
- 3.Dhatri in the beginning created the sun and the moon, the sky, the earth, the firmament and the happy (sky) (Wilson, 1990: vol. VI, 518-9). .

Ralph T.H. Griffith's translation (1896):

- 1.From the fervour raised to its height, the Eternal Law and the Truth were born. Hence the night was produced, and hence the raging sea deluge arose.
2. From the same deluge of raging sea, the Year was next produced. Ordainer of days and nights, Lord over all who close their eyes.
- 3.Dhātar, the great Creator, then formed the Sun and Moon in due order. He formed in order Heaven and Earth, the regions of air and light. (Griffith, 2018: 984).

Wendy Doniger's translation (1981):

- 1.Order and Truth were born from the heat when he rose. From him the night was born, from this heat the raging ocean was born.
2. From the raging ocean the year was born, which arranged the days and nights, ruling everything that blinks its eyes.
3. The Organizer placed in their proper place the sun and the moon, the sky and the earth, the

middle realm of space and finally the light of the sun (Doniger, 1981: 34).

Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton translation (2014):

1. Both truth and reality were born from the heat when it was kindled. From this, night was born, and from this, the undulating sea.
2. From the undulating sea, the year was born, which distributes days and nights and exercises its will over everything that blinks (mortals).
3. The Ordainer arranged, according to their own orders, the sun and the moon, the sky and the earth, the middle space and the light of the sun (Brereton, 2014: 1660).

Below are the translations of some important words, that is, how each translator translated the same term or the same expression:

ऋत – Rta

H.H. Wilson: “Truth of Thought”

Ralph T.H. Griffith: “Eternal Law”

Wendy Doniger: “Order”

S. Jamison and Joel Brereton: “truth”

सत्य – Satya

H.H. Wilson: “veracity of speech”

R.T.H. Griffith: “truth”

W. Doniger: “truth”

S. Jamison and J. Brereton: “reality”

तपस् - Tapas

H.H. Wilson: "Hard Penance"

R.T.H. Griffith: "Fervour"

W. Doniger: "heat"

S. Jamison and J. Brereton: "heat"

समुद्रो अण्वः – samudro arnavah

H.H. Wilson: "ocean of waters"

R.T.H. Griffith: "Flood of Rough Seas"

W. Doniger: "rough ocean"

S. Jamison and J. Brereton: "undulating sea"

मिष्टो वशी – mishato vashī

H.H. Wilson: "ruler of every moment"

R.T.H. Griffith: "Lord over everything that closes its eye"

W. Doniger: "ruling over all that blinks"

S. Jamison and J. Brereton: "will over everything that blinks"

धाता – Dhātā

H.H. Wilson: "Dhatri"

R.T.H. Griffith: "the great Creator"

W. Doniger: "Organiser"

S. Jamison and J. Brereton: "Orderer"

अन्तरिक्ष – antarīksha

H.H. Wilson: "firmament"

R.T.H. Griffith: "air regions"

W. Doniger: "middle realm of space"

S. Jamison and J. Brereton “middle space”

See also below how the 13 translations of the first verse of the Īshāvasya Upanishad may coincide or differ from one translator to another:

Devanāgarī Text:

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किंच जगत्यां जगत् ।  
तेन त्यक्तेन भुजीथा मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम् १ ॥

Transliteration:

Īshāvāsyamidam sarvam / yatkincha jagatyām  
jagat /  
tena tyaktena bhunjīthā / mā grdhah kasya  
swiddhanam // 01 //

Translations:

“This whole world must be enveloped by the Lord, whatever living being there is in the world. So you must eat what has been forsaken; and do not covet someone's wealth.” (Patrick Olivelle)

“All this, everything that moves on the earth, must be hidden in the Lord (I). When you have renounced all this, then you can enjoy. Do not covet any man's wealth.” (F. Max Müller)

“This entire universe is permeated by Lord Hari. He (the universe) also depends on the primordial nature which, in turn, is also permeated by Him (Hari). Only He (Hari) is thus independent. For this reason, enjoy all that He has given you, and do not seek wealth from any other source.” (Shrisha Rao)

“Absorb this universe in God and in everything that lives on earth. He who renounces, really enjoys. Do not desire the goods of others.” (Paul Deussen)

“All this, anything that exists in this universe, must be covered by the Lord. Protect the Self by renunciation. Do not wish any man wealth.” (Swami Nikhilananda)

“All this is for the indwelling of the Lord, everything that is individual universe of movement in universal movement. With this renunciation you must enjoy, do not desire the possession of any man.” (Sri Aurobindo)

“All that is changeable in this ephemeral world, all this must be enveloped by the Lord. With this renunciation (of the world), sustain yourself. Don't covet someone's wealth.” (Swami Sarvananda A)

“All that is changeable in this ephemeral world, all this must be seen as permeated by the Lord. So enjoy the world after renouncing the desire for these ephemeral things. Do not covet for possessions.” (Swami Sarvananda B)

“Behold the universe in the glory of God, and everything that lives and moves on the earth. Abandoning the transitory, find joy in the Eternal, do not place your heart in the possessions of the other”. (Juan Mascaró)

“All this must be enveloped by the Lord (Īshā). Every moving thing in the mobile world. With this renunciation, you must enjoy. Do not covet someone's wealth at all.” (R.E. Hume)

“This whole world, and that which is the least of all in this world, which sustains and supports it, that is, the Atman; they are Brahman in association with their Shakti (manifested) or Brahma Shakti itself. Ignoring this truth, do not engage in actions for worldly pleasures; sincerely seek the brahmic beatitudes, reject the wealth obtained by sweat”. (Sri Janardana)

“All this is pervaded by the Lord, everything that is mobile and immobile in this world. With such renunciation enjoy (or protect). Don't covet someone's wealth.” (Swami Krishnananda)

“The Lord is situated in the hearts of all. The Lord is the ultimate reality. Feel joy in it through renunciation. Don't covet. Everything belongs to the Lord.” (Eknath Easwaran)

“All this is inhabited by God, everything that moves here in this moving universe. Therefore, only through renunciation enjoy all things. Do not covet what belongs to others.” (V. Jayaram)

“Involved by the Lord must be all this, every moving thing on earth. With this renunciation, enjoy yourself. Don't covet someone's wealth.” (Ralph T.H. Griffith).<sup>19</sup>

The reason for these differences in the translations lies in the attribution of different meanings by the translators, since the original

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<sup>19</sup> For a comprehensive comparative study of contemporary translations of the full text of the Īshāvasya Upanishad, see: Botelho, 2022: 51-67.

meaning at the time of the composition of the work is no longer possible to be identified, or pointed out in the midst of so many different translations. Every translator or every confessional interpreter claims that his or her translation or interpretation is the original. Guénon himself chose their meanings and then interpreted the sacred texts according to the interpretation that fitted his metaphysical ideas or his comparative theories. This interpretative dispersion is yet another example of how tradition is not able to faithfully preserve originality.

The few examples above were limited to showing traditional infidelity in textual, redactionial, exegetical transmissions and in translations, there are hundreds of other cases. There was a lack of treatment on the evolutions in religious concepts between the different currents of Hinduism, which occurred over the centuries. These are so many that Jan Gonda needed a 480-page book, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, to cover just a few in brief. Therefore, I recommend reading this book above as a start to your research.

When we delve deeper and, therefore, find the huge amount of examples of corruption in traditional transmission, which occurred in the Hindu religion, which may have happened with many other traditions, it becomes difficult to believe in the theory, without documentary support and without confirmable evidence, of the immutable transmission of a Primordial Tradition, for so many centuries until today, preached by

René Guénon. That's why he disliked the historical method. What happened after Guénon's death was that, increasingly in the following years, studies of history, linguistics, iconographic evolution, as well as textual criticism, archaeology, philology and other historical disciplines, were able to demonstrate, regardless of the preaching of the adepts, the infidelity of traditional transmission, through well-documented research, while Guénon's documentation on this subject is very poor and, in many cases, does not even exist (for further details, see Witzel, 2014: 56-69).

### **The Development of a Myth from a Seminal Narrative**

Myths are like creatures: they are generated, are born, grow, reach adulthood and some die, that is, they transform during their lifetime. Even more, when they develop in different environments, they assume different characteristics, so the creatures are not exactly alike. Likewise, the same myth preserved in one tradition is not strictly the same myth, when preserved in another tradition, changes and omissions occur. As a general rule, myths and legends develop as they are transmitted orally and, even after being recorded in manuscripts, continue to undergo slight alterations. And Hindu myths are no exception. The main evidence of changes in the transmission of ancient myths is the difference in

the accounts, when these were passed into written form. When compared, the myths recorded in writing show significant divergences when comparing different manuscripts or printed texts. It is not possible to deal with all these cases here, we will deal with just one example, the myth of the Flood in Hinduism.

Like other ancient peoples, Hindus also have a Flood myth (जलप्लावन – jalaplāvana).<sup>20</sup> This grew out of a short seminal narrative, then was augmented and embellished by other narratives recorded in the Mahābhārata and the Purānas. Of all the narratives, none is more significant than the one in which the god Vishnu incarnates himself in the form of a fish Matsyāvatāra (मत्स्यावतार) to save King Manu (मनु), the Vedas<sup>21</sup> and the Seven Sages (सप्तर्षेऽसैऽप्षेषै) from flood. The texts that narrate this myth are: the Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa I.08, the Mahābhārata III.185 (Critical Edition), Bhāgavata Purāna VIII.24, Agni Purāna cap. 02, Matsya Purāna chap. 01 and the late and suspect Bhavisya Purāna III.01.04.47-57. Chronologically, the oldest and most seminal narrative is that recorded in Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa I.08.01, whose

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<sup>20</sup> Compound word that combines the terms जल (jala - water) and प्लावन - (plāvana - flood), therefore literally: flood of water.

<sup>21</sup> Stolen by the demon Hayagrīva, from the mouth of the god Brahmā, while the latter slept (Bhāgavata Purāna VIII.24.08).

core myth existed before its development and embellishment by other traditions. The core seed of the myth is as follows:

“In the morning, they brought water for Manu to wash, just like they are used to bringing water to wash their hands. When he was washing himself, a fish appeared in his hands” (verse 01).

“He (the fish) spoke to him these words: ‘Take care of me, I will save you. ‘What will you save me from?’ (asked Manu).<sup>22</sup> ‘A flood will destroy all these creatures, from which I will save you’ (said the fish). ‘How should I take care of you?’ (asked Manu)” (verse 02).

“The fish said, ‘while we are small, there is great destruction for us (small fish): fish devours fish. You will first keep me in a jar. When I grow up, you'll dig a well and keep me in it. When I grow bigger, you will take me to the sea, for then I will be beyond destruction' (of being devoured)" (verse 03).

“He (the fish) soon became a great fish, the biggest of all fishes. Then he said: 'In such and such a year, that flood will come. You must listen to me (to my advice) preparing a ship; and when the Flood comes, you must enter the ship and I will save you from it" (verse 04).

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<sup>22</sup> The parentheses are not in Julius Eggeling's English translation, they were introduced here to facilitate the reader's understanding.

“After he (Manu) had taken care of him (the fish) in that way, he (Manu) took him to the sea. And in the same year that the fish had indicated to him, he listened to the advice of the fish preparing a ship, and when the flood came, he entered the ship. The fish then swam to him and on his horn<sup>23</sup> he tied the rope of the ship, and in this way he quickly reached the wonderful mountain of the north” (verse 05).

“He (the fish) then said: ‘I saved you. Tie the ship to the tree, but don't let the water release it, while you are on the mountain. When the water goes down, you must gradually go down. Consequently, he gradually descended, and hence that northern mountain slope is called 'Manu's descent'. The flood then swept away all these creatures, and only Manu remained there” (verse 06 – Eggeling, 1993: part I, 216-7 and Dikshitar, 1935: 01-3).

The sequel deals with the descendants of Manu. If Manu had resided in caves in the bowels of the Earth, such as Manu's identification with the King of the Underworld suggested by Guénon, he would not have survived the flood, as the caves would have been flooded.

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<sup>23</sup> In this case, the fish had a horn. The Agni Purana II.15 reports that the fish's horn was one million yojanas in length, that is, the equivalent of 12 million km. This horn size corresponds to 31 times the distance from Earth to the Moon (384,000 km), or approximately 1/5 of the distance to the planet Mars, depending on its closest orbits (approximately 63 million km).

In chronological order, the first text to elaborate an extended narrative from the seminal account of the Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa tradition is chapter 185 of Vana Parva of the Mahābhārata (Critical Edition). In this text, Manu is praised as a king, the tiger among men, great seer of great strength (III.185.01-5). Note what he practiced to reach this stage: “This lord of men (Manu) practiced severe and great self-mortification in the Vishālā forest, while he stood erect, on one foot, with his arms raised. With his head bowed and his eyes unblinking, he practiced impressive austerities for ten thousand years”<sup>24</sup> (Mahābhārata, III.185.01-5 – van Buitenen, 1975: 583). So, these were the preparation practices of the lawgiver of Hinduism, so revered by Hindus and praised by Guénon as the Primordial and Universal Lawgiver, the Principle, the Cosmic Intelligence and the Spiritual Light. If it were fact and not myth, such an irrational preparation, such as these physical austerities, could only result in that very discriminatory, xenophobic and prejudiced legislation of the Manusmṛti (Code of Manu).

This makes it impossible for many to believe in the existence of a “Cosmic Intelligence”, and if it exists, how could it be so small as to produce such an ethnic and provincial legislation?

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<sup>24</sup> And to add to the severity, the Bhāgavata Purāna VIII.24.10 informs that during the austerities he survived only on the consumption of water.

Unlike the account in the Shatapatha, in this version of the myth the fish (matsya) appeared swimming to the bank of the river Vīrini in order to meet King Manu, who at the time was practicing austerities. This Flood narrative in the epic slightly expands on the Shatapatha narrative. Common snippets vary in some small details. For example, in Shatapatha, the ship is tied to a tree in the northern mountain, while in Mahābhārata, the ship is tied to the peak of the Himalayas. Therefore, the slope on the northern mountain, where the ship anchored, came to be called the Descent of Manu (Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa, I.08.01.06 – Eggeling, 1993, part I, 218); whereas, in the account of the Mahābhārata, the highest peak in the Himalayas is termed “the Mooring” (Mahābhārata, III.185.45-50 – Van Buitenen, 1975: 585). Also very significant for religious traditions is the fact that in the Shatapatha it is not mentioned which god the fish was the incarnation of, whereas in the Mahābhārata (III.185.45-50) the fish states that he is the god Brahmā (Lord of Creatures), while in the Purāṇas the fish (Matsya) is pointed out as the incarnation of god Vishnu (Matsyāvatāra).

There are the following geographical divergences in the accounts. In the above narratives of the Shatapatha and the Mahābhārata, King Manu and the events of the flood take place in the Himalayan region of northern India; in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (VIII.24.13) and in the Agni Purāṇa (II.4-5), the events take place on the banks

of the river Krtamālā<sup>25</sup> in the state of Tamil Nadu in southern India; whereas in Matsya Purana (I.10) the events take place around Malaya Mountain in the state of Kerala, southern India.

The flood account in the fraudulent Bhavishya Purana<sup>26</sup> is a Hindu adaptation of the Biblical Flood. The adaptation begins even in the period of the creation of humanity with the couple Adam and Eve. The first is called Adama and the second Havyavati. The couple is tricked by the demonic serpent Kalipurusha and eats the fruit of the sinful tree. Adama (Adam) lived 930 years, his son was named Shwetamana. Instead of Elohim and Jehovah in the first and second creation narratives in Genesis respectively, the god of creation is Vishnu. Noah is known as Nyūha (नयूह) in the Bhavishya Purāna and ruled for 500 years, he had three sons: Sima, Sama and Bhava. The god Vishnu appeared to him in a dream and informed him of an imminent deluge, asking him to build a large boat. The flood rain was sent by Indra (Vedic god) through his devastating cloud

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<sup>25</sup> G. V. Tagare reported, in a note, that the Krtamālā River currently corresponds to the Vaigai River, in the state of Tamil Nadu, southern India (Tagare, 1987: part III, 1118n), is 258 km long, rises in Malaya Mountain and crosses the holy city of Madurai.

<sup>26</sup> भविष्य - Bhavishya means future, therefore: Purāna of the Future, although the Purānas are narratives of myths and events of the past. Some authors paradoxically translated it as "History of the Future".

Sambartaka. Only the regions of Vishālā (mythical Jambūdwīpa region) and Badarikashrama (in the Himalayas) were not flooded. King Nyūha (Noah) and his family were saved and everything else destroyed. Finally, instead of developing the already existing seminal Hindu flood narrative, as the other Purānas did, the Bhavishya Purana preferred to adapt the Biblical Flood narrative to a Hindu context, which turned it into a narrative even further away from the seminal narrative of the Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa.

Of all the flood narratives, the most extensive is that of the Bhāgavata Purāna. It adds some details regarding the previous narratives. For example, he adds the episode of the demon Hayagrīva, who stole the Vedas, which had unconsciously escaped from the mouth of the god Brahmā, while he was sleeping under the influence of Time and wished to go to bed (VIII.24.08 – Tagare, 1987: part III, 1117). In Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa I.08.01.05 and Mahābhārata III.185.30-35, it is Manu who builds the great boat to survive the flood, while in Bhāgavata VIII.24.33 the great boat is provided by the Fish (Matsyāvatāra) already built. Also, in the first two texts, the boat is tied with a rope to the Himalayan Mountain, whereas in the Bhāgavata VIII.24.36 and in the Agni Purāna II.13, the boat is tied with the great serpent Vāsuki, like a rope. Anyway, it would be too extensive to mention here all the details that differentiate the narratives.

## The Greatest of Delusions

Of all René Guénon's delusional ideas, none was more fanciful, to some even comical, than his belief in an underground region, known as Agartha, inhabited by highly spiritual creatures, led by an underground world ruler known as the King of World (Guénon, 1958).

It seems that the first work dealing with spiritual creatures residing in underground regions was the science fiction novel *Vril: The Power of the Coming Race* by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873), a former Secretary of State for the British Colonies (1858-1859), initially published anonymously in May 1871 under the title *The Coming Race*. However, in late 1871 Bulwer-Lytton came to be discovered as the author and so subsequent publications included his name. In this fiction, Vril is the name of an energy that endowed the creatures that awakened it with exceptional powers, so they managed to survive underground. It is about the adventure of a young man who, during an exploration, in the company of a friend who was a mining engineer, fell into an abyss, due to an accident with the rope that supported him. Abyss that ended in an underground world inhabited by angel-like creatures, that is, an advanced underground civilization. So, the young man made friends and lived with these exceptional

creatures, and even fell in love with his host's daughter.

Despite being a science fiction novel, many esoterists believed in the existence of an underground region inhabited by highly spiritual creatures, claiming that Bulwer-Lytton drew his inspiration from reality to create a fiction. René Guénon was one of them, but he was not the first to write about this subterranean region, believing in its existence. Before him, the French esoterist, Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre (1842-1909), wrote a book in 1886, based on his experiences in contact with oriental adepts, called *Mission de L'Inde en Europe* (Mission of India in Europe), whose publication only took place in 1910, by another French esoterist, Gérard Encausse, better known by the pseudonym Papus. In this book, Saint-Yves d'Alveydre revealed the existence of a mysterious initiatic centre called Agartha, located in the subterranean regions of the Earth. The book is full of orthographically incorrect Sanskrit transliterations. A few decades later, the Russian explorer and writer Ferdinand Ossendowsky (1876-1945), an author who has written extensively about his many travels, published in 1922, in his book *Beasts, Men and Gods*, also full of incorrect Sanskrit transliterations, the accounts of the King of the World and the Underground Kingdom (part V, p. 299s), which he heard from Buddhist monks during his visit to Mongolia. Ossendowsky's accounts either agree or diverge

from those of Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, as they are derived from different sources. Soon afterward, René Guénon took these two works and commented on them in his delirious book *Le Roi du Monde* (the King of the World), and through a fanciful comparison with countless traditions, sought to justify the existence of the King of the World who resides in Agarttha, that is, "the subterranean world that spreads its ramifications everywhere, under the continents and even under the oceans, through which invisible communications are established among all regions of the Earth" (Guénon, 1958: 08). But this was not always so and it will not be forever, for, according to Guénon, "Agarttha has not always been underground and will not remain forever, a time will come when, according to the words reported by Ossendowsky, 'the peoples of Agarttha will leap from their caves and will appear on the surface of the Earth'" (Guénon, 1958: 67). I confess that when I read this book for the first time in the 1980s, I had a hard time holding back laughter in some parts, now imagine how much more comic a speleologist<sup>27</sup> or a geologist will find while reading.

Guénon mentioned, in the first chapter of *Le Roi du Monde* (The King of the World), the book *Mission de L'Inde en Europe* (Mission of India in

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<sup>27</sup> Specialist in the study of Speleology, the science that studies caves, from the Greek σπήλαιον - spelaion and from the Latin spēlæum, cave (Sullivan, 1997 and Faulkner, 2008).

Europe), by Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre (Guénon, 1958: 08), later specified that Saint-Yves had obtained the information about Agartha "from a Hindu source" (idem: 10). Well, the population of India is 90% Hindu, Hinduism is not a proselytizing religion, but a hereditary religion. To be a Hindu, you have to be the son or daughter of a Hindu couple who belongs to one of the castes of Hinduism, therefore, Hinduism is not a missionary religion, it does not make converts, so it has no mission to fulfil in Europe. Therefore, a *Mission de L'Inde en Europe* (Mission of India in Europe) does not proceed, because orthodox Hindus are not missionaries. Now, the innovation is in the New Religious Movements inspired by Hinduism, they do accept converts: Hare Krshna Movement, Rāmakrshna Mission, Swami Shivānanda's Divine Life Society, Sadhguru's festive Isha Yoga Centre, as well as the groups of followers of Ramana Mahārshi, of Swami Yogananda, of Satya Sai Baba, of Sri Aurobindo, etc. These New Religions do not follow the caste system required in the strict Hindu Dharmashastras, so anyone is able to practice them.

As for the "underground world that spreads its ramifications everywhere, under the continents and even under the oceans, through which invisible communications are established between all regions of the Earth", quoted by Guénon, we know today that, despite the advances in Speleology in recent decades, we are still far from

confirming this possibility, since the longest cave system in the world is the Mammoth Cave system, in the state of Kentucky, USA. The extent of the caves and passages mapped so far is approximately 500 km. There are over 200 caves in the cave system, with around 250 entrances to the caves. But this is not all, as exploration is still ongoing and speleologists claim that there are still many areas to be explored and mapped (Faulkner, 2008: 10). What is intriguing about an underground "King of the World" is the exceptionality in relation to other reports of paradisiacal regions in other myths around the world. While the gods' preference was always for the surface or for the heights (Himalayans, Shambala, Mount Olympus, Mount Kailasa and Mount Meru), the King of the World, quite the contrary, preferred to reside underground.

### **The King of the World**

In the very first paragraph of the second chapter, based on his hasty comparative theory and always inserting his own interpretation, Guénon emphatically identified the King of the World with the mythical progenitor and lawgiver Manu (मनु), that of the Hindu flood myth, as follows. In this way: "the title of 'King of the World' taken in the highest and most complete, and at the same time in the most rigorous sense, is properly applied to Manu, the primordial and universal

Lawgiver. (...) Manu never designates a historical or more or less legendary character, but rather a principle, the Cosmic Intelligence, which reflects the pure Spiritual Light and formulates the Law (Dharma) that regulates the conditions of our world and of our cycle of existence" (p. 13). Well, there is no mention in any of the Hindu texts that Manu Vaivaswata (मनु वैवस्वत) <sup>28</sup> (also known as Manu Satyavrata) resided in an underground kingdom, quite the contrary, by the Puranic accounts, he lived very content with his feet on the surface of the Earth, for he was a king. Guénon believed that Manu was the "Primordial and Universal Lawgiver", he was, according to Hindu tradition, the revealer of Manusmrti (Code of Manu). Unlike what Guénon thought, he was indeed a mythological character and his legislation is not universal, as only the Hindus followed the rules prescribed in this book which, for the sensate contemporary culture, is a monstrous monument of discrimination, prejudice, submission, of inequality, xenophobia, misogyny, servitude, protectionism, privileges for the upper castes, deprivation of liberties and endogamy. Almost everything in the Manusmrti runs counter to the current and universally accepted *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the 1979

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<sup>28</sup> Seven Manus (progenitors of the human race) have already arisen, one for each epoch (Kalpa). Manu Vaivaswata is the Manu of the present age, the seventh, seven more to come, according to Hindu mythology.

*Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, signed by almost all UN member states. Guénon also defended the caste system (Guénon, 1945: 216-24 and 2002: 62-7). Furthermore, Guénon identified the King of the World and the Manu with a principle, the “Cosmic Intelligence” (p. 13). Therefore, the latter can only be something incorporeal, so what is the feasibility of a “Cosmic Intelligence” residing in a confined underground region of the Earth?

Also, taken by a comparatist compulsion, in addition to the comparison with Manu, in the first chapters of *The King of the World* (Le Roi du Monde), he compared the King of the World with other characters of religious myths, or with historical characters who had their lives and their mythologized sayings, however, about these many religious characters he compared, we do not find references, either in mythology or much less in history, that any of them resided in an underground region, such as the King of the World.

Then, through his compulsive practice of comparing through appearances between ideas and between symbols, because everything that appeared he associated, without in-depth and solid truly historical documentation to support, since his theories are almost always not documented through sources certainly historical, for he preferred mythological and religious sources, he unleashes a number of comparisons, in order to justify the association between king and priest,

peculiar to the King of the World. Among so many hasty comparisons, he mentioned the biblical Wise Men (Roi-Mages – p.17). However, strictly speaking, these characters are mentioned only in the Gospel of Matthew 2.01, through the Greek word μάγοι (magoi, plural of μάγος - magi; Latin: magi, plural of magus), and the word “King” is not included. Their number is not mentioned, nor their names, as tradition informs. Therefore, the attribute of “King” to the Magi of the East is a later addition by translators and by interpreters, so that there is no mention, in this single quotation in this gospel, that these Magi were kings.

According to a note from Guénon, the King of the World made an appearance at the monastery of Narabanchi,<sup>29</sup> in 1890 (Guénon, 1958: 67n), on which occasion he made the prophecy that “the peoples of Aggarti will come out of their caves to the face of the Earth” (Ibid: 67). And it continues: “before its concealment to the visible world, Agarttha had another name, since this name of Agarttha, which means “unattainable”, or “inaccessible” (and “inviolable”, because it is the abode of peace, Salem) was not then appropriate for him. Ossendowski explains that Agarttha descended underground more than six thousand years ago, which corresponds very roughly to the beginning of the Kali Yuga, or the “dark age”, the

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<sup>29</sup> A Buddhist monastery in Mongolia visited by Ferdinand Ossendowski.

“iron age” of the ancient Westerners...” (Idem: 67). Well, if these facts are true and this prophecy comes true, it will be interesting to watch these creatures, resident for millennia under the earth, adapt to life on the surface with the presence of sun, rain, light, lightning, wind, snow, vegetation, abundant oxygen, etc. If we believe in the myth of the ages (yugas) of the Hindus, the date for the submersion of Agarttha which coincides with the beginning of the Kali Yuga is unfounded, since the Hindu traditions, recorded in the Purānas, are not unanimous as to the date of the beginning of the Kali Yuga, as well as its duration.

On the other hand, if we understand this fanciful prediction from a scientific point of view, according to speleologists and biologists, creatures that are able to survive in dark caves (example: the bat, the white snake, the blind cave fish and other insects) do not develop eyesight, due to unnecessary, due to darkness (see: Sullivan, 1997: 79-132 and Faulkner, 2008: 30-3). So, if the emergence of the peoples of Agarttha happens, we will find that its inhabitants have no eyesight, so they will have to walk the surface of the Earth with a cane and a guide dog, as well as with a lot of protection from light and heat of the sun. Of course, they will have to use sunscreen, a hat, an umbrella and always look for the shade, probably even the King of the World, which could be a comic scene, rather than a glorious emergence.

Further on, he reported that the ancient name of Agarttha, before its occultation, was Paradesha, a Sanskrit term that he translated as “supreme country”, which applies to the spiritual centre par excellence. Invariably, through another bout of comparatist compulsion, for to him everything that only appeared could be compared, he compared the evolution of the word Paradesha, claiming that from this word came the word Pardes of the Chaldeans and the word Paradise of the Westerners (p. 72-3). However, it is necessary to clarify that the Sanskrit antipositive Para (पर) does not always mean “supreme”. The compound word Paradesha (परदेश) is formed from the words पर (para), which means “beyond”, “after”, “further”, “foreign”, “hostile” and “supreme”; and देश (desha) “region”, “country” and “land”, so the most common meaning of Paradesha is “foreign region”, “hostile country” and “foreign land”, hence not always the word “para” means “supreme”, so it is not used in Sanskrit literature in the sense of “supreme country”, only in Guénon's interpretation. Then the compound noun परदेशसेविन् (paradeshasevin) meaning “foreigner” or “traveller”. Therefore, the derivation of the word “Paradise” from the word “Paradesha” is questionable.

Through yet another bout of comparatist compulsion, this time through an even more improbable comparison, he came to compare the dormant energy of kundalinī, located in the lowest

part of the spine in the human body, according to yoga books, with the “supreme spiritual centre in the underworld” (Guénon, 1958: 66). Strictly speaking, his sources of comparisons are always mythological, legendary, symbolic or speculative, and never securely documented and proven historical sources, since he repudiated “historicism”. So, his historicity support for myths and speculations, which he believed to be real facts or characters, during his fantastic comparisons, is always another myth, another mythological character or another speculation. Something like a myth supporting the historicity of another myth, or a speculation being supported by another speculation. So to speak, in a way, it is possible to recognize that Guénon's erudition is diversified and, at times, even in-depth, however, his historicity is unfounded, as it is based on myths, symbols and religious beliefs, in a way that that his work in general is an immense attempt to transform myths into facts, mythological characters into real characters and religious beliefs into science, what he called “Sacred Science”, in short: from fantasy into reality.

Strictly speaking, there is no “Sacred Science”, according to the rigor of Contemporary Science, because all that Science tries is to move away from sacredness, the latter makes research emotive, and what Science needs is to be cold and impartial. Sacredness is the overvaluation of something or an idea, which represents an

interference and contamination during the coldness of the scientific method. Scientific methodology does not match emotion. Therefore, the most appropriate denomination for what Guénon tried to communicate is "Sacred Knowledge" or, to be even more precise with his idea: "Sacred Belief", rather than "Sacred Science".

In the same way that he admitted that Western science is an "ignorant knowledge", a scientific reader, after reading Guénon's books, will readily accept that the set of his comparative ideas is something like a "delusional knowledge", whose imagination superimposes the sure. For, the suspicion never crossed his mind that metaphysical knowledge could be only speculative and hypothetical knowledge, conjectured in order to supply the lack of resources and the inexistence of investigative instruments of the old speculators. One of his claims for the superiority of metaphysical knowledge over scientific knowledge is that the former is grounded in "principles", which are the causes of all things and all phenomena in the universe, while the latter is grounded in the concreteness of materiality, therefore, the effect of these "principles"; without taking into account that, with the advancement of scientific research, what in the past was considered a "principle", with the subsequent discoveries and the development of knowledge, it was later confirmed that these

“principles” are, in fact, effects of causes deeper, which were not previously known.

Well, it is worth stopping here, since the remainder of the book *The King of the World* (Le Roi du Monde) is a continuation of the same ideas and the same delusional comparisons, such as those already mentioned and commented on, which does not change the degree of fictionality of the comparisons and arguments of René Guénon already mentioned, as there are so many delusions to be commented on, which would transform this study into an extensive text.

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## **BOOKS**

