Evola introduces “ The crisis of the modern world ” by Guénon ( 1937 )

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As we have seen a few days ago, in the thirties the initially conflicting relationship between Evola and Guénon completely changed nature, opening up to mutual esteem and collaboration. As a further demonstration of this turning point, we will propose four writings by Evola from today, from the 1930s to the earthly disappearance of Guénon ( 1951 ), in which the radical change of view of the baron towards the work and the figure of the metaphysicist of Blois appears crystalline.

Today we offer a very interesting document, namely the first version of the introduction to the famous Guénonian work “ Crisis in the modern world ”, which Evola wrote in July 1936, as confirmed by the affixing of the date at the bottom of the introduction itself, which served as a presentation of the first Italian translation of Guénon's writing, personally curated by Evola himself. The entire volume would also have been published in 1937, for the publisher Hoepli.

Of this introduction, which constitutes an unpublished that Evola regeneration presents exclusively for its readers, two points should be highlighted immediately:

1 ) Evola's radical change of view on Guènon, presented to readers as a very thick personality ( “The public today has had enough, it is true, to hear continually talk about « crisis » and « twilight of civilization. But it is precisely for this reason that in Italy ( ... ) it is time for Guénon to be known, since here we have a personality of very different stature, we have someone, which does not present us with more or less personal constructions and interpretations and « philosophical », but which addresses the topic in the name of a tradition, in the highest and most universal sense of the term” );

2 ) the combination of Guénon's “ integral traditionalism ” and the universal fascist idea as enucleated by Mussolini.

In fact, Evola had already presented Guénon to the Italian public, always with very hagiographic tones, the year before, with an article published in “ La Vita Italiana ” in February 1935, with an title that left very few doubts about Evola's intentions: “A master of modern times: René Guénon”. The estimate gained in those years, the correspondence between the two, and certainly, the great revision work carried out by Guénon on the drafts of “Uprising”, together with a greater understanding of the teacher's teaching, had evidently left their mark on Evola. That article was then re-proposed by the magazine “ Civilization ”, in the special issue in memory of Evola which was published in May-August 1975, with the title “News of Guénon”.

Evola regeneration, as perhaps the most loyal readers will remember, he published this article in two parts: we refer to them, to point out how Evola, with that article, had already presented Guénon to the Italian public with a very detailed writing, to which he actually referred to elaborate, in a necessarily more reduced and detailed form, the introduction to “ Crisis ”. In first part of that article of 1935, Evola presented Guénon's personality, method and doctrine, also focusing on the superpersonal character of metaphysical principles, and on the neo-spiritualist currents identified and exposed by him.

The first number historian of Evola's “ Philosophical Diorama ” on the columns of “ Farinacci's Fascist Regime ” 2 February 1934 (, in which René Guénon's first contribution immediately stood out ( “ spiritual knowledge and ‘ culture ’ profane ” )

In second part, Evola further developed the concepts set out, up to analyzing the practical consequences of the social, political and practical application of metaphysical principles, going to explain the concept of “ Universal ” in the Guénonian perspective ( and therefore metaphysical ), and the coexistence of it with the utmost differentiation and with the hierarchical idea. From here, through further steps, Evola concluded with an explicit reference to the new European movements ( fascisms ) which in the 1930s opposed the decline of the West, with the hope that on the one hand Guénon could study these movements closely and, on the other, that the elites of the fascist movement would form on Guénon's works.

All this, with a light-toned lock: “the premise of Guénon's « integral traditionalism » is that of the Mussolini ideal of conquering a « permanent and universal reality » as a condition for anyone who wants to act spiritually in the world as « dominant human will of will »”. This statement would have been taken up and developed in the introduction to “ Crisis ” that we present to you, to plead the thesis that the only ideal model suitable for giving concrete and historical implementation to Mussolini's fascist universalism, it would have been Guénon's “ integral traditionalism ”. In this way, the fascist push for the renewal of decadent Europe would have found a firm, formidable, unassailable spiritual basis, able to give it an invincible content, of metaphysical, suprarational matrix.

Hence the explicit and surprising invitation to the “ Black shirts ” of the Fascist Revolution to make Guénon's doctrine its own. Well, the latter's collaboration with the Philosophical diorama by Evola, on the columns of an official body such as “ Farinacci's Fascist Regime ”, was already in that period starting from an exact year ( February 1934 – February 1935 ), with the publication of 15 articles written by Guénon. And, particularly of extraordinary importance, the article by Blois' metaphysician published in January 1935, that is, a few weeks before Evola's article on “ Italian Life ”, it was entitled: “The problem of establishing elites”. A good connoisseur, a few words …

In those years, therefore, we found Guénon, who would always abhor the idea of approaching politics, who wrote for “ The Fascist Regime ”, and Evola who presented it to the Black Shirts of the Revolution as an essential doctrinaire reference point. At that time, therefore, something exceptional was happening: metaphysics and politics tried to meet again. An extraordinary project, out of time, which unfortunately, perhaps inevitably, would not have followed, but whose historical importance remains intact. A project that also reveals, once again, the groundlessness of the theses of “ incapacitating myth ” and the impolicity of Evolian thought: Evola, who had already tried to translate the doctrine of the Absolute Individual on a political level, now revised its concept of state by trying to give practical application to Guénon's “ metaphysical ideas ”, and tirelessly continuing the elaboration of the concept of state in the light of traditional doctrines, above all thanks to the fruitful collaboration with the magazine “ The state ” by Carlo Costamagna, from 1934 onwards.

It should be noted, in the introduction that we present, about the rectification of the conclusions reached by young Evola regarding ’ “ intellectualism ” and “objective metaphysics ” of Guénon, accused of “ rationalism ”, among the many statements of the baron, this ( which already echoed in the article of 1935 ): “Therefore wherever Guénon speaks of « intellectuality », of « contemplation », of « intellectual elite », of « pure knowledge », of « world of principles » or « intellectual intuition <1, the reader must be careful not to suppose a kind of rationalism or abstract universalism, as perhaps, in their modern common use, these terms could suggest”.

For those wishing, moreover, to note the differences between this 1936-37 version of the introduction to “ Crisis ” and the version at the top of the third edition of 1972 of Guénon's work ( in which, evidently, any reference to fascism had disappeared ), we refer to publication of the latter on our website, in January 2016. Happy reading.

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by Julius Evola

Rome, July 1936-XIV

Taken in the fullness of its meaning, the word « revolution » includes two ideas: first of all the idea of a revolt against a given state of affairs; then, the idea of a return or conversion – whereby in ancient astronomical language the revolution of a star meant precisely the return to its principle and its orderly motion around a motionless center.

Well, taking the term « revolution » in this overall sense, it can be said that, in today's world, few books are as fully « revolutionary » as René Guénon's work, which we present here.

ln no modern author is as violent, severed, unattainable as in Guénon, the revolt against our materialistic, scientific, democratic civilization, against a « western order », which indeed was only a badly organized disorder and bearing in itself the principle of the most tragic crises.

But, at the same time, in no modern author is the movement of return to those principles so radical, precise, self-conscious, austere, impersonal that, to be above time, they are not of today or of yesterday, but they present a perennial relevance and remain the immutable presuppositions for every greatness and for every normal form of civilization.

The public today has had enough, it is true, to hear continually talk about « crisis » and « twilight of civilization ». But it is precisely for this reason that in Italy, where the importation of the ideas of the various Keyserling, Spengler, Massis, Berdjajeff, Benda has already started, it is time for Guénon to be known, since here we have a personality of very different stature, we have someone, which does not present us with more or less personal constructions and interpretations and « philosophical », but which addresses the topic in the name of a tradition, in the highest and most universal sense of the term; who weighs every word of what he says, assumes full responsibility for it, setting, in this regard, points that are both impartial and definitive.

To meet Guénon's work, the best mood is precisely that of those who have enough of words and « theories », of those who feel its vanity before the need for decisions requiring realism in a higher sense and above all the courage of the unconditional. Guénon is not part of the series of modern authors « personal » in exhibitionist models and in brilliant fireworks to catch the European « respectable » audience: he is inaccessible to any compromise and to any concession, he says only what he has to say, his point of view is not that of « novelty » or ’ « originality », but that of pure, unattainable truth. In his world there is not even « to discuss »: there is only to declare for or against – of all the more extensive and understanding is its « orthodoxy » in front of the one that usually bears this name, of the same it is more rigid, exclusivist, inflexible. And that's what is needed for these « hard times », for these « decision times » – and for men up to such times.

The work carried out by Guénon in a series of volumes is vast and organic, so much so that, here, we could not even summarize its main aspects. Proceeding from a constant and immutable point of view « metaphysical », it branches out into the most varied domains: symbols, myths, primordial traditions, interpretations of history, morphology and criticism of civilization, religious and pseudoreligious phenomena, asceticism, traditional science of human interiority, doctrine of spiritual authority, and so on, all this is part of the work, already carried out by Guénon tirelessly for years, with unparalleled preparation, with the absence of any sectarianism, with a new method to be firmly anti-modern, to have as constant object the « third dimension » of all that the reader will realize that he has not known previously that on the surface.

the Tetraktys: one of the many symbols examined by Guénon

This work is perhaps the one that can offer a direct interest to most and which can serve as an introduction to the study of other works by Guénon, enough to gradually lead the best to direct contacts with the same traditional spirit, of which Guénon is the exponent. A constant care of the author is not to neglect anything that, with regard to his exposures, no misunderstandings arise. However, it is always possible that, due to the very nature of its views and the need to use words unfortunately affected by a different use, in an inattentive reading some point of this work can lend itself to a misunderstanding, which we would like to help prevent here through some brief consideration.

Guénon clearly declares that if his point of view is essentially « metaphysical », with the term « metaphysics » he does not intend at all to refer to some philosophical conception, with philosophy he does not want to have anything to do. Beyond everything that is conditioned by time and space, which is subject to change, which is imbued with sensitivity and particularity or linked to rational categories, there is a higher world, not as a hypothesis or abstraction of the human mind, as well as the most real of realities. Man can « make it », that is, have such a direct and certain experience as that mediated by the physical senses, when he manages to rise to a state, precisely, superrational, or, as Guénon always says, of « pure intellectuality », that is, to a transcendent use of the intellect, dissolved in any properly human, psychological, emotional, and so individualistic or confusingly « mystical » element. And it is in relation to this, that is, to a kind of transcendent realism which intends to go much higher than the world than any particular religion or tradition ( various and contingent formulations, both, of the only immutable metaphysical content ) and in a much more objective climate than that of any science, realism combined with the premises of an inner asceticism and the possibilities of overcoming the human always offered by every true tradition – is in relation to what the term « metaphysics » is used by Guénon.

Therefore wherever Guénon speaks of « intellectuality », of « contemplation », of « intellectual elite », of « pure knowledge », of « world of principles » or « intellectual intuition <1, the reader must be careful not to suppose a kind of rationalism or abstract universalism, as perhaps, in their modern common use, these terms could suggest. It must also be accentuated, more than what, perhaps, from this book alone shows, that the world of « principles », which Guénon conceives and shows it at the basis of every true tradition, it is much less a world bloodless of abstractions than a world of forces, the action of which, to be invisible, it is no less effective, indeed it is much more irresistible, inexorable and fatal than that relating to material and, in general, simply human forces.For Guénon the spirit does not have exile as its destiny in a stratospheric superworld, and the bearers of the spirit are not condemned to do down here, the part of exiles in tears and nostalgia or of impotent utopians; what does not begin or end in the element « man » for Guénon projects precise ratios of « dignity », of quality, of difference in the various forms of life; and this is how they are formed, in their luminous, oceanic, superhuman sense, the great traditions, this is how the great history and true hierarchy were born, what the great traditional pre-modern social organizations always knew, even in their arts and sciences, and the last echo of which continues until the feudal and Catholic-imperial Middle Ages, to which Guénon naturally claims a special meaning as a symbolic model.

On this basis, all Guénon's statements about the primacy of « knowledge », i.e. ’ « intellectuality », over the action, must not be mistaken: what is inferior and which must be subordinated is, in this regard, only the lower action, the deconsecrated and materialized action, what is to be said more agitation and fever than real action, in its being devoid of any light, of any true purpose, of any true principle. Another misunderstanding incentive may arise from Guónon's considerations regarding the relationship between East and West. We therefore invite the reader to never forget what the author has stated in the most explicit way, namely that the real opposition is not between East and West, but between modern West and traditional world. Just because it is in contrast with its best past, the modern West is also in antithesis with what in the East still retains of « metaphysical » despite the decomposition ferments imported into it essentially secularized and materialized from the West. It matters to note that, in their essence, the views exposed by Guénon in this regard not only collimano with those of Coppola about the « bad conscience of Europe », but even more with those of Mussolini's well-known speech to oriental students. In this speech Mussolini acknowledged that the antithesis and misunderstanding between East and West is based only on the fact that he exchanged his most recent materialistic, mercantile and liberalistic degenerescence with the West, that « soulless and ideal civilization » that « only knew how to see a market in manufactured goods in Asia, a source of raw materials to put their hand on, anti-fascist civilization that has taken over the world and is reflected in the same evils that Asia is now beginning to suffer ». It is enough to develop these exact positions of Mussolini consistently, so as not to be impressed by the expressions « strong » which, precisely in this sense, Guénon uses against the western barbarian invasions,in order to be able to take these accusations as the healthiest reactive to make clear what are the truly « revolutionary ideals » that we must assume and defend and that only can they found the true concept, spiritual, of ’Imperium, to oppose the « imperialist » destruction of the modern type and – let's say it – of the essentially Anglo-Saxon brand. And then no one – and the first censors – comes to mind to confuse the problem of the East, treated by Guénon, with the wider, colonial one, which in this book is not a question, and to think what reasons, valid for peoples of millennial civilization « metaphysics », such as p. es. the Hindu one, however, they can extend to wild or degenercent breeds, such as p. es. the African ones.

The views of Guénon can give rise to doubt, if ever, where he says that in the East, and only in it, there are still authentic representatives of the true « traditional » spirit and that therefore one of the best ways even to find or revive one's tradition which has become latent to ’ West would be given by the East. It is true that, in Guénon, « traditional » becomes synonymous with « metaphysical » and that if, in his various works, the essence of what he means by the East is analyzed, there is something that with what the vast part of readers think as East has nothing to do and, to say the least, it is found from there both East and West. But this does not completely solve the difficulty. If the crisis of the West, as Guénon explains it, is due to the « cyclical laws », and if these cyclical laws are general, that is, foreseeing an overall descending critical phase, it is clear that the West, just to be at the focal point of the crisis, is « ahead » – closest to the end, but also to the new principle of a next cycle – that not civilizations, like the Orientals, which only now begin to enter the real crisis, which therefore retain even greater remains of traditional and metaphysical spirit, but which, in the end, will have to travel our own ordeal. So if you have that positive solution that, after all, even without indulging in any optimistic illusion, Guénon hopes, that is, if we manage to bring a certain group of forces beyond the end of our world, the West will find itself holding its leading position, when the East is at the point of our present crisis. The premises, it seems to us, certainly allow this deduction.

The eagle: symbol of imperial power, taken from fascism, is “ bearer of the traditional spirit in the west. ”

On the other hand, it is perhaps a little simplistic ’ to think that the world conquest wrought by the West can be explained with purely material factors. Since Guénon believes that the forces from above specific to every « traditional » reality, if present, know every way to bend even without fighting any brute force, it must be concluded that in the Eastern peoples, who have become so easily subjugated, the presence of these spiritual forces should not have been so real anymore, and that a certain degenerescence, to be reported to the same cyclical laws, it must have manifested itself in them too. So, it is also undeniable that based on the worldwide conquest of the white races, at least at the origin, there was a spiritual factor, a kind of dark push towards infinity or the unlimited: although immediately it must be recognized, that this original thrust disregarded itself, it turned upside down, went out in « humanistic » terms of adventure and conquest, then mercantile and materialistic, accompanied, at best, by qualities of character and voluntarism.

How can we fail to see that bringing back to oneself and re-retualizing this impulse would be one of the best ways for a western reconstruction? The assumption would be the same one that, in a definitive and indisputable form, Guénon places: the presence of a metaphysical center and bearers of the true traditional spirit in the West; however, the development would be different, because, unlike the East, it is above all from the ’ « action that it would derive its raw material, not from the religious attitude or « cognitive » in a unilateral sense.

Here, indeed, an order of problems would open, which Guénon did not include in his book, drawn up about ten years ago: Guénon limited himself to indicating what is now pure denial and what can be used as a right point of reference for a revolt and a return to a true, spiritual, hierarchical, anti-collar and anti-egalitarian civilization.

Therefore, in this book, there is no examination of those motions of intolerance and insurrection against the most visible forms of modern social and intellectual disintegration, which in the meantime have manifested themselves in various parts of the West and have now generated large currents « revolutionary » compared to yesterday's European world: the fascist one, on the front line. But since all the premises for such an examination of Guénon's work are laid, it is the task of the best and most anxious elements of true spiritual orientation of the new and young Italy to draw the consequences.

We do not hide that precisely for this purpose we have held much to bring this book out among us. Guénon who, fought in France in every way – until the attempt to make his books disappear from circulation – lives presently almost « incognito » outside our continent, he should, strictly speaking, find for the ideas he defended the best climate among us, among the intellectual avant-garde of the Black Shirts revolution.

It is therefore a kind of « appeal », to which we hope that these avant-garde will be able to respond with dignity, rejecting many half-ideas and many amateur slogans in vogue, recognizing all that is missing to be able to give the much abused word « tradition » the fullness of its meaning, making himself capable of a clear gaze and true intellectual courage: as the premises of « integral traditionalism » defended by Guénon beyond any particularism conditioned by blood or matter, after all, they are the same as the Mussolini ideal of conquering « a permanent and universal reality » as a condition for anyone who wants to act spiritually in the world as « human will-dominating will » and the same persuasion of Mussolini, who today our civilization « must return universal, if it does not want to perish ».