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# CHRISTIANITY AND INITIATION

WE DID NOT MEAN TO RETURN here to questions concerning the character of Christianity itself, for we thought that what we had said of this on other occasions, however incidentally, was more or less sufficient to preclude any ambiguity on the subject.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, we have lately had to note that this is not at all the case and that certain rather troublesome confusions have arisen in the minds of many of our readers, making clear the need to further elucidate certain points. It is furthermore only with regret that we do this, for we must confess that we have never felt any inclination to give this subject special treatment. There are several reasons for this, the first being the almost impenetrable obscurity that surrounds everything relating to the origins and early stages of Christianity, an obscurity so profound that, upon reflection, it seems impossible that it should simply have been accidental, but more likely was expressly intended — an observation to be kept in mind in connection with what we shall have to say later.

1. We could not help being somewhat surprised upon learning that some readers think that our *Perspectives on Initiation* deals more directly and extensively with Christianity than our other works do; we can assure them that there as elsewhere we meant to speak of it only to the extent necessary to make our exposition comprehensible, and, one might say, as a function of the various questions we had to treat. Scarcely less astonishing is the fact that some readers who assure us they have attentively followed all we have written should nevertheless think this book contains something new on that score, whereas on all the points they have brought to our attention in this respect we were on the contrary only reiterating considerations we had already developed in some of our earlier articles in *Le Voile d'Isis* and *Études Traditionnelles*.

Despite all the difficulties resulting from such a state of affairs, there is nevertheless at least one point that does not seem to be in doubt, one that has in any event not been contested by any who have shared their observations with us, but that has, quite to the contrary, provided a support for certain of their objections. This point is that, far from being merely the religion or exoteric tradition known today, Christianity originally had both in its rites and doctrine an essentially esoteric and thus 'initiatic' character. We find confirmation of this in the fact that the Islamic tradition considers primitive Christianity to have been a *ṭarīqah*, that is, essentially an initiatic 'way', and not a *sharī'ah* or social legislation addressed to all; and this was so true that subsequently this latter had to be supplied by instituting a 'canon' law<sup>2</sup> that was really only an adaptation of ancient Roman law, thus something coming entirely from the outside, and not at all a development of something originally contained in Christianity itself. Moreover, it is evident that no prescription can be found in the Gospels that might be regarded as having a truly legal character in the proper sense of the word. The well-known saying, 'Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's,' seems to us particularly significant in this respect because, regarding everything of an exterior order, it formally implies the acceptance of a legislation wholly foreign to Christianity. This legislation was simply that existing in the milieu into which Christianity was born, given that it was at that time incorporated into the Roman Empire. This would surely have been a most serious lacuna if Christianity had been then what it later became, for the very existence of such a lacuna would have been not just inexplicable but truly inconceivable for a regular and orthodox tradition if Christianity had really included an exoterism as well as an esoterism, and if it was even to have applied—above all, one might say—to the exoteric domain. If, on the contrary, Christianity had the character we have just attributed to it, the thing is easily explained because there is no question of a defect but

2. Apropos of this it is perhaps not without interest to note that in Arabic the word *qanūn*, derived from the Greek, is used to designate any law adopted for purely contingent reasons and not forming an integral part of the *sharī'ah*, or traditional legislation.

rather an intention to abstain from intervening in a domain that by definition could not concern it under these conditions.

For that to have been possible, the earliest Christian church would have had to be a closed or reserved organization to which admission would not have been granted indiscriminately, being reserved for those who possessed the qualifications necessary to receive initiation validly in what we might call a 'Christic' form; and we could doubtless find many more indications that such was indeed the case, although they would generally be misunderstood in our day, when the modern tendency to deny esoterism prompts many more or less consciously to deny these indications of their true significance.<sup>3</sup> In short, then, the Church would have been comparable to the Buddhist *Sangha*, admission to which also had the characteristics of a true initiation,<sup>4</sup> and which is commonly compared to a 'monastic order', an apt comparison at least in that its particular statutes, just as those of a monastic order in the Christian sense, were not made to extend to the whole of the society at the heart of which it was established.<sup>5</sup> From this point of view the case of Christianity is therefore not unique among the various known traditional forms, and it seems to us that this fact should diminish the astonishment that some may feel about it; it would perhaps be more difficult to explain how it could have undergone the complete change in character shown by everything we see around us; but this is not the moment to examine that question.

3. We have often had occasion to draw attention to this type of procedure in the current interpretations of the Church Fathers and more particularly of the Greek Fathers: every effort is made to maintain that it is a mistake to see esoteric allusions in their writings, and when that becomes altogether impossible there is no hesitation in holding it against them and declaring that there has been a regrettable lapse on their part!

4. See A.K. Coomaraswamy, 'L'ordination bouddhique est-elle une Initiation?', in the July 1939 issue of *Études Traditionnelles*.

5. It was this illegitimate extrapolation that later provoked certain deviations in Indian Buddhism, such as the negation of the castes; the Buddha did not have to take these into account within a closed organization whose members were bound, at least in principle, to be beyond caste distinction; but to wish to suppress that same distinction in the entire social milieu constituted a formal heresy from the Hindu point of view.

Here then is the objection that was addressed to us and to which we alluded above: since the Christian rites, and the sacraments in particular, had an initiatic character, how could they have lost this and become simply exoteric rites? This is impossible, even contradictory they tell us, because the initiatic character is permanent and immutable and could never be effaced, so that it need only be admitted that as a result of circumstances and of the admission of a great majority of unqualified individuals, what was originally an effective initiation was reduced to no more than a virtual one. Here there is a misapprehension that seems quite evident: initiation, as we have repeatedly explained, does indeed confer upon those who receive it a character that is acquired once and for all and is truly ineradicable; but this idea of the permanence of the initiatic character applies to the human beings who possess it and not to the action of the spiritual influence or to the rites that are intended to serve as its vehicle; it is absolutely unjustified to transfer this notion from one to the other, which amounts in the end to attributing to it an altogether different significance, and we are certain that we have never ourselves said anything that could provoke such a confusion. In support of their position, however, our opponents assert that the spiritual action is effected through the Christian sacraments by the Holy Spirit, which is perfectly true though totally beside the point; moreover, whether the spiritual influence is named according to Christian terminology or according to the terminology of some other tradition, it remains true that it is essentially transcendent and supra-individual, for were it not so we would no longer be dealing with a spiritual influence at all but merely a psychic one. Even admitting this, however, what could prevent the same influence, or one similar, from acting according to different modalities and in different domains as well? Furthermore, even if this influence belongs to the transcendent order, must its effects be such in every case?<sup>6</sup> We do not at all see why this should be so, and we are even certain of the contrary; indeed, we have always taken the greatest care to point

6. Let us note in passing that a particular consequence of this would be to preclude spiritual influences from producing effects relating simply to the corporeal order, such as miraculous cures, for example.



out that a spiritual influence intervenes as much in exoteric rites as in initiatic rites, but it goes without saying that the effects it produces could never be of the same order in the two cases, for otherwise the very distinction between the two corresponding domains would no longer exist.<sup>7</sup> Neither do we understand why it is inadmissible that the spiritual influence that works through the Christian sacraments, after having first acted in the initiatic order, should not in other conditions and for reasons contingent on these very conditions, then lower its action to the merely religious and exoteric domain, so that its effects were thenceforth limited to certain exclusively individual possibilities with the goal of 'salvation' while nevertheless preserving these same ritual supports as far as external appearances are concerned, because they were instituted by Christ and without them there would no longer have been any properly Christian tradition. That this may really have been the case, and that consequently in our present state of affairs (and indeed for quite a long time now) we can no longer in any way consider Christian rites to have an initiatic character, is something we will have to stress with greater precision; but we must also point out that there is a certain linguistic impropriety in saying that they 'lost' that character, as if that fact were purely accidental, for we think on the contrary that there must have been an adaptation that, despite the regrettable consequences it entailed in some respects, was fully justified, and even necessitated, by the circumstances of time and place.

If we consider the state of the Western world in the age in question (that is, of the territories comprised in the Roman Empire), it is easy to see that, had Christianity not 'descended' into the exoteric domain, this world would soon have been deprived of all tradition, for the traditions that had existed until that time, especially the Greco-Roman tradition, which naturally was predominant, had reached an advanced state of degeneration heralding the imminent

7. If the action of the Holy Spirit were exercised only in the esoteric domain, because this alone is truly transcendent, we would also ask our opponents, who are Catholics, what one should think of the doctrine stating that this influence operates in the formulation of the most clearly exoteric dogmas?

end of their cycle of existence.<sup>8</sup> This 'descent' therefore, let us insist again, was neither an accident nor a deviation but should on the contrary be regarded as having a truly 'providential' character since it prevented the West from falling at that time into a state comparable to that in which it now finds itself. The moment had not yet arrived for a general loss of tradition such as characterizes modern times; a 'rectification' was therefore necessary, and Christianity alone could accomplish it, but on the condition that it renounce the esoteric and 'restricted' character it originally possessed;<sup>9</sup> and thus the 'rectification' was not only beneficial for Western humanity—which is too obvious to require emphasis—but at the same time conformed perfectly with the cyclical laws themselves, as all 'providential' action intervening in the course of history necessarily does.

It would in all likelihood be impossible to assign a precise date to this change that made of Christianity a religion in the proper sense of the word, that is to say a traditional form addressing itself to all without distinction; but what is certain in any case is that it was already an established fact at the time of Constantine and the Council of Nicaea, so that the latter had only to 'sanction' it, so to speak, by inaugurating the era of 'dogmatic' formulations intended as a purely exoteric presentation of the doctrine.<sup>10</sup> This change could not but occasion certain drawbacks, for the enclosing of doctrine in

8. It should be understood that in speaking of the Western world in its entirety we make an exception for an elite that not only still understood its own tradition from the exterior point of view, but that continued to receive initiation into the mysteries; the tradition could thus have maintained itself for quite some time in an increasingly restricted setting; but this goes beyond the scope of our present topic since we are concerned with Westerners in general, for whom Christianity had to come to replace the old traditional forms at a time when they were being reduced to nothing more than 'superstitions' in the etymological sense of the word.

9. One might say in this regard that the transition from esoterism to exoterism constituted a veritable 'sacrifice', which is moreover true of every descent of the spirit.

10. At the same time the 'conversion' of Constantine implied, by a sort of official act of imperial authority, a recognition of the fact that the Greco-Roman tradition had thenceforth to be considered extinct, although naturally some remnants may have survived for a fairly long time—remnants that could only degenerate further and further until they finally disappeared and were later designated by the contemptuous term of 'paganism'.

clearly defined and limited formulas made it much more difficult, even for those who were capable of so doing, to penetrate its deeper meaning. Furthermore, truths of a more properly esoteric order, by their very nature beyond the reach of the vast majority, could then only be presented as 'mysteries' in the popular meaning this word has acquired, which is to say that before long they had to appear to the generality of men as things impossible to understand, indeed as things one was forbidden even to try and fathom. These drawbacks, however, were not such as could go against the establishment of Christianity in traditional exoteric form or put its legitimacy into question, given the immense advantage that would result for the Western world, as we have already said. Moreover, if Christianity as such ceased thenceforth to be initiatic, the possibility still remained that a specifically Christian initiation might subsist at its core for an elite that could not restrict itself to the narrowly exoteric point of view or enclose itself in such inherent limitations; but this is yet another question that we shall have to examine later.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that this change in the essential character—one might even say the very nature—of Christianity, explains perfectly what we mentioned at the outset: that everything preceding it was intentionally enveloped in obscurity, and even that it could not have been otherwise. Indeed, it is evident that insofar as it was essentially esoteric and initiatic, the nature of original Christianity would thus remain entirely hidden to those now admitted into a Christianity that had become exoteric; consequently, anything that might lead to a knowledge or even a suspicion of what Christianity was at its beginning had to be concealed by an impenetrable veil. We need not inquire as to the means by which such a result was obtained, which would rather be the business of historians if ever it occurred to them to ask such a question, a question that would in any case seem to them virtually insoluble since it is not one to which they could apply their habitual methodological reliance on 'documents' (which obviously could not exist in such a case); but what interests us here is only to establish the fact and to understand its true reason. We will add in this connection, however, that contrary to what those who are devotees of superficial and 'simplistic' rational explanations might think, this 'obscuration' can in no way

be attributed to ignorance, for it is all too evident that such ignorance could not have existed among those who must have been all the more conscious of the transformation for having been more or less directly involved in it. Neither can we claim, in accordance with a prejudice widespread among those moderns who are only too willing to lend their own mentality to others, that selfish and 'political' manoeuvres must have been involved, from which, in any case, we cannot see what benefit could have accrued. On the contrary, the truth is that this was strictly required by the very nature of things in order to maintain the profound distinction between the exoteric and esoteric domains, in conformity with traditional orthodoxy.<sup>11</sup>

Some may perhaps ask what happened to the teachings of Christ in consequence of such a change, since these teachings constitute by definition the foundation of Christianity, from which foundation it could not stray without ceasing to merit its name, not to mention the difficulty of seeing what could be substituted for these teachings without compromising the 'non-human' character without which there is no longer any authentic tradition. In reality, these teachings have been in no way touched or modified in their 'literalness' by these events, and the permanence of the Gospel texts and other writings of the New Testament, which obviously date from the earliest period of Christianity, provide sufficient proof of this.<sup>12</sup> What changed was only the way they were understood, or, if one prefers, the perspective from which they were envisaged and the resulting significance that was accorded them. This is not to suggest, however,

11. We have pointed out elsewhere that the confusion between exoterism and esoterism is one of the causes that most frequently gives rise to heterodox 'sects', and there is in fact no doubt that this was the sole origin of some of the ancient Christian heresies. This explains all the better the precautions taken to avoid this confusion as much as possible, and their efficacy cannot be doubted in this regard even though, from a different point of view, one is tempted to regret that their secondary effect was to bring almost insurmountable difficulties to any profound and complete study of Christianity.

12. Even if one accepted—which we do not—the alleged conclusions of modern 'criticism', when the latter, with intentions only too manifestly anti-traditional, seeks to assign these writings the most recent possible dates, these dates would certainly still be anterior to the transformation of which we are speaking.



that there was anything false or illegitimate in this new understanding, for it goes without saying that the same truths are susceptible of application in different domains by virtue of the correspondences obtaining between all orders of reality. It is only to say that there are some precepts of special concern to those following an initiatic way and that are consequently applicable in a restricted and in some ways qualitatively homogeneous milieu, but which become impracticable in fact if they are extended to human society in general. This is recognized quite explicitly when they are considered to be only 'counsels of perfection' to which no obligation attaches,<sup>13</sup> which amounts to saying that each is to follow the evangelical way not only in the measure of his personal capacity, which is self-evident, but also according to what is permitted by the contingent circumstances in which he finds himself; and this is indeed all that can reasonably be demanded of those who do not aim to surpass simple exoteric practice.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, as to doctrine strictly speaking, if there are truths that can be understood both exoterically and esoterically according to their reference to different degrees of reality, there are others that pertain exclusively to esoterism and have no correspondence outside it, becoming, as we have already said, wholly incomprehensible when one tries to transfer them to the exoteric domain, and one must then confine oneself to expressing them purely and simply as 'dogmatic' pronouncements to which the least explanation can never be attached. It is these that properly constitute what are generally called the 'mysteries' of Christianity. Indeed, the very existence of these 'mysteries' would be altogether unjustifiable if the esoteric character of early Christianity were denied; if, however, we take it into account, they appear on the contrary as a normal and inevitable consequence of the 'exteriorization' by which

13. We do not intend to speak of the abuses to which this sort of restriction or 'minimization' has sometimes given rise, but rather of the real need to adapt these precepts to a society composed of individuals as different and unequal as can be in respect of their spiritual level, but who must nevertheless be addressed by an exoterism in the same way and without exception.

14. This exoteric practice could be defined as the minimum necessary and sufficient to assure 'salvation', for that is indeed the sole aim it is in fact meant to achieve.

Christianity became the exoteric and specifically religious tradition we know today, even while preserving in appearance the same form in its doctrine and rites.



AMONG the Christian rites, or more precisely among the sacraments that constitute their most essential part, those which present the greatest similarity to the rites of initiation and which consequently must be regarded as 'exteriorizations' of these latter—if in fact these had such a character in the beginning<sup>15</sup>—are as we have noted elsewhere naturally those that can be received only once, especially baptism. As long as the Christian community remained an initiatic organization, baptism, by which the neophyte was admitted into that community and in a sense 'incorporated' into it, evidently constituted the first initiation, which is to say the beginning of the 'lesser mysteries'. Moreover, this is clearly what is indicated by the character of 'second birth', which baptism preserved, although with a different application, even as it descended into the exoteric domain. So as not to have to come back to it let us immediately add that the rite of confirmation seems to have marked an accession to a higher degree, and it is most probable that this corresponded in principle to the completion of the 'lesser mysteries'. As for ordination, which now confers only the possibility of exercising certain functions, it can only be the 'exteriorization' of a sacerdotal initiation, pertaining as such to the 'greater mysteries'.

In order to realize that in what might be called the second state of Christianity the sacraments no longer retain any initiatic character and are really only exoteric rites, one need only consider the case of

15. In speaking here of 'rites of initiation' we mean those rites of which the actual aim is to communicate the initiatic influence; it goes without saying that apart from these there may exist other initiatic rites reserved for an elite that has already received initiation: one might suppose for example that the Eucharist was originally an initiatic rite in this sense, but not a rite of initiation.

baptism, since all the rest depend directly upon it. Despite the 'obscuration' of which we have spoken, we do at least know that at the very beginning rigorous precautions surrounded the conferring of baptism, and that those who were to receive it were subject to a long preparation. Today quite the reverse is the case, and it seems that everything possible has been done to facilitate to an extreme the reception of this sacrament, since not only is it conferred indiscriminately on one and all without question of qualification and preparation, but it can even be conferred validly by anyone at all, whereas the other sacraments may only be administered by priests or bishops, who exercise a definite ritual function. This easy attitude, coupled with the fact that infants are baptized as soon as possible after birth (which obviously excludes the idea of any sort of preparation whatsoever) can only be explained by a radical change in the very concept of baptism, a change following which it was considered to be an indispensable condition of 'salvation' and had consequently to be made available to the greatest possible number of individuals, whereas originally it was something altogether different. This way of envisaging things, by which 'salvation', the ultimate goal of all exoteric rites, is necessarily bound up with admission into the Christian church, is in short merely a result of the sort of 'exclusivism' that inevitably inheres in any exoterism as such. We do not think it useful to insist further on this, for it is only too clear that a rite conferred upon new-born infants, without any means being employed to determine their qualifications, could not have the character and value of an initiation, even if this were to be reduced to a mere virtuality. We shall, however, return in due course to the question whether a virtual initiation through the Christian sacraments remains possible.

We should make one additional point which is not without importance: in Christianity as it exists today, that is, in contrast to its original state, all rites without exception are public; everyone may be present at these rites, even at those which would have seemed to demand 'restriction', such as the ordination of a priest, the consecration of a bishop, or, with all the more reason, baptism or confirmation. Now this would be inadmissible in the case of rites

of initiation, which normally can only be accomplished in the presence of those who have received the same initiation;<sup>16</sup> there is an obvious incompatibility between what is public, on the one hand, and the esoteric or initiatic on the other. If, however, we regard this argument as merely secondary, it is because one could claim that in the absence of other arguments it might imply no more than an abuse due to a certain degeneration that can appear from time to time in initiatic organizations without thereby depriving them of their intrinsic character. But we have seen quite clearly that the descent of Christianity into the exoteric order must not be considered a degeneration, and besides, the other reasons we give suffice to show that in this case there can really no longer be any question of initiation.

If Christianity still possessed a virtual initiation, as some have envisaged in their objections, and if in consequence those receiving the Christian sacraments, even baptism alone, no longer needed to seek any other form of initiation whatsoever,<sup>17</sup> how could one explain the specifically Christian initiatic organizations that incontestably existed throughout the Middle Ages, and what could have been their *raison d'être* if their particular rites were in a sense useless repetitions of the ordinary Christian rites? It will be said that these were only initiations into the 'lesser mysteries', so that those who wished to go further and gain access to the 'greater mysteries' would have had to seek another initiation; but apart from the fact that it is very unlikely, to say the least, that all who entered these organizations were prepared to approach that domain, there stands

16. Following the article on Buddhist ordination mentioned earlier, we asked A. K. Coomaraswamy a question on this subject; he confirmed that this ordination was never conferred save in the presence of members of the *Sangha*, composed solely of those who had received it themselves, and excluding not only non-Buddhists, but also 'lay' adherents, who were basically only associates 'from outside'.

17. We are very much afraid that for many this may be the principal motive that persuades them that the Christian rites have preserved an initiatic value; they would in truth wish to dispense with all regular initiatic ties and yet be in a position to claim results in this order, and even if they admit that these results can only be exceptional under present conditions, each readily believes himself destined to be among the exceptions. It goes without saying that this is nothing more than a deplorable illusion.



as a decisive fact against such a supposition the existence of Christian Hermeticism, for by definition Hermeticism depends precisely on the 'lesser mysteries'—not to mention the craft initiations, which also belong to this same domain and which even in cases that cannot be called specifically Christian still required of their members in the Christian milieu the practice of the corresponding exoterism.

We must now anticipate another equivocation, for some may be tempted to draw from this an erroneous conclusion, thinking that if the sacraments no longer possess any initiatic quality they can have no initiatic effect, against which they would undoubtedly not fail to cite certain cases where the contrary seems to hold. The truth is that the sacraments cannot indeed have such effects by themselves, since their own efficacy is limited to the exoteric domain; but there is another thing to consider in this regard. Wherever there exist initiations that depend on one particular traditional form and that take its very exoterism as foundation, 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, as is the case for the generality of the adherents of the same traditional form. In this respect Christianity is no different from other traditions, since there is, or was, a properly Christian initiation; only it must be understood that this initiatic use of the exoteric rites, far from dispensing with the need for regular initiation or taking its place, essentially presupposes it as the one necessary condition, a condition that could not be replaced even by the most exceptional qualifications, and without which everything that surpasses the ordinary level can at most only lead to mysticism, that is, to something that in reality still belongs to religious exoterism.

From what we have just said, it is easy to understand how it really was with those individuals in the Middle Ages who left writings manifestly initiatic in inspiration, and who today are wrongly taken for 'mystics' simply because nothing else is now known, but who were certainly something entirely different. It is not to be supposed that these were cases of 'spontaneous' initiation, or exceptional cases in which a virtual initiation that had remained attached to the sacraments might have become effective, at least not while there was

still every possibility of a normal connection with one of the regular initiatic organizations that existed at that time, often under the cover of religious orders and even within them although not in any way a part of them. We cannot elaborate further on this since it would prolong the exposition indefinitely, but we will point out that it was precisely when these initiations ceased to exist, or at least ceased to be sufficiently accessible to offer real possibilities of an initiatic attachment, that mysticism properly speaking was born, so that the two things appear closely linked.<sup>18</sup> What we are saying here applies moreover only to the Roman Catholic church, and what is very remarkable too is that in the Eastern churches there has never been a 'mysticism' as understood in Western Christianity since the sixteenth century. This fact might lead us to think that a certain initiation of the kind we have just mentioned must have been maintained in those churches; and this is indeed what we find in hesychasm, of which the truly initiatic character seems indisputable, even if, as in so many other cases, it has been more or less diminished in modern times as a natural consequence of the general conditions of the age, conditions from which initiations can only escape by being very little known, either because they have always been so or because they have simply decided to 'close' themselves more than ever in order to avoid degeneration. In hesychasm, initiation in the strict sense consists essentially in the regular transmission of certain formulas, exactly comparable to the transmission of *mantras* in the Hindu tradition and of the *wird* in the Islamic *ṭuruq*. It also contains a complete 'technique' of invocation as a true method of interior work,<sup>19</sup> a method quite distinct from the exoteric Christian rites, although such a practice can nonetheless find a support in them as we explained, once the required formulas and the influence for

18. We do not wish to suggest that no forms of Christian initiation persisted after this, for we have reason to believe that something still remains of them even today, though in circumstances so restricted that they must in fact be considered as practically inaccessible, or else, as we shall see, in branches of Christianity other than the Roman Catholic church.

19. An interesting point in this regard is that such invocation is designated in Greek by the term *mnēmē*, 'memory' or 'remembrance', which is here the exact equivalent of the Arabic *dhikr*.

which they are a vehicle have been validly transmitted, something that naturally implies the existence of an uninterrupted initiatic chain since it is obvious that one can only transmit what one has oneself received.<sup>20</sup> These again are questions which we can only note summarily, but given that hesychasm still survives in our time, it seems to us that it would be possible to find in that direction some clarification about the nature and methods of other Christian initiations that belong, unfortunately, to the past.

In conclusion, we can say that despite its initiatic origins Christianity in its present state is certainly nothing more than a religion, that is, an exclusively exoteric tradition, and that it contains no possibilities other than those possessed by any other exoterism. Moreover, it makes no claim to more, because there is never a question of anything else but gaining 'salvation'. An initiation can naturally be superimposed upon it, and normally would even have to be, in order for the tradition to be truly complete, possessing effectively both esoteric and exoteric aspects; but this initiation does not currently exist in Christianity, at least in its Western form. It is in any case clear that observance of exoteric rites is fully sufficient for attaining 'salvation', and today more than ever that is all to which the great majority of human beings can legitimately aspire. But in such conditions, what are those individuals to do for whom, according to certain *mutaşawwufîn*, 'Paradise is still nothing but a prison'?

20. It should be noted that among modern interpreters of hesychasm there are many who try to 'minimize' the importance of its properly 'technical' side, whether because that truly answers their tendencies, or because they think thus to free themselves from certain criticisms stemming from a total ignorance of initiatic matters; in either case we have here an example of the minimization we were speaking of earlier.