RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY AND INITIATION

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Religion and Initiation according to Guenon

According to Guenon, Tradition (the entirety of sacred knowledge dating back to the primordial and inhuman divine source) has, in the final period of our cycle – the Kali Yuga, which has already been counting down for several millennia – been divided into two parts: exotericism and esotericism. Exotericism can manifest itself in the form of religion (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) or in a non-religious form (Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism, etc.) and represents the socio-psychological, ordering aspect of Tradition, i.e., the face of Tradition oriented exclusively outwards toward people and made available to all members of traditional society without exception. Esotericism, for its part, is the purely spiritual sphere. On this level, Tradition appeals to the “elite” and the “chosen” who have been called to go deep into sacred doctrines and myths. Esotericism is the underside of Tradition, while exotericism remains the outer side.

Religious society conventionally has two types of rituals intended for the induction of the neophyte into the bosom of the Sacred. The first is acceptance into an exoteric organization (“conversion”) and the second is initiation, this time into an esoteric organization. Initiation is the foundation of esotericism, and in certain cases it can be constructed not only as a ritual, but also a complex of associated esoteric and symbolic doctrines, or even as a manifestation of concrete spiritual influences exceeding the scope of the outer, exoteric tradition.

According to Guenon, the existence of precisely such a dual structure in traditional society is a necessary condition for any society to be considered normal and fully-fledged.

The uniqueness of Christianity

Such a schematic presentation, however, requires special explanation in regards to the Christian religion. Guenon believed that the Christian tradition, unlike Judaism and Islam, was originally incomplete, possessing only an esoteric and initiatic level. As evidence of this is cited the absence of a consideration in the New Testament of any legal or social dimension which constitutes the essence of any exotericism. Only in later eras did Christianity “descend” to the exoteric level in adopting the socio-religious basis of a revised code of Roman law. This original and essential esotericism of the Christian tradition should be borne in mind in order to understand further considerations.

The Shiite problem through the lens of Henry Corbin

The image of Tradition divided into internal and external spheres is particularly inapplicable in the special case of Shiism in the Islamic tradition. The most authoritative Western scholar of Islam, Henry Corbin, pointed out this very interesting feature of Iranian Islam, which is by and large Shiite. On the one hand, Shiite Islam is replete with numerous explicit references to esotericism and the foundation of Shiite doctrine particularly rests on the recognition of the central place of the “light of the Imamate” and the sacred mission of Ali, the first of the imams whose figure corresponds to the deeply esoteric level of the Muslim religion. On the other hand, “Sufi” initiatic organizations are least widespread of all in Shiism. Corbin asserts that Shiite Sufism is a rare encounter and, thus, Shiite Islam does not comply with the norm of the strict division of tradition into external and internal planes as is the case in Sunni Islam. Guenon himself, however, recognized that Iranian Islam was a special phenomenon and he associated its absence of bans on the depiction of humans or animals in sacred art (such bans are strictly observed in Sunni Islam) with the specific Aryan origin of the Iranians who, in comparison to Semites, are much less inclined toward idolatry.

In Shiism, and particularly in Iranian Shiism, we are thus dealing with an esoteric tradition more open and less formalized or institutionalized than at-Tasawwuf and Sufism. In the case of extreme Shiism (“Islamism”) this is totally evident given the virtual absence of any exotericism at all.

It should also be noted that the Iranians occupy the more “eastern” geographical and intellectual regions of the Islamic Umma, or in more general terms the Caliphate (let us recall the “Oriental Theosophy” of Suhrawardi).

Orthodoxy and the East

Taking the above-mentioned into account, an analogy can be suggested between Catholicism and Sunnism on the one hand and Orthodoxy and Shiism on the other. Firstly, unlike in Catholicism, it is practically impossible to record any special esoteric organizations in the history of the Eastern Church, whether hermetic orders, companionships, or gnostic brotherhoods. Despite their absence, however, the esoteric underpinnings of Orthodoxy can be clearly traced and are evident in the sacred architecture of churches, initiatic iconography, and a widespread apophatic theology (which was practically erased by exoteric Catholicism with the introduction of the dogma of the Filioque)[1], as well as in the monastic contemplative practices in Hesychasm, the Old Believers, and the traditions of the Holy Fools, etc.

Secondly, Orthodoxy never evolved into a purely social religion, but remained above this level. The Orthodox Patriarch, unlike the Pope, is first and foremost the spiritual center of the Church, and who does not directly influence public and political life. The social role of the Roman Pope was indeed the subject of severe criticism of Catholicism expressed by the Orthodox. It can be said that this “descent” of Christianity into society which existed in the West never happened in the East. In some sense, the “Ghibelline archetype” was realized in Russia with the Sacred Emperor as the center of the state and the Patriarch fulfilling strictly sacred functions [2].

Thirdly, this “Ghibelline archetype” mentioned above was embodied in the sacred attitude towards the Russian Tsars. It was the Tsar who was the sacred center of the Russian imperial ecumene in whose figure were concentrated all of the immanent religious energies of the [empire’s] peoples. Unlike Catholic eschatology, in which the “anti-Pope” and the usurpation of the throne of St. Peter are discussed in an apocalyptic sense, Orthodox prophecies never mentioned an “anti-Patriarch.” Instead, all negative, counter-sacred forces are gathered in the singular personage of the “anti-Tsar,” the “Antichrist-Emperor.” In principle, this “Ghibelline” aspect is typologically close to the Shiite understanding of the sacred nature of Authority, as Shiite doctrine (unlike Sunni) insists on the rule of only the Aliites, the sacred descendants of the first of the Imams. The Shiites believe that no-one outside of this line has any “sacred” or “initiatic” right to rule.

Fourthly, the eastern geographical location of Russian Orthodoxy logically puts it in close proximity to the lines of the eastern fathers, i.e., the saintly fathers from Greece, Anatolia, Syria, Lebanon, Cappadocia, etc.

Fifthly, the tradition of “Hesychasm”, or “light gnosis” from the first anchorites and the Athos monastery was not the product of some kind of formal organization within the framework of Russian Orthodoxy. Hesychasm literally permeates the Orthodox tradition all the way to the point of its extern aspects. Of course, the division between internal and external aspects remained, but there have never existed any structural differences between the Hesychasts and Old Believers on the one hand, and the clergy and believers on the other. This differs from the strict organization of initiatic orders in Catholicism, where this border is clearly marked.

Sixthly and finally, the esoteric specificity of Orthodoxy has been preserved in Church ritual itself and particularly in the presence of iconostasis [3] which separates the altar of the Sacrament from the laity. Catholic ritual involves the openness of the altar, its accessibility to viewing by all the laity at any time during service and outside of it. Thus, the sacrament of the altar is genuinely exoteric and “descends” to the outer level. In Orthodoxy, however, the gates of Iconostasis – the Royal Gates – are open only for a short period during the key moments of the liturgy (the exception being on certain holidays). This symbolizes the unique revelation of the apophatic, unknowable Principle on the other side of the cataphatic vision of the sacred world which in a normal state is presented only by symbols – the images of iconostasis, the Deeisis near, etc., as if they replace the altar. This unique feature of Orthodox ritual is connected to the historical absence of a developed “scholastic” and rational theological tradition in Russia, as theology itself in the Orthodox Church relates to the initiatic and super-rational level, whereas the openness of the altar in the Catholic Church relates the sacrament to the sphere of the rational and dogmatic. When the Catholic believer is in search of initiation, he must to appeal to special non-church authorities (esoteric communities, brotherhoods, associations, etc.), but the Orthodox can attain such as desired in the liturgy itself and enter into the most profound transcendent dimension without the aid of other sacred institutions.

Thus, it should be grasped that the Orthodox Church, similarly to the Shiite trend in Islam, is not subject to the strict division into exoteric and esoteric levels, this being true at least on the level of its archetypal organization of the sacred system. However, this does not mean that all of Orthodoxy is esoteric or that all the Orthodox are esotericists. Without a doubt, the division of “internal” and “external” planes is maintained in Orthodoxy as it is everywhere else depending on the personal qualities and “spiritual caste” of this or that human being. However, in our case, this division is not formalized, and the degree of initiatic quality depends exclusively on the internal nature of the believer and his efforts to realize his given spiritual possibilities.

Of course, the degree of spiritual realization strictly corresponding to the general structure of the initiatic sphere is preserved in Orthodoxy, but its character is more flexibly and less structured than it is in closed esoteric organizations.

The question of “virtual initiation”

Speaking of initiation, Guenon distinguished between “virtual initiation” and “effective” or “realized” initiation. From his point of view, the Christian religion, since becoming “exoteric,” cannot offer any sort of “initiation.” In Catholic ritual and in the Catholic scarament, purely spiritual energies of the same nature as in initiatic rituals are also in action, but they are not oriented towards perfect interiorization and, consequently, affect only the outer side of the individual structure of believers. “Salvation” is guaranteed, but the path to higher, super-individual levels of existence is not opened as happens in purely esoteric mysteries.

However, an initiation received by means of esotericism might remain a forever “virtual,” untapped possibility if there is a lack of knowledge of the secrets of the “initiatic work,” the “Great Work,” or if the “dedicated” prefers to use the “wealth” attained for goals opposite to the great goal of spiritual exaltation and the realization of purely heavenly, spiritual states.

Orthodox Initiation

Building on the particularities of the Orthodox Tradition and basing ourself on the typological parallel with the Shiite tradition, an extremely important conclusion can be drawn: Orthodoxy is an operative instrument for transferring “virtual initiation.” Thus, Orthodox ritual itself, unlike Catholic ritual, preserves an initiatic character peculiar to original Christianity.

On the symbolic level, the Church of St. Andrew the First-Called – the Orthodox Church – never fully separated itself from the esoteric Church of St. John, as happened in the case of the Church of St. Peter.

In addition, the Medieval legend of “the Kingdom of Prester John” located somewhere in the East, can be symbolically related not only to the main sacred center of the Primordial Tradition, but also by analogy to Russia itself where, in fact, “John” (Ivan, Ioan) has always been the most widespread name.

This particularity and uniqueness of Russian Orthodoxy has its doctrinal reflection in the Orthodox “Formula of Faith,” in which the rejection of the Catholic innovation of the “Filioque” – i.e., the assertion that the Holy Spirit comes not only from the Father, the First Entity of the Trinity, but also from the Son, the Second Entity – bears the character of a rejection of “mediating” entities between the sacred, spiritual Cosmos (the “Holy Spirit”) and the Genesis. In other words, it rejects exotericism as a mediating force between the believer and initiation. The omnipresence of the Holy Spirit and its direct link to the Father, along with the apophatic hypostasis of the Trinity, means a direct totality of the “Spiritual Light” accessible to the Orthodox which permeates Being in every sense and opens the initiatic “dispensation” in Orthodox life. This Orthodox principle of “divine dispensation” [literally “house-building” in Russian – J.A.], which is central to the entire Eastern Church and its practices, precisely corresponds to the “church-dispensation” [literally “church-building” in Russian – J.A.] line of Western Christian initiation pronounced in the sphere of special non-church organizations of the initiatic type later concentrated in “Christian Masonry” and “campanionships” [4].

Such an initiatic phenomenon in Orthodoxy and especially the absence of the Filioque explain the fact that, unlike Catholic esotericism, in Orthodoxy there are no traces to be found of “hermeticism” as a separate and independent discipline. As a sacred cosmology, “hermeticism” actually focuses on the consecration of the Sacred Cosmos – the realm of the Holy Spirit – as the direct product of the Father, i.e., in the forthright “God-likeness” of the Cosmos, the “theophany” of the Cosmos free from the passage of the “censorship of Logos.” If in full-fledged theology the Logos-Son is naturally shifted onto the supra-individual level that is transcendental in relation to the human mind, then in terms of the degeneration of theological consciousness this hypostasis of the Holy Trinity is in danger of being identified with the human mind which is price sly what happened in Catholic teleology beginning with the exclusion of the apophatic approach. This reaches its conclusion with “rationalism” and “humanism” of a semi-profane character.

Orthodox doctrine, by virtue of its natural, “informal Hermeticism” did not undergo a similar transformation and has preserved its initiatic, super-individual and super-rational nature.

Here it should be noted that there is a second, equally troubling aspect of the arrangement under examination. Being common to the entire people without a strict division into “elite” and “common” forms of spirituality, the Russian Orthodox Church is also posed with the risk of offering mere “virtual initiation,” albeit of a different type than that in the Catholic tradition. In the majority of cases, the “virtual initiation” afforded by Orthodoxy to all Christians can fail to be taken to its logical conclusion in the form of a positive and final goal which, on the one hand, is totally understandable taking into account the necessary difference between the inner nature of people and the overall exclusivity of a fully-fledged initiatic path (there many “called”, but very few “chosen”). On the other hand however, this orientation towards the “super-personal” or “beyond-personal” aspects of apophatic Orthodox theology serves almost exclusively the discursive and rational forms of initiatic doctrines, sometimes extremely important at the preparatory stage. Thus, the realization of “virtual initiation” gradually becomes more and more problematic.

Of course, the chosen, the saints, the elders, and the monks, or any simply exceptional personalities can indeed reach the end of this path, but the majority are compelled to limit themselves to mere “virtual initiation.” Such a stipulation especially explains the phenomenon of the widespread tradition of “Holy fools” in Rus, i.e., those people who have acquired the opportunity of spiritual contemplation, but are incapable of harmoniously combining it with the normal functioning of the individual, rational level of their personality. On the other hand, “Holy foolishness”, as a phenomenon of Russian spirituality, is a particularly telling aspect of Russian Orthodoxy which once again confirms the Eastern Church’s initiatic nature (after all, without any special “initiation,” no holy fools would have existed). The difficulty associated with the complete realization of “virtual initiation”, however, is thus quite clear.

The dark mystery of Cosmism

When Rene Guenon spoke of the “counter-initiatic” organizations of the West, he of course did not put quotation marks around the issue, as the very nature of this topic demands certain precautions. After all, if one summates all of what Guenon said on this question (including in the form of innuendos and assumptions), the following picture unfolds: in the past centuries, “counter-initiation” has manifested itself all the more clearly in the degraded initiatic organization of the “hermetic type” in the West. This can refer to the “offshoots of Masonry” as well as neo-Rosicrucianist or neo-alchemic organizations. These groups, which inherited the secrets and rituals of “virtual initiation”, gave rise to a whole range of pseudo-initiatic occult and theosophist societies in the 19th century which later formed the basis of what has acceptably been called “neo-spiritualism” (Guenon ranked magnetism, spiritism, the theosophism of Madame Blavatsky and Bezan, the occultism of Papus, the anthroposophy of Steiner, and all the extensions and variations of such neo-mysticist and pseudo-esoteric trends as “neo-spiritualisms.” Today the majority of such neo-spiritualist organizations are united under the sign of the syncretic “New Age” movement). Neo-spiritualism itself is not directly “counter-initiatic”, but is an instrument aimed at the destruction of the remnants of the true Tradition in the West under the guise of a “return to spirituality” which in turn leads the profane into the abyss of dissolution in psychic chaos. In turn, “counter-initiation” belongs to a much deeper level of reality, being associated with what has been called the “Devil’s Mission.”

Rene Guenon considered the “Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor”[5] to be one of the most dangerous counter-initiatic organizations. The line is drawn from this to all the more massive neo-spiritualist tendencies, including even those sometimes opposed to its teachings, such as Theosophism, occultism, perverted neo-Hinduism (“Auroville,” Sri Aurobindo Ghosh) and others. It is extremely telling that the doctrine of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor was called “the Cosmic Philosophy,” “the Cosmic Doctrine”, or sometimes “Cosmism.” The essence of the “Cosmism” of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor consists of contact with the “cosmos” or “cosmic consciousness” which means the attainment of the “light nature” of the Cosmos (the “light” theme is embodied in the very name of the order, Luxor, the Egyptian city whose name is similar to the Latin word Lux or “light” and the name Lucifer, or “light-bringer”). The “Cosmic Doctrine” concentrates all attention on the “psychic” or “subtle” plane, practically identifying the “spritual” and the “super-psychic” with that of the “soul” or “mental” element [6]. This is not a special form of philosophically abstract “pantheism”, but a “magical,” “concrete”, “operative” and “aggressive” one. Besides actually ignoring the transcendental aspects of the Spirit, the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor’s Comism also threatened transferring many “initiatic” sacred and spiritual symbols and rituals to the “mental” and material level which entails a “parodying” of true initiation and its grotesque and dangerous imitation. The members of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, possessing indisputable paranormal capabilities, were not only the first to formulate the foundations of “neo-spiritualist” theories, but also through provoking mysterious phenomena achieved their speedy introduction in to the most diverse cultural and scholarly environments. Historically, the roots of this secret society date back to several German Masonic lodges of the 18th century in which the members of the highest degree practiced “operative magic.” Roots can also be traced back to the unconventional Masonry of the Egyptian Rite (the Memphis-Mizraim) and the “sexual magic” groups of Randolph which displayed considerable “Satanic characteristics.” In fact, the Cosmism of the counter-initiatic Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor was later inherited by openly Satanic centers such as the Order of the Templars of the Orient (O.T.O.) of Kellner and Aleister Crowley, which called itself the “Beast of 666.”

If we turn to Russia in the second half the 19th century, we discover a quite striking phenomenon which was called “Russian Cosmism” whose most famous representative was Nikolay Fedorovich Fedorov, the author of the famous work The Philosophy of the Common Cause. In Fedorov’s biography there is no mention of any contact with “counter-initiatic” organizations, but his works remain a compendium of counter-initiatic doctrines that almost exactly match those of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor. Fedorov even maintained the theory of “artificially resurrecting the dead” which Tradition considers to be an outspoken sign of the “Kingdom of the Antichrist.” In addition, Fedorov’s ideas to a certain extent formed the paradigm for the transfer of spiritual, symbolic, and religious doctrines to the psychic-materialist level. Among these we find the theories of “the management of atmospheric phenomena,” the “conversion of churches into museums,” and, finally, the “project for establishing a universal and indivisible human brotherhood to include all the ‘resurrected love of the ancestors’ and become the crown of history.” Fedorov’s moral utopianism and pantheistic messianism inspired a number of Russian philosophers, scholars, writers, and theoreticians and, what’s more, his “Cosmism” was extremely popular in “Bolshevik” circles, who identified the “brotherhood of the risen and resurrected” (sic!) with communism. In some sense, the ideas of Fedorov reflected the exalted revolutionary messianism of the era.

However, Fedorovist Cosmism in fact possesses a purely Orthodox Christian form which was not the only (although perhaps the most striking) manifestation of counter-initiatic Cosmism in Russia. In a broader sense, Russian Cosmism can be called a clearly formulated tendency of Orthodox “virtual initiation” which (if we recall its universal nature ensured by the mere fact of confessional belonging) was realized not by means of positive ascent from the mental world to the purely spiritual, heavenly, super-individual one, but by means of “fusing” with the intermediately psychic world, that is, the “thin Cosmos.” In this Cosmisist specificity, “natural” Russian “counter-initiation” negatively affected the issue of the Filioque just as how if the path from the spiritual universe, from the Cosmos of the Holy Spirit to the apophatic Principle of the Father itself is not completed, then no mere “rational” or “formalized” structures can hold back individual beings from “fusing” with the subtle plane and immersing in the Chaos and excitement of what Tradition calls the “Lower Waters.” Russian Cosmism is thus the ultimate form of degradation of the “Orthodox Holy Fooldom”, a demonic form of this foolishness in which the “Holy Fools of Christ” become the “Holy Fools of the Antichrist.” It is this character of Cosmism which sharply distinguishes practically all of Russian philosophy, science, and culture from European profanity just as how “Cosmisist” consciousness is drawn specifically to the non-rational, paradoxical, and powerful node of “subtle” energy which breaks through the structure of logical constructions.

If in Russia in the 20th century the most heinous persecution of the Church was indeed carried out under the communist regime, then we should see in this the “natural counter-initiation” of the Orthodox nation deprived of its vertical, holy perspective which, for lack of rational, “logos-related” boundaries, lapsed into the extreme forms of demonic, aggressive, and anarchic Cosmisist “foolishness”, and above all the “foolishness of the Antichrist.”

Conclusion

The features of the Russian Church and its specificity which we have broken down might help understand the bizarre and strange world of the Russian conscience which is similar neither to Western nor to Eastern forms. In his book East and West, Guenon identified the Russians as a “people which imitates” the archetypes inherent to the “truly Eastern” peoples. In another place, he noted how “occultist” and “spiritualist” practices are widespread in Russia, something which he saw as evidence of Russians’ special propensity for “psychism.” Finally, he puts forth the quite mysterious statement that “Russian communism” is most likely something other than what it is commonly considered. Despite their criticality, these assessments indeed very fairly describe the Orthodox people, whose true spiritual elite, albeit too small and too weak, pushed “virtual initiation” to the point of universality, while at the lowest levels it is as if the masses imitated the possession of the true spiritual mystery of the East.

Perhaps the Russian idea of sobornost and “universality” (such as that of the Slavophiles) and later the communists and socialists’ idea of “universal equality” were in fact the expressions of a vague consciousness of the “general dedication” of the nation, its “universal brotherhood” (indeed members of esoteric organizations call each other “brothers” as do “lodges,” “orders”, and monastic communities). It also cannot be excluded that the Bolshevik Revolution was an explosion of part of this justified conviction of “universal dedication” seeking to cancel the “exoteric” hierarchy, the “master system,” as something unnecessary and vicious imposed by the “alien West,” the “Grand Inquisitor” of Dostoevsky, and as a social Filioque which leaving a barrier between the people and the “light Cosmos of the Holy Spirit.” But properly speaking, these same tendencies, only on a closed, conspiratorial level, also enlivened the majority of “counter-initiatic” organizations which were not only anti-Catholic but also foreign to the “socialist” and “communist” pathos. For example, Theodor Reuss, who initiated Aleister Crowley, the Beast of 666, into esotericism, was a known anarchist and socialist. However, in no other country or region of the Earth have such counter-initiatic, thoroughly Cosmisist, and mystical-communist trends manifested themselves to such an extent as in Russia, which for more than 70 years became the epitome of the “Red Woman” of the Apocalypse, the Whore of Babylon.

But even long before this period, in the dark political mysticism and plotting of the Time of Troubles (coupled with the succession of the Impostors), in the grandiose stagings of the Apocalypse by the sinister Emperor Peter I [7], in the grotesque parody of the Russian Enlightenment of the time of Catherine and, finally, in the disturbing and psychedelic literature (Gogol, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Sologub) and philosophy (Khomyakov, Solovyov, Rozanov, etc.) of Russia, the sprouts of “the red Cosmos sowed by the virtual initiation of Russian Orthodoxy” matured and produced flowers that pointed not upwards towards the sun of Russian Holiness, the spiritual sun of Sergey Radonezhsky, Nil Sorsky, and Seraphim Sarovsky, but downwards.

The current state of Russia cannot be defined in purely economic or political terms. The seeds of “virtual initiation” (it should not be forgotten that even under the communist dictatorship the majority of Russian baptized their children!) are too significant and active to expect any kind of transformation of Russia into a purely secular, capitalist, or profane state of the “Western” model. The roots of the “Russian phenomenon” are too deep and tragic to count on such an outcome. The Russian soul and, more precisely, the complexity of those “Russians virtually initiated” who form the mystical body of the “Inner Church” cannot abandon their “initiatic” and crucial function. Either there will be a catastrophe even more frightening and deep than under communism or, contrary to all external circumstances, a “spiritual elite” will appear which will halt the rapid decline into the abyss, “instantly” casting the “Nation of the Red Beast” into the Spiritual Heavens of the Holy Trinity much like Christ himself, freeing Old Adam from the snares of hell. If the possibility of salvation still exists for our “counter-initiatic” civilization, then does “initiatic” Orthodox Russia not remain the best place for ascension?

Footnotes:

[1] See Ver la Tradition; Nicolas Vardikhas Est et Oest N. 43, 1991. The Filioque is the dogma concerning the Holy Spirit’s coming not only from the Father, but also the Son (Filio) which was introduced at the instance of Charlemagne.

[2] Guenon considered such a relationship between “spiritual authority” and “temporal/secular authority” to be the only normal form, since it strictly adheres to the hierarchical structure of reality as a whole. It is important to note that “temporal power”, or the “authority of emperors and kings” is not considered to be something profane in Tradition. On the contrary, imperial sacrality is practically identified with the exoteric side of Tradition. Hence why Guenon, in his Christianity and Initiation, quotes Christ saying “Render unto Caesar.” This can be seen as a recognition and “sanctification” of imperial sacrality. The desire of representatives of “spiritual sovereignty”, i.e. the Church, to interfere in administrative and political issues (which is characteristic of Catholicism” is a sign of the degeneration of the spiritual nature of this form of government, and an attempt to restore the dignity of the imperial function which thus appears not as a phenomenon of usurpation by the kshatriyas (warriors; the second caste) of the first caste (“priests”), but rather the legitimate defense of certain sacred rights. This observation helps to explain why Guenon himself, being a radical opponent of the “revolution of the Kshatriya” and an unequivocal support of the superiority of the “Brahmins” (the first caste) over the Kshatriyas (as opposed to Julius Evola), so sympathetically treated the Ghibelline tradition and in particular the great Ghibelline poet Dante Alighieri.

[3] It is important to note that the appearance of Iconostasis in the Ancient church chronologically coincides with the transition from esotericism to exotericism. If parallel to the actual “exotericization” of the Western Church the altar, as the “super-heavenly” (iperuranios) element of the Church became visually and spatially open, then the preservation of the altar in the Eastern Church meant its “refrain” from complete “exotericization” by keeping the esoteric element in the center of the church itself, not outside of it as in the case of Catholicism. Indeed, the “super-heavenly,” “hyper-Uranian” relevant cannot be exhibited for public meditation without changing the very quality of spiritual influences “theurgically” associated with this space.

But if the alter is kept a mystery behind the forbidden (for the exoteric) wall of iconostasis which both “unveils” the essence of the sacrament of the alter through the holy presence of icons of the Diesis type as well as “hides”such from unqualified view, thus allowing for a delicate balance to be maintained between esotericism and exotericism even without strict formalization. This in fact is the meaning etymologically contained in the term “revelare” which means both “to hide” and “to open.” A similar idea is inherent in the Latin word “coelus” or “sky”, which comes from the root meaning of”cover” or “cover over” thus connotating both “hide” and “open.”

It is also important to note the symbolism of the division of the Orthodox church into three parts: the altar, or “super-heavenly component,” the church itself, or the “heavenly component,” and the vestibule, or “terrestrial component.” Simeon of Thessolonica compared these three parts to the Holy Trinity, the three triads of Angelic orders, and the three categories of the Orthodox people – the presets, the “totally faithful” and the “leaning and converts.” Passing through these three stages of the Orthodox hierarchy typologically (or virtually) corresponds to the three phases of initiation: the “work of black,” “work of white,” and “work of red.” Upon the transferring of initiatic rituals to the masses of people, Orthodoxy undergoes particular in regards to the preparatory, first phase, “conversion” and “repentance”, as the baptized infant obviously cannot repent or become a convert, i.e. accept the theoretical aspects of the doctrine. The “work of black” is transferred to the post-baptism stage of a person’s spiritual realization, and the responsibility of “repentance and conversion” is taken over by godfathers and godmothers who act as a kind of “collateral” for the effective realization of the stage which is completed upon the infant’s baptism. In some cases, such a peculiarity yields an extremely negative result since the the spiritual absence of initiatic grain received at the time of the “second birth” ritual chronologically precedes the basic intellectual entry into the teachings of the Church. Consequently, such a presence does is bound to establish a special status for a person which, although raising him above the level of the profane, nevertheless makes it difficult to achieve consistent spiritual realization. Orthodoxy calls this prelest. The extremely widespread distribution of this phenomenon in Russia among parishioners demonstrates the seriousness of the cost which the Eastern Church has to bear in order to preserve its initiatic nature.

[4] Undoubtedly, in the last century Western Freemasonry has significantly changes its operative and initiatic character typical of earlier Masonry. In this case, we are dealing with the transformation of “virtual initiation” into “counter-initiation. Only in such terms is it possible to consider the activities of all of later Masonry to be anti-Christian, anti-Church, and anti-Tradition.

[5] As we have learned from a competent representative of one Western initiatic organization, Guenon was in the possession of the most accurate information concerning the Hermetic Brotherhood, since he himself apparently joined it in his youth!

[6] In Guenon’s opinion, this mixture is the main source of diabolical substitution which is unleashed by counter-initiatic forces. In his book The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times, Guenon explains in detail the “mechanism” of this phenomenon. The Devil belongs to the subtle, psychic world, the world of the soul. Purely spiritual regions, such as the realm of the Spirit, are closed to him. In the world of the soul, during special periods in cyclical history (such as at the end of a cycle), he may occupy a “central” position, but this “centrality” is imaginary and illusory. This illusion is obvious in reference to purely spiritual reality. Thus, the creation of the illusion of the “omnipotence of the devil” is possibly only under the condition of “concealing” the actual spirit level and placing the main emphasis on the medium, spiritual world in which the efficiency of the Devil is indeed overwhelming at times. As follows, mixing the spiritual with that of the soul is not only misleading, but a dangerous and malignant trend actively and consciously introduced into life by “Satan’s agents” or “Satan’s saints” (ali ash-Shaytan).

[7] See the colorful description of the “eschatological” amusements of Peter in Merezhkovsky’s The Antichrist. Peter and Alexey