

SYMBOLISM AND THE SUPREME IDENTITY
ACCORDING TO RENE GUENON

by RICHARD PICKRELL

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Department of Religious Studies
McGill University
Montreal

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Abstract

This thesis studies the thought of René Guénon (1886-1951), specifically his methodology of symbolic hermeneutics applied to the stages of metaphysical Self-realization.

Chapter one examines Guénon's criticisms of the modern world and gives Guénon's reasons for denouncing the essential products of modern humanistic thought (evolutionism, progressivisme, individualism, and positivism).

The second chapter gives Guénon's concept of a sacred tradition and his alternative to modern thought, the Primordial Tradition, and the role he claims it plays in the sacred history of mankind.

The third chapter gives Guénon's methodology for a symbolic hermeneutics and the role that symbols play in a sacred tradition.

Chapter four deals with Guénon's cosmology. Here his methodology is utilized and, in the final chapter, his symbolic hermeneutics are applied to the stages of metaphysical Self-realization.

A biographical appendix has been added. It mentions some of the predecessors who may have influenced Guénon's thought.

Résumé

Cette thèse étudie la pensée de René Guénon (1886-1951), et spécifiquement sa méthodologie de l'herméneutique symbolique appliqué aux étapes de la Réalisation métaphysique.

Le premier chapitre examinera ses critiques du monde moderne, et énoncera les raisons de Guénon le menant à dénoncer le produit essentiel de la pensée humanistique moderne (l'évolutionisme, le progressivisme, l'individualisme, et le positivisme).

Le deuxième chapitre nous fait part des concepts de Guénon à l'égard de la tradition sacrée et son alternative à la pensée moderne, à la Tradition Primordiale, ainsi que le rôle qu'il affirme qu'elle joue dans l'histoire sacrée de l'humanité.

Le troisième chapitre traite de la méthodologie de Guénon envers une herméneutique symbolique et le rôle que les symboles jouent dans la tradition sacrée.

Le chapitre quatre nous livrera la cosmologie de Guénon. Ici sa méthodologie s'utilise et au chapitre final sa herméneutique symbolique s'appliquerait aux étapes de la Réalisation métaphysique.

Vous trouverez un appendice biographique dans laquelle sont mentionné quelques-uns des prédécesseurs qui peuvent avoir influencé la pensée de Guénon.

PREFACE

I would like to thank John Patrick Deveney who introduced me to the works of René Guénon and who thoughtfully provided some research material and advice for this thesis. Without his encouragement this thesis would never have been written.

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INTRODUCTION

The influence René Guénon has had upon others in the field of comparative religions would suffice in itself to warrant a study of his thought. To some extent his intellectual progeny and others of close proximity to his thought are better known to the world than the man himself. This fact may be due to the nature of Guénon's writings which, to quote Jean Daniélou, stand out "... like a foreign body in the intellectual world of the present day."¹ The works of such well-known scholars as Hussein Nasr, Frithjof Schuon, Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings and others are replete with the vocabulary and conceptual framework initiated by the "oeuvre" of René Guénon. Their use of such words as metaphysic, cosmology, quality, quantity, essence, and substance are part of a vocabulary previously defined and established by Guénon. Similarly various philosophical and historical positions have their genesis in Guénon's work. Titus Burckhardt's position that Aristotle's Metaphysics is in reality cosmology and ontology,² or Schuon's thesis that the intellect stands over and above reason = the primary subject of his Logic and Transcendence³ - are two points previously taken up by Guénon. Guénon's influence upon Nasr is no secret, as a simple perusal of his footnotes will bear witness; George Vajda remarks in his review of Nasr's Sufi essays: "Il n'est pas inutile de signaler en outre que M. Nasr tient à souligner à maintes reprises son étroite communion d'idées avec les Européens islamisés de la

lignée doctrinale de René Guénon...."⁴

There is no need to dwell upon the close connection between Schuon and Guénon. The former deliberately mentioned in the preface of his first book, De l'Unité Transcendante des Religions, that he used Guénon's terminology.⁵

Guénon's works were primarily devoted to Vedic doctrines. This may appear singular at first glance, inasmuch as Guénon himself converted to Islam and the exponents of his position are more intimate with Islam than the Vedas. Nevertheless, his work has earned the respect of Alain Daniélou. As Roger du Pasquier stated in a letter:

Ce n'est que en 1949, lors d'un séjour à Bénarès que j'ai fait connaissance de l'oeuvre de René Guénon. Sa lecture m'avait été recommandée par Alain Daniélou, lequel avait soumis les ouvrages de Guénon à des pandits orthodoxes. Le verdict de ceux-ci fut net: de tous les Occidentaux qui se sont occupés des doctrines hindoues,⁶ seul Guénon, dirent-ils, en a vraiment compris le sens.

Ananda Coomaraswamy, the well-known orientalist and former curator of the Boston Museum of Art, enjoyed a close intellectual affiliation with Guénon and termed Guénon's Man and His Becoming according to the Vedanta the "...best account of the Vedanta in any European language."⁷

In America we also find Huston Smith who has recently published The Forgotten Truth, The Primordial Tradition which reflects closely and relies to a large extent on the positions of Guénon, Schuon and Coomaraswamy. On a more popular level in America we find Alan Watts who, at one point in his career,

made use of Guénon and Coomaraswamy:

Since writing Behold the Spirit, I have been greatly helped by the work of two writers who have, in certain respects, profoundly changed my understanding of the scope and the nature of the oriental doctrines and their relation to Christianity - René Guénon and Ananda Coomaraswamy.

However the significance of a man may just as easily be reflected and established by the reaction he engenders - and Guénon is not without his critics. His position was strong enough to have warranted much criticism from devout Roman Catholics who were extremely reluctant to see their religion compared with other traditions. Guénon's comparison was in some ways unfavorable to Christianity since he maintained the superiority of the oriental doctrines over the western tradition, particularly regarding the Vedic doctrines as the purest representative of the "Primordial Tradition." In the Lord of History Jean Daniélou devoted a full chapter to Guénon, entitled "Strength and weakness of René Guénon." In it he states:

The work of René Guénon, who died in 1949[sic], was surely among the most original productions of our time. It stands so completely outside the boundaries of modern thought, and it is so sharply at variance with the most inveterate habits of the modern mind, as to seem like a foreign body in the intellectual world of the present day...he cannot be ignored.

In arguing against Guénon, Daniélou contrasts "natural" symbolism of other traditions with the "supernatural" symbolism of the Revelation and Resurrection in Christianity. This contrast is nothing new for it is found among the early Christians in their polemics against the pagans. R.C. Zaehner reiterates it in respect to mystical experiences in his Mysticism Sacred and

Profane, and in the process he mentions Guénon along with Schuon as exponents of a philosophia perennis which he, Zaehner, sees as too simplistic.¹⁰ According to Lucien Méroz, the eminent Christian metaphysician Jacques Maritain was alluding to Guénon when he wrote:

S'il en est ainsi, on voit quelle duperie ce serait, comme nous le proposent certains des plus zélés interprètes occidentaux de l'hindouisme, la pensée védântine pour le pur type de la métaphysique par excellence. Intellectuelle et intellectuelliste tant q'on voudra, son sens le plus profond est pratique et mystique, non spéculatif, elle est commandée dans sa structure interne non par la loi du savoir et de la conformité des énoncés conceptuels à ce qui est, mais par la loi d'une discipline ascétique et pratique, et la recherche vécue de Moksha. La spéculation y'est dominée tout entière par un pragmatisme qui, pour avoir un but sublime et sacré, n'en reste pas moins un pragmatisme, et n'en contraire ou n'en dévie pas moins le développement autonome de la philosophie comme telle. Loin qu'elle nous présente le type pur de la pensée métaphysique, la métaphysique n'a jamais réussi à s'y dégager dans sa nature propre.

As we will see it is just that practical side of oriental metaphysics that Guénon regards as superior to anything found in the West.

Christianity received some left-handed compliments from Guénon and we can see the reaction by Lucien Méroz who echoes Daniélou's response: "C'est que, malgré ce que nous considérons comme ses erreurs, son oeuvre est riche en aperçus suggestifs..."¹²

We find a similar response suggested in his title "Sagesse de René Guénon?", by the Catholic theologian Louis Beirnaert in Les Nouvelles Litteraires (May 25, 1951).

Paradoxically, Guénon's "aperçus suggestifs" have led

some to the rediscovery of their own tradition in the Catholic Church and this rediscovery is completely in keeping with Guénon's vision of a restoration of the Western tradition upon the already existing foundation of the Catholic Church.

In addition to its influence on these followers and sympathizers, Guénon's thought continues to live as a "movement", if we may use the term. In other words these men are not isolated, but rather, represent the better known individuals who envision a restoration of "true" metaphysical principles as held by the sacred traditions of the past. The individuals who hold this position we will call "traditionalists." Several journals exist in Europe which are the direct result of Guénonian thought. Etudes Traditionnelles, started by Guénon, continues to publish his works and those of others inspired by traditionalist lines of thought. Also in France there is Symbolisme begun by Marius Lepage and Oswald Wirth.¹³ In England, Studies in Comparative Religions, formerly Tomorrow, was instigated by the thought of Guénon, Schuon and Coomaraswamy. In Italy we find Rivista di studi Tradizioni and also Imperium¹⁴ which are devoted to Guénon's thought and that of other traditionalists, most notably Julius Evola, author of Rivolta contra il mondo moderna.

Guénon has naturally received more attention in France than elsewhere because most of his works have not been translated. The greater attention there may also be due to his works on the French Masons. His Etudes sur la Franc-maçonneries

et le compagnonnage naturally aroused the interest of this group and may (according to various studies on the French Masons such as La Franc-Maçonnerie Traditionnelle dans notre temps by Jean Baylot and Les Francs-Maçons by Jean Saunier¹⁵) possibly have had an effect in reforming it. Jean Tourniac quotes Jean Baylot to this effect "...l'oeuvre guénonienne demeure essentielle à l'intelligence maçonnique du présent et de l'avenir...."¹⁶

Guénon was not without some influence on French literature of the 20th century. Such popular authors as Henri Bosco, André Breton, René Daumal and André Rolland de Renéville openly admit their debt to him.¹⁷ We must not fail to mention André Gide's reaction upon reading Guénon:

Si Abdallah, converted to Islam and a Sanskrit scholar, gets me to read the books of René Guénon. What would have become of me if I had met them in the time of my youth, when I was plunged into the Méthode pour arriver à la vie bienheureuse and was listening to the lessons of Fichte in the most submissive way possible? But at that time Guénon's books were not yet written. Now it is too late; the die is cast.¹⁸

This was written in Fez in 1943. In 1951, when Henri Bosco reminded Gide of these words, Gide responded after some reflection "...Je n'ai pas rien, absolument rien à objecter à ce que Guénon a écrit. C'est irrefutable."¹⁹

Although Guénon is as far outside the intellectual current of the 20th century as anyone could be, even he could not entirely escape his temporal conditions. To some extent he carried on some of the themes laid down by his predecessors of

the 19th century. Such themes as the primordial tradition, the theory of cosmic cycles and the universal communicability of symbols and their role as hierophanies are not original with Guénon. Paul Chacornac mentions a few works ante-dating Guénon which dealt with these subjects:²⁰ Les Religions de l'Antiquité by Cruetzer and Guignet (1825-1851), Des couleurs symboliques dans l'antiquité, le moyen âge et le temps moderne by Portal (1837), L'essai sur le symbolisme antique d'Orient by deBièrre (1847), le Catholicisme avant Jesus-Christ by the Father P.J. Jallabert (1872) as well as the works of Saint-Yves d'Alveydre - a contemporary of Guénon's youth. Chacornac continues:

Mais si ces auteurs avaient réussi à assurer la persistance au sein du monde occidental de certaines vérités devenues étrangères à la mentalité moderne, ils n'avaient jamais pu, voulu ou osé rompre entièrement avec celle-ci; ils n'avaient non plus jamais réussi à présenter un ensemble doctrinal complet et cohérent; ils n'avaient surtout pas 'rapporté' la doctrine de l'Identité Suprême dont on ne trouve plus guère de traces en Occident depuis Maître Eckhart, à l'exception peut-être de quelques lignes du seul Villiers de l'Isle-Adam.²¹

The notion of the Supreme Identity is the very heart of Guénon's message and the main source of his original contribution. In spite of the numerous writings on "mysticism" the concept of the Supreme Identity was largely misunderstood or distorted according to Guénon. We should add that the present understanding far surpasses the very limited horizons which existed at the beginning of this century among the occult, the

world from which Guénon arose. Guénon regarded their horizons as not only limited but as distortions of true sacred traditions. His works, Erreur Spirite and Le Théosophisme, are examples of his continuous attack against the occultists, spiritualists and esoteric movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In spite of their spurious ancestry and lack of discipline the theosophists at one time were taken very seriously, so much so as to have had an effect upon scholars in Vedic studies. The theosophical theory of reincarnation, which Guénon so vociferously attacked as being a misconception of Vedic doctrines, is still considered a fact of the Vedic tradition.

For Guénon, true realization begins with initiation into a tradition, which itself is nothing less than a body of sacred symbols that have an efficacious influence on the being. Tradition and symbols transmit a spiritually efficacious influence that helps the being to realize itself. This realization is the final goal of true metaphysics.

To an incredible degree Guénon's entire scheme of thought is thoroughly unchanging. Several minor changes occurred, but they were positions entirely contingent upon the metaphysical principles of his thought, and these never changed from the time of his first publication, "Le Demiurge." He originally held that Buddhism was a heterodox growth out of the Vedic tradition. He subsequently agreed that it was orthodox after Marco Pallis and the son of Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy visited

Guénon in Cairo and convinced him of the error.

The question we wish to pose is this: how does Guénon apply his methodology of symbolic hermeneutics to the stages leading up to and including metaphysical Self-realization or what Guénon calls the Supreme Identity?

Guénon's thought quite naturally falls into five major headings, and it is most appropriate that we should remain faithful to this natural division of topics. Before answering our question directly we must first lay the foundation, beginning with a more general subject matter and then slowly focusing to the particular, which is, indeed, what Guénon believes to be the most important element of his own thought, namely, the Supreme Identity. The first chapter will deal with Guénon's critique of the modern world. To a certain degree a subject may be understood as much by what it is not as by what it is. This chapter on his critique of the modern world serves, by dealing with what a sacred tradition is not, to dispense with the modern preconceptions, or in other words, the modern conceptual framework, in order to clear the way for the laying of the foundation of a new conceptual framework. Once we have completed ~~this~~ **negative side**, the positive follows, and our second topic the Primordial Tradition. In this second chapter we will discuss Guénon's conception of the Primordial Tradition and the role it plays in the transmission of sacred knowledge. This chapter will also deal with the concept of

"tradition" in general and the role tradition plays in contributing to Self-realization. Having thus established a new foundation by giving the concept of tradition, from that position we will then be able to narrow in on the means of transmission of that sacred knowledge, namely, the function of symbols. This will be our third chapter, and will be the key to all that will follow it, because an understanding of the role of symbols and their hermeneutics will be applied in the final two chapters. Our fourth chapter will set up Guénon's structure of the cosmos, both the macrocosm and the microcosm. We will show how the microcosm must be pictured within the macrocosmic structure and the relationship between the two in the realization of the being. Once we have viewed the cosmos this quite naturally leaves us with what is outside the cosmos - metaphysics, the subject of our fifth and final chapter. In this chapter we will give Guénon's metaphysics, and then do an about face by starting with the "fallen" state of man within the cosmos, and follow the process of a being as it first harmonizes with the cosmos and then successively rises beyond the cosmos into the full blossom of the Supreme Identity.

A biographical appendix will be added to give additional understanding of Guénon's thought. We will situate it in an historical-cultural milieu by speculating on some of the possible sources of his thought and precedents to it. This will help us to see some of the historical continuity, the

Western antecedents of his thought, and just as importantly it will give an idea of some of the non-Western sources of his thought. And finally it will show that the thought and the man are inseparably united in Guénon, with a dedication and zeal little matched. The biography will also show that, as in the course of anyone's life, some of his opinions were molded and tested by his encounters with his contemporaries.

NOTES

1. Jean Daniélou, "Strength and weakness of René Guénon," Lord of History, trans. by Nigel Abercrombie (London: Longmans-Chicago: H. Regnary, 1958), p. 122.
2. Titus Burckhardt, Alchemy, trans. by William Stoddart (Baltimore: Penguin Books, inc. 1971), p. 36 note 2.
3. Frithjof Schuon, Logic and Transcendence, trans. by Peter N. Townsend (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).
4. George Vajda, Review of Sufi Essays by Hussein Nasr, Revue de L'Histoire des Religions, 187/2 (1975), 217.
5. Frithjof Schuon, De l'Unité Transcendente des Religions, (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 13. The English edition, The Transcendent Unity of Religions, trans. by Peter Townsend (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), omits this mention and high praise of Guénon. Schuon gives several reasons for this omission: first, Schuon is now known on his own and has no further need to "situate" himself with Guénon; second, Schuon harbors some reservations over Guénon's later stance on Christianity and initiation which is unacceptable to most Christians; third, Guénon's taint of occultism remains a disturbing factor for Schuon. From a letter to the author from Whithall N. Perry on behalf of Frithjof Schuon, June 15, 1976.
6. Paul Chacornac, La Vie Simple de René Guénon (Paris: Les Editions Traditionnelles, 1958), p. 74.
7. Ananda Coomaraswamy, Introduction to "Sacred and Profane Science," a chapter from La Crise du monde moderne, trans. by Ananda Coomaraswamy, Visva-Bharati Quarterly (Nov.-Jan., 1935-36).
8. Alan Watts, The Supreme Identity (New York: The Noonday Press, 1957), p. 15.
9. Jean Daniélou, op. cit., p.122.
10. R.C. Zaehner, Mysticism Sacred and Profane (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 30-31.
11. Lucien Méroz, René Guénon ou la Sagesse Initiatique (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1962), p. 153.

12. Ibid., p. 225.
13. Jean Tourniac, Propos sur René Guénon (Paris: Dervy Livres, 1973), p. 19.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 22. See also Denys Roman, "René Guénon et La Loge 'La Grande Triade'," Etudes Traditionnelles, 243 (Nov.-Dec. 1971), 217-266.
16. Ibid., p. 20.
17. Gabriel V. Asfar, "René Guénon: A Chapter of French Symbolist Thought in the Twentieth Century," Dissertation Abstracts International, 33 (1973), 3571A - 72A (Princeton).
18. Andre Gide, Journals, vol. IV, 1939-1949, trans. by Justin O'Brien (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), p. 226.
19. Henri Bosco, "Trois Rencontres," Nouvelle Revue Française (Nov., 1951), 271-280.
20. We deal with this matter at greater length in the biographical appendix.
21. Paul Chacornac, p. 124-125.

CRITIQUE OF THE
MODERN WORLD

The modern world has not been without its critics, but Guénon has perhaps been the severest of all. Indeed, it would be difficult to go further in total rejection of the modern world. The following criticism of the Renaissance indicates the scope of his rejection:

Henceforth there was to be left only philosophy and 'profane' science, the negation, that is to say, of true intellectuality, the limitation of knowledge to its lowest order, an empirical and analytical study of facts divorced from principles, a dispersion in an indefinite multitude of insignificant details and a piling up of baseless hypotheses, continually undermining one another and of fragmentary views incapable of leading to anything except practical applications of the kind which constitute the sole real superiority of modern civilization - hardly an enviable superiority, moreover, which by its development to the point of stifling every other preoccupation has only succeeded in endowing this civilization with the purely material character that makes of it a sheer monstrosity.

Guénon neither hesitates nor compromises. His attacks are neither partial nor vague. Three of his books were devoted to criticism of the modern world: Crisis of the Modern World, The Reign of Quantity, and East and West. The appellations "modern world" and "modern West" are synonymous for Guénon and designate as much a state of mind as a geographical location or an historical period. The term "modern" is exactly the equivalent of Eliade's "profane", whereas the term "traditional", as Guénon uses it, carries with it the notion of "sacred". In any place where there is a living sacred tradition then the term "modern"

does not apply. This is especially true for the Orient, hence Guénon's continual contrast between the East and West. The West is, or rather was in Guénon's day, the only really modern or profane civilization, but its influence is widespread and has the unmeritorious distinction of destroying anything traditional in its path.

Guénon envisioned a restoration of the knowledge of metaphysical principles in the West and the consequent restructuring of the modern western civilization so that metaphysical principles would become its guiding authority. Guénon's sphere of activity was neither political nor social. These were of only secondary importance to him. He operated in the intellectual sphere, the world of ideas and the transcendent, hence his attacks against the modern world were directed against the cornerstone - the very conceptual framework of modern civilization. It must be remembered, especially for those who put so much stock in action, that, according to Guénon, the seeds of a civilization exist in the minds of its members and logically prior to its physical inception. The outward actualization of a civilization is determined and logically must be determined by the individuals participating in that civilization. To launch an attack at the conceptual framework is to rattle the foundation. Guénon strategically directed his polemics at what are structurally the most sound pillars of that foundation. Our most cherished notions, beginning with humanism and followed by all of its

derivatives, philosophy, rationalism, individualism, evolutionism and progress, are shattered without the slightest trace of sympathy. As the above quotation illustrates, he unhesitatingly attacks the so-called "exact" sciences, not for their practical benefits (which indeed no one can deny) but for the illusions they foster - the empirical methodology becomes a trap, description of phenomena becomes an explanation of reality, and the alleged "truths" discovered are imagined to lead to solutions beyond the practical applications.

Guénon's viewpoint for his critique is from a far less restricted position than that of most contemporary critics, since his conception of man is something far more and far less than the modern conception. Furthermore, Guénon's historical horizons are much broader than the brief historical period of the last six thousand years to which historians are accustomed.

Guénon subscribes to the Hindu conception of cosmic cycles,² in which there are four subcycles called yugas within a larger cycle called a manvantara (age of Manu). The yugas correspond to the Golden, Silver, Copper and Iron ages of Greek mythology. Fourteen manvantaras compose a larger cycle called a kalpa, but present humanity has its origins only at the onset of the present manvantara. The historical period of which we have direct evidence is merely the final period of the present manvantara which extends back millions of years. We will have more to say about cosmic cycles later when we discuss cosmology,

but for the moment we should note that existence in its totality is the flux or "becoming" (to be distinguished from "Being" which is outside of existence and yet the basis of it) that exists between the two poles of quality and quantity, the first of the cosmic dualities. Existence is, then, the union of these two poles, symbolized in myth as male and female, as purusha and prakriti in the Hindu tradition. This duality is also equivalent to "essence" and "substance" and to Aristotle's "act" and "potency".³ While this duality is applied to existence as a whole, it may also be applied to all entities partaking in existence, and thus is susceptible of both universal and particular applications. Also, since each entity may be viewed from both of these two aspects of duality, from one point of view that entity may appear as quantitative and passive, while from another point of view it may be taken as qualitative and active. As an example, the soul of man (without any need to define "soul" in this case) may be taken as an active agent with respect to the body, whereas with respect to God it remains a passive recipient.

Time, as a part of existence, also partakes of quality and quantity, and like all beings begins in youth and ends in old age. Commencement is youth and purity, when quality is most apparent, while termination is old age and decay when quantity dominates. The world began in a state of pristine purity. All the higher spheres of reality were opened to

mankind and mankind itself was in a state of primordial innocence - hence the universal myth of the Golden Age and the biblical account of the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve ate of the "fruit" they lost innocence and fell. Just as a fruit is a seed, and a seed is the germ for growth, so the knowledge of good and evil grows and man becomes ever more entangled in the flux of existence and is drawn imperceptibly towards the quantitative pole. Similarly, the cosmos as a whole falls, undergoing a kind of spiritual dissipation parallel to the fall of man, and tends to degenerate and solidify.⁴ This continual fall is marked by periodic upheavals and temporary partial restorations which can be regarded as milestones in the temporal cycles. The biblical deluge is one such example where the old order was destroyed to restore the world. Since mankind is now in the final cycle of this manvantara, it is not only not more highly evolved than primordial man was, but is rather a vestige of what man once was. Man is therefore far from "evolving" biologically, and far from progressing socially towards a "Golden Age", as is often imagined to be the case by the popular mind. The cosmos is degenerating into ever greater "materialization", and Guénon prefers the word "solidification", explaining that bodies are becoming more "dense" by this descent which follows the natural cosmic tendency towards the quantitative. Modern man, by his participation in the cosmos and situation in the final cycle, does not recognize true quality

because it has become ever more veiled by solidification. Consequently he compounds the problem by reducing all knowledge to purely quantitative considerations. When quality has been extracted from a traditional science, such as in the relationship of chemistry to alchemy, all that remains, according to Guénon, are the quantitative elements or residues of any real knowledge. The Tibetan word for kali yuga means the "age of impure residues"⁵ and this exactly expresses Guénon's view of the knowledge of our civilization: it only consists of residues of real knowledge.

Man the microcosm is a reflection of the macrocosm, and if his intellectual endeavors become ever more quantitative, that is utilitarian, and his cultural expression ever more sentimental, that is merely an expression of the fact that his orientation reflects the actual cosmological conditions. Man is not something apart from the cosmos, he participates with an active role, and the very fact and meaning of playing an active role includes the reciprocal effective relationship between the micro- and macrocosm. This reciprocity is such that when man's intellectual awareness solidifies, it in turn contributes to the cosmic solidification. In the same way an increase in spiritual awareness retards, but never reverses, the overall cosmic solidification by opening our world up to higher regions. Self-perfection exerts a spiritual efficacy on the cosmos. This efficacy is real from the more narrow

focus of a cosmological and individual perspective; from a metaphysical perspective, of course, this effect of the individual is part of the pattern and the influence is only illusory.

Guénon, however, does not always speak from so vast an historical perspective as the prior yugas. He uses these merely to situate the present world more in terms of metaphysical principles rather than chronologically. Often he simply contents himself with the historical period alone, as he must if he is to provide us with any examples or alternatives to the modern concepts of reality. He always uses history to point out metaphysical principles. History for Guénon is not simply an accumulation of facts and events. The historicity of an event can only be intelligible in the light of metaphysical principles, just as for Christians history is intelligible only in terms of the Revelation of Christ. Time or duration is always taken as a symbol for, and hence a reflection of, the eternal, which is the area proper to metaphysics. Needless to say the historical period also illustrates a descent of human spirituality analogous to the total cyclical descent envisioned by the theory of yugas. Western civilization, prior to the Renaissance, and more specifically, up to the fourteenth century, enjoyed a period of relative normality with respect to a traditional civilization as Guénon envisions it. Tradition during this period in the West existed in a religious mode, which Guénon distinguishes from other forms of a sacred tradition; in fact,

according to Guénon, religion is strictly a semitic form of tradition. This theme will be developed more fully later.⁶

From the age of Charlemagne until the fourteenth century the West was as close to a truly traditional civilization as at any subsequent period in its history or at any previous period going back to classical antiquity. The end of the Middle Ages is somewhat fluid inasmuch as the various elements - philosophy, arts, religion, and politics - ceased to be traditional at different periods. The Renaissance therefore was not a "rebirth" as most see it, but a renewal of classical decadence. Most of the revered concepts of today: humanism, rationalism, individualism, and even the empirical investigative approach of science, originated or flowered during the Renaissance and in turn destroyed the basis of a sacred western tradition.

There was a word which rose to repute at the time of the Renaissance and which summarized in advance the whole program of modern civilization: this word is 'humanism'. It had indeed become a matter of reducing everything to purely human proportions, of eliminating every principle belonging to a higher order and, figuratively speaking, of turning away from heaven on the pretext of gaining possession of the earth.

Probably the greatest single development out of humanism was rationalism. Guénon attributes the founding of rationalism to Descartes, although this "founding" must be understood in a different sense than modern conceptions give it. To Guénon's way of thinking, an individual only formulates a given develop-

ment and in that sense is an originator. Thus Descartes himself merely formulated, and therefore solidified, an already occurring trend of thought which arose as the result of previous assumptions. Guénon notes that all the seeds of modern thought can be directly attributed to the proliferation of rationalism that began in the Renaissance, and whose antecedents are found in the graeco-latin philosophy which was revived by the West's rediscovery of classical antiquity.

One might wonder, given modern axioms of thought, just what is so dreadful about rationalism since the only apparent alternative would be irrationalism. To begin with, Guénon makes a clear distinction between "rationality" and "rationalism". The former, at its highest, is the rational expression of intellectual intuition or supra-rational thought. The latter is exclusive in that it ignores the supra-rational and often even denies its existence, if not openly then at least by implication or assumption. Even when lip-service is given to intellectual intuition and the spiritual it amounts to the same thing as rationalism because rational thought, if it is to be faithful to reality, cannot operate "as if" the spiritual did not exist. Rational thought cannot be placed in a closed system; to do so is to invalidate its position and produce distorted conclusions, as Cartesian mechanics did, by not taking all things into account. Only a small step is necessary to a denial of the spiritual altogether. In fact a denial of the spiritual is

an inevitable consequence if one merely follows the logical consequences. Agnosticism and atheism are the inevitable outcome.

Guénon contends that the etymology of the word "philosophy" ("love of wisdom") denotes a preparatory stage, a prerequisite for the attainment of wisdom of Self-realization itself.⁸ Thus philosophy, the rational expression of intuitive knowledge, is theoretical and mediate, compared to intellectual intuition which is actual and immediate. Once intellectual intuition, or even the notion of its possibility, was lost, philosophy was left on its own without a spiritual rudder, floundering in the realm of ratiocination where logic can give it order but without being capable of guiding - "Rational life therefore does not owe its excellence to itself, but to the truth which it willingly obeys."⁹ Logic is an inadequate substitute for intellectual intuition.

Under these conditions philosophy became a "profane" knowledge. Human rationality became the substitute for intuitive, supra-rational and supra-human traditional wisdom. Philosophy, established purely in rationalism, could do nothing more than scatter in every direction without a guide, designing its own maze by positing one hypothesis after another, each one being torn down in the progression until finally rationalism itself was called into question. It was inescapable that the limits of rational thought would be realized. Rational discursive

thought is entirely incapable of synthesis since its roots are in analysis. Analysis by its very nature can never lead to a true synthesis of reality, any more than a mathematician can disclose how many points are on a segment of line. The thrust of Guénon's thought was that modern man must recognize the limitations of rational thought if he is in any way going to overcome the intellectual desert of today.

According to Guénon, rationalism, without the support of something beyond itself, can do nothing but contribute to the ongoing descent. Once intelligence is limited to reasoning it is only a matter of time before reasoning itself becomes merely a tool for practical applications. The practical applications are obvious and undeniable, but the rational explanations of reality continue to destroy each other because the faults of one philosophical school are only too apparent to other schools. Rationalism at this stage has long since become a tool for self-delusion. The myriad turns and logical twists of the human mind lead ultimately to relativism - "relativism is the only logical outcome of rationalism."¹⁰ Relativism is the denial of any truth or absolute - a flat self-contradiction - for to find a fixed position on which to observe that everything is relative is to find the truth and therefore disprove the very point proven. Nor is it logical to claim there is no truth, since this is also a contradiction, e.g., the statement that there is no truth is presumably supposed to be true. Once

relativism has worked its way to the fore rationalism destroys itself and Pandora's box is opened for all the inventions of the sub-rational or infra-rational philosophies, such as Bergsonian "intuitionism". Guénon characterizes this as "a vaguely defined sensory intuition, more or less mixed with imagination, instinct and sentiment."¹¹

Individualism is another inevitable consequence of humanism. When the rational faculty predominates in philosophical speculation it becomes only natural to see the individual as the source of all knowledge. In this state of affairs the "originator" of a given "truth" becomes all important and originality at any cost becomes the norm. For Guénon this is contrary to the normal order:

In a traditional civilization it is almost inconceivable that a man should lay claim to the possession of an idea, and, in any case, if he were to do so he would thereby be depriving himself of all credit and authority, since he would be reducing the idea to no more than a kind of baseless fantasy; if an idea is true it belongs equally to all those who are capable of understanding it; if it is false there is no reason to be proud of having thought of it.¹²

The desire for real authority explains the motivation for attaching a pseudo-authorship to many works in Antiquity and the Middle Ages (Pseudo Dionysius, the "Hermetic" writings, etc.). In Les principes du calcul infinitésimal, Guénon applies the distinction between "conception" and "imagination", which he claims the modern world fails to understand because it overemphasizes individuality and originality. At the risk of

overquoting we give Guénon's application where he discusses the origin of infinitesimal calculus:

... nous appellerions plutôt [Leibnitz] son 'formulateur', car cette methode correspond à certaines réalités, qui, comme telles, ont une existence indépendante de celui qui les conçoit et qui les exprime plus ou moins parfaitement; les réalités de l'ordre mathématique ne peuvent, comme toutes les autres, qu'être découvertes et non pas inventées, tandis que, par contre, c'est bien d'"invention" qu'il s'agit quand, ainsi qu'il arrive trop souvent dans ce domaine, on se laisse entraîner, par le fait d'un "jeu" de notation, dans la fantaisie pure...¹³

Individualism in the intellectual and social order leads to intellectual and social chaos. The imagined freedom of individualism that the modern West so proudly proclaims is merely a license given to inferiority. Individualism is another example of quantity over quality. It renders void all things superior to itself.

The modern West has gone a step further than individualism by regarding individuals, at least theoretically, as equal. Guénon states that no two entities are entirely equal, otherwise they would no longer be two entities, but rather one. There are two ways of differentiating between any number of entities, the quantitative and the qualitative. A quantitative consideration is the kind that is applied in differentiating between numerical units, a consideration of a condition which Guénon claims does not have any real existence but is in fact theoretical, since quality, however remote it may be, must always be existant. A quantitative point of view can regard

all men as equals only by dismissing quality and reducing men to their lowest common denominator, not unlike numerical units, or, if social roles are taken into account, like interchangeable mechanical units. Since a group of individuals is a collectivity, to separate individuals into equal units "... turns their collectivity into quantitative multiplicity; at the limit, these individuals would be no more than something comparable to the imagined 'atoms' of the physicists, deprived of every qualitative determination;..."¹⁴ However if quality becomes a deciding factor, as it should to accord with the reality of things, it is no longer possible to regard individuals as "equal" (except in a very limited fashion), because a qualitative distinction is a matter of at least relative superiority.

It can hardly be questioned that the most important development of the modern West is empirical science. This empiricism was reached, according to Guénon, only after an intellectual descent beginning with Cartesian mechanics and became materialistic no earlier than the eighteenth century.¹⁵ "Mechanism is limited to giving a simple description of movement, such as it is in its outward appearance, but is powerless to grasp the reason for it and so to express its essential or qualitative aspect which alone can afford a real explanation."¹⁶ Thus movement was also reduced to its quantitative mode alone and this could not have been possible without regarding time and space as homogeneous - as if each were a flat continuum with

no real qualitative distinction between one moment or place and the next. Furthermore, Descartes "... reduced the whole nature of bodies to extension, and in addition he considered extension only from a purely quantitative point of view."¹⁷ This homogeneity of time and space is of course a scientific hypothesis that has become an imagined "fact".

Descartes set up a methodological limit by restricting himself to the corporeal domain and treating it as if the spirit were entirely absent. He pointed out that he was not denying the spirit, but this was a concession that did not at all, according to Guénon, alter the consequences. After all, if this limitation is posited then there is no real difference in Cartesian mechanism whether the spirit is really absent or not. This limitation necessarily establishes a matter/spirit dualism in which the two domains are mutually exclusive. From ignoring the spirit to denying it altogether is merely a step in the logical sequence, for if it is posited that reality functions without the spirit, what function does the spirit serve? This is why Guénon says "... thus it is that Descartes' mechanistic physics could not but pave the way for materialism."¹⁸ Moreover, the notion of "matter" as understood by modern physicists is "... complex and even in some ways contradictory, [and] seems to have been as strange to the ancient Westerners as it is still to the Orientals."¹⁹

The purpose of Guénon's approach is of course to break

down the doors of materialism which has enclosed and quantified our domain. The introduction of spiritual quality and the opening of our world to higher realms is necessary for a restoration of traditional cosmology. We will give an outline of Guénon's cosmological scheme of things later. If the concept of quality in our domain were understood, there would be some remarkable conceptual consequences which would strain the credulity of the modern mind. For example, Guénon says that the applications of empirical sciences are only possible because the world has solidified and that "... such would not have been the case in earlier periods, when the world was not so 'solid' as it has become today, and when the corporeal and subtle modalities of the individual domain were not so completely separated."²⁰

Another modern scientific development is statistics, which again is useful, but entirely devoid of any power of true explanation. Statistics merely supports an hypothesis, while several hypotheses may account for the same statistics. When reality is construed qualitatively, contrary to modern science, it is understood that the same cause does not produce identical effects (just as no two things can be entirely equal), nor are the same effects the result of identical causes - there is only analogy. There is of course a pattern, otherwise the world would be unintelligible. Since statistics reduces reality to numerical entities by regarding repetitions of phenomena as identical, it ceases to be an exact explanation of reality and forces reality

into a preconceived quantitative mold, thereby discounting that very quality which is the source of any real explanation.

Only mathematics can claim to be an "exact" science, and its domain is quantity: "... that being the case, all the rest of modern science is, and can only be, a tissue of more or less crude approximations, and that not only in its applications, in which everyone is compelled to acknowledge the inevitable imperfections of the means of observation and measurement, but even from a purely theoretical view as well."²¹ In a footnote to this Guénon continues: "Where, for example, has anyone ever seen a 'heavy material point', or a 'perfectly elastic solid', an 'unstretchable and weightless thread', or any other of the no less imaginary 'entities' with which this science is replete, though it is regarded as being above all else 'rational'."²²

In his rush to condemn modern science Guénon does not give much balance to the subject. Indeed he could be misunderstood as being anti-scientific and calling for a return to a more primitive way of life. This is not at all the case, and if he shows little quarter in his attacks, he is only counterbalancing the role that empirical science and its apparent invulnerability plays in the modern mind. Guénon's entire purpose is to place rationalism and empiricism in their proper perspective within the overall domain of knowledge. Indeed, some forms of ignorance, as Sankaracharya says,²³ can be likened to mistaking a rope for a snake, and a kind of mistaken identity is exact-

ly the rationalist's and empiricist's failure when they take a description of phenomena as an explanation. If the rationalist and the empiricist could be receptive to the notion of quality and knowledge outside their own methodology, their methods would immediately be recognized as minor and extremely limited within the totality of human knowledge. To quote Guénon:

We must insist a little on this last distinction: What we wish to indicate by it is that we see no essential harm in the development of certain sciences, even if we find that far too much importance is given them; it is only a very relative knowledge, and it is right that everyone should turn his intellectual activity on to what suits his natural talents and the means at his disposal.²⁴

Les principes du calcul infinitésimal is Guénon's most specialized effort in bringing modern science into harmony with metaphysical principles. Mathematics can be understood as the backbone to modern physics and therefore any change in the basic modern mathematical concepts inevitably alters the theoretical construct of modern physics. Guénon begins the work by establishing metaphysical principles and then "... procedant en quelque sorte en sens inverse de la science profane."²⁵ The basic concept of number is dealt with in the beginning, followed by such concepts as the infinite and the indefinite, quantity, continuity and discontinuity, and the infinitesimal. His best discussion of the relationship between analysis and synthesis is found here, where he shows that analysis does not, and can

never, lead to synthesis. This particular work applies the discussion to the mathematical sphere, but it also serves as an analogy for other domains, such as the empirical sciences, which are rooted in analysis and are thereby incapable of leading to a synthesis of knowledge.

Solidification of the cosmos, to continue where we left off, is a preliminary stage in the inevitable cyclical descent leading to the final stage of dissolution. Materialism, Guénon states, has already lost much ground "...in the domain of scientific and philosophical theory, if not in the common mentality, and this is so far true that, as pointed out earlier, the very notion of 'matter' as it existed in these theories has begun to fade away and dissolve."²⁶ Solidification implies at least a relative degree of stability, but this stability is quite ephemeral and illusory because the solidified world is now incapable of resisting influences of a lower order. Fissures occur to destroy that relative stability, and those fissures can only open up to what is below materialism "... in other words, that which 'interferes' with the sensible world through those 'fissures' can be nothing but inferior 'cosmic psychism' in its most destructive and disorganizing forms"²⁷

One of the manifestations of this dissolving tendency is the neo-spiritualism which arose as a direct result of the preceeding materialism. The neo-spiritualists, according to Guénon, give a facade to a sacred orientation, but in reality

they both transpose materialist notions onto the spiritual (Guénon terms it "transposed materialism", which means materialism transposed beyond the corporeal domain)²⁸ and substitute irrational or lower psychic elements for the supra-rational (as is the case with many mediums who take their psychic experiences for spiritual experiences) to form a melange that has the net result, in Guénon's eyes, of a further "fall" into the profane. To distort the sacred is even, according to Guénon, worse than just ignoring it, it is satanic. Guénon's works, Le Théosophisme and L'Erreur Spirite, are devoted to pointing out the errors of neo-spiritualism, a term which includes both the occultists and spiritualists. Guénon takes great care to not confuse these two groups, but nevertheless they both partake in the dissolving tendencies of the present world.

Le Théosophisme is a denunciation of the theosophical movement started by Madame Blavatsky in the late nineteenth century. If Guénon attacked the Theosophists with particular vigor it was probably owing to their popularity at that time, for he was also vehemently opposed to most of the modern occult movements. He regarded their origins and their teachings as false. Occult groups usually claimed ties to antiquity or to the Orient and took on a religious character with dogma, ritual and symbols. The spiritualists are another group which arose before the turn of the century, and grew out of the need to explain various psychic phenomena (ghosts, the experience of mediums, etc.) that

the materialists denied or ignored.

On a positive side, in L'Erreur Spirite Guénon clarified the distinction between "metempsychosis", "transmigration" and "reincarnation".²⁹ These notions were confused by the neo-spiritualists. Reincarnation is a metaphysical impossibility, according to Guénon, because it is impossible to pass through the same state twice.³⁰ The phenomena used by the neo-spiritualists to prove reincarnation is what Guénon calls metempsychosis "... au sens où l'entendaient notemment les Orphiques et les Pythagoriciens."³¹ Metempsychosis, as the word indicates, involves the psychic elements in man which leave the body after death and are then able to pass to other living beings such as men or animals. These elements may give the illusion of reincarnation in some cases (cases in which sensitive individuals may be influenced enough by them to think they are "recalling" past lives). In other cases they may give the illusion of spirits (the so-called "spirits" which "communicate" through mediums) since they may have a temporary independent existence. These elements may also be transmitted in an hereditary sense,³² much like the hereditary potential of the body. It is important to note that these elements do not at all constitute that aspect of the being which transmigrates. Transmigration is the passing of the being from one state of existence to another.³³ This will be dealt with later.³⁴

Despite the pessimistic overtones of Guénon's eschatology,

periodic restorations are always possible. He envisioned the restoration of a "true" intellectual elite, that is, an elite aware of metaphysical principles and capable of playing an efficacious role in a traditional restoration. If this elite should fail it would at least serve as the seeds for the next manvantara, as will, in any case, all things of genuine value in this manvantara, so that the next manvantara will begin in a state of pristine purity, as will the beginning of all manvantaras.

While the world inevitably degenerates, it is not inevitable that everyone need always participate in that degeneration. Hence a being may very well attempt to improve the conditions by bringing civilization into harmony with traditional sacred principles. Guénon's positive alternative to the modern profane world is the subject of our next chapter.

NOTES

1. René Guénon, The Crisis of the Modern World, trans. by Marco Pallis and Richard Nicholson (London: Luzac and Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 10.
2. René Guénon, Formes traditionnelles et cycles cosmique (Paris: Gallimard), 1970.
3. René Guénon, The Reign of Quantity (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1972), chapt. 1.
4. George Frederick Kunz remarks: "... there were those who held that precious stones, in common with all created things, were corrupted by the sin of Adam." p. 44. The Curious Lore of Precious Stones (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1971). Originally published in 1913 by J.B. Lippincott Company.
5. Note by Marco Pallis in The Crisis of the Modern World, p. 43.
6. See our chapter on the Primordial Tradition, p. 58.
7. Guénon, Crisis, p. 11.
8. Augustine envisioned a similar role for reason: "And yet truth is not reached by reasoning, but is itself the goal of all who reason." Of True Religion, trans. by J.H.S. Burleigh (Chicago: Henry Regnary Company, 1968), p. 69.
9. Ibid., p. 103.
10. Guénon, Crisis, p. 54.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 52-53.
13. René Guénon, Les principes du calcul infinitésimal (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), p. 11. "Invention" would apply to Descartes' "mechanics" since, for Guénon, it does not apply to the reality of things. Joseph Campbell cites the words of a Zanzibar Swahili: "If the story was beautiful, the beauty belongs to us all; if it was bad, the fault is mine only who told it." Flight of the Wild Gander (Chicago: Regnary, 1972), p. 18.
14. Guénon, Quantity, p. 61.

15. Ibid., p. 118.
16. Ibid., p. 119-120.
17. Ibid., p. 120.
18. Ibid., p. 121.
19. ibid., p. 25.
20. Ibid., p. 161.
21. Ibid., p. 87.
22. Ibid., p. 342, note 38.
23. Sri Sankaracharya, Brahma-Sutra-Bhasya, trans. by Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Swami Chidatmānda, 1965), chapt. 1 "Samanvaya - Reconciliation through proper interpretation" section I, p. 2, note 8.
24. René Guénon, East and West, trans. by William Massey (London: Luzac and Co., 1941), p. 54.
25. Guénon, Les principes du calcul, p. 13.
26. Guénon, Quantity, p. 197-198.
27. Ibid., p. 202.
28. Ibid., p. 260.
29. Luc Benoist claims that these distinctions are impossible to find elsewhere. "Perspectives générales," Etudes Traditionnelles, special edition # 293-294-295 (July-Aug., Sept., Oct.-Nov., 1951), p. 265.
30. Guénon symbolizes the changing states with a three dimensional spiral, where the central axis represents the being and each radius a plane of reflection. The axis may intersect each plane at only one point. Each plane, being a state, in which the being may be manifested, may only be passed through once.
31. René Guénon, L'Erreur Spirite (Paris: Editions Traditionnelles, 1974), p. 206.

32. See ananda Coomaraswamy on the same subject in "Recollection, Indian and Platonic, and on the One and only Transmigrant", Supplement to The Journal of the American Oriental Society 64, #2, 1-42.
33. Guénon, Spirite, p. 211-212.
34. See Chapter IV, p. 95-96

PRIMORDIAL TRADITION

Guénon's criticism of the modern world was not simply an empty diatribe without any positive alternative. To him the alternative to the modern world of progressivism was a "traditional" civilization and in its most pristine form the "Primordial Tradition". This is almost an antithesis to the modern materialist West because in it the highest form of human endeavor is metaphysics, to which all other knowledge and action are subordinated.

The term "Primordial Tradition" is Guénon's rendition of the Hindu term Sanatana Dharma. In L'Etudes sur L'Hindouisme¹ he gives a lengthy explanation for this choice of words. Sanatana means perennial or perpetual, thereby referring to an indefinite extension of time. Guénon claims that Sanatana also has the sense of "primordial". He defines perpetual as that which exists throughout a given cycle of time. Therefore it is only logical that anything perpetual must have also been primordial. That which is primordial serves as a temporal reflection of the eternal which itself transcends time and is not an indefinite extension of time as it is commonly and mistakenly understood to be. Dharma, from the verbal root dhri which has the sense of "to carry, maintain or sustain", is similar to our word "tradition" which means etymologically "transmission". Thus when the word "primordial" is joined with "tradition" it signifies the transmission and maintenance

of eternal principles, or the "norm" or "law" that has existed since the beginning. Guénon understands this to mean nothing other than the transmission of sacred knowledge (he only acknowledges a profane "point of view", and denies any such thing as a profane knowledge).

Taking the Vedic tradition as his source, Guénon declares that present humanity has its origin at the beginning of this manvantara, and the laws or norms constituting the Primordial Tradition were formulated by the present Manu, or cosmic intelligence, which reflects the divine will and expresses the universal order.

The expression of this will in each state of manifested existence is called Prajapati or the "Lord of produced beings"; and in each particular cosmic cycle this same will manifests itself as Manu who gives the cycle its proper law. Manu should not therefore be taken for the name of a mythical, legendary or historical personage; it is properly speaking the name of a principle, which can be defined, in accordance with the meaning of the verbal root man, as "cosmic intelligence" or "thought reflecting the universal order."⁴

The chief of the supreme spiritual center of a cycle, from whence the title of Guénon's work Le Roi du Monde, represents "... en quelque sorte Manu lui-même"⁵, and serves as the human expression of Manu by his function as well as by the degree of knowledge he has attained.

Just as a temporal origin serves as a reflection of the eternal principle (the first words of the Gospel of John, for example, may be translated alternatively as "In the Principle" or "In the beginning"), and becomes the primordial determinant

of all subsequent time, so a geographical center serves as a spatial determinant. The Primordial Tradition has, and must have, a central geographic location, serving as a spatial reflection of the absolute in its omnipresent capacity. This is all the more obvious when we remember,⁶ according to Guénon, that space and time are not quantitative continuums nor a succession of homogeneous units, but rather, qualitative continuums. Guénon posits the North Pole as that original location since that position is the geographical equivalent of a symbolic center.⁷ He, however, is not simply contented with symbolic consistency, but offers as evidence the survivals of certain myths in the Vedas; "... cela est expressement affirme dans le Veda, aussi bien que d'autre livres sacres."⁸ He gives as a reference "... le remarquable ouvrage de B.G. Tilak, The Arctic Home in the Veda." In Guénon's opinion, the legendary Tula or Hyperborean Thule represents the first and supreme center for this manvantara. It is also regarded in myths as the sacred island par excellence. According to Greek legend the Hyperboreans were inhabitants of a region north of the river Oceanus. The climate was perpetually in Spring and these inhabitants allegedly lived for thousands of years, enjoying all sorts of felicities. Vergil situated this region under the North Pole.⁹ Thule was an island at the northern-most region of the North Sea and represented the northern limit of the habitable world for the ancient Greeks.¹⁰

Guénon's conception of the changing locus of the Primordial

Tradition, and also secondary traditions, is somewhat more complex, given the notion of qualitative space and time; thus the locality changes with the different temporal cycles. Guénon conceives of a succession of locations for this supreme spiritual center. As the cosmos becomes ever more solidified this location becomes ever more concealed from the world in the same process. At present, according to Guénon's Le Roi du Monde, the enclave of the Primordial Tradition is located in Central Asia at a center named Agarttha. This is a spiritual center established in the terrestrial world and run by an organization which has the role of conserving integrally the "Primordial Tradition" or "primordial wisdom". It is by this organization that the primordial wisdom is transmitted to those who are capable of receiving it. Guénon's discussion of Agarttha was prompted by two books, Mission de L'Inde (1910) by Saint-Yves d'Alveydre and Beasts, Men and Gods by Ferdinand Ossendowski, both of which recounted the legend of an underground kingdom of Agarttha where the "King of the World" resides.

Le Roi du Monde is Guénon's most evidently "occult" work, it was written in 1927 and he never repudiated it. This may be what Whithall N. Perry was referring to when he wrote that "[Guénon] was also from his early years an occultist to an extent that left in varying degrees a taint to the end of his life on an otherwise lucid exposition."¹¹ In spite of Guénon's early occult ties, he must not be mistaken for an occultist.

All of his conclusions result from metaphysical principles and conform to a synthetic conception. If he perceived all facts as reflections of a spiritual order it was only natural that Aqarttha should be postulated within the holistic context of a symbolic universe:

Maintenant, sa localisation dans une région déterminée doit-elle être regardée comme littéralement effective, ou seulement comme symbolique, ou est-elle à la fois l'un et l'autre? A cette question, nous répondrons simplement que, pour nous, les faits géographiques eux-mêmes, et aussi les faits historiques, ont, comme tous les autres, une valeur symbolique, qui d'ailleurs, évidemment, ne leur enlève rien de leur réalité propre en tant que les faits, mais qui confère, en outre de cette réalité immédiate, une signification supérieure.¹²

Somehow we think this answers only half the question, where the literal can be taken as also symbolic. That an historical fact in its symbolic role reflects a transcendental reality is easy to understand; and Guénon most certainly understands Aqarttha to be a literal fact. He treats the contact between Melchizedek and Abraham as an "investiture" and as an historical event that represents the "... point de jonction de la tradition primordiale..." with the Hebrew tradition. He sees Melchizedek as the Manu of the Hebrew tradition:

C'est pourquoi il est 'sans généalogie', car son origine est 'non-humaine', puisque il est lui-même le prototype de l'homme; et il est bien réellement 'fait semblable au Fils de Dieu', puisque, par la Loi qu'il formule, il est, pour ce monde, l'expression et l'image même du Verbe divin.¹⁴

However the other side of the question remains unanswered. Cannot Aqarttha be symbolic without being literally true? Guénon

most clearly does not take all myths and legends as literal events, and many times understands them to be symbolic of transcendental cosmic realities. Could not this legend of Agarttha be a sort of intrinsic human response to a spiritual reality, simply another form of a mythical paradise? Guénon seriously posits, for example, the notion that representatives of the Primordial Tradition emerged from that spiritual enclave to transmit an unbroken tradition and sees the "three wise men" as Christianity's connection with Agarttha. Following the explanation given by Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, Guénon considers these three chiefs of Agarttha, and the gifts they offer, as a salute to Christ as king, priest, and prophet or spiritual master par excellence.¹⁵

To continue, there are secondary spiritual centers which which must not be confused with the different localizations of the supreme center:

Du temoignage concordant de toutes les traditions, un conclusions se dégage très nettement: c'est l'affirmation qu'il existe un 'terre saint' par excellence, prototype de toutes les autres 'terres saintes', centres spirituel auquel tous les autres centres sont subordonnées.¹⁶

Thus Jerusalem and Mecca are secondary centers with respect to the primordial center; "Toute tradition ortodoxe est un reflet et, pourrait-on dire, un 'substitut' de la tradition primordiale. ..."¹⁷ Those secondary centers represent primary centers within their own respective traditions.

Each new locality of the supreme center is preceeded by

the destruction of the old, just as all death, for homo religiosus, is a rite of passage preceeding a rebirth.

The knowledge that constitutes a tradition and is passed on from one generation to the next by means of a body of symbols is spiritual, which for Guénon is synonymous with intellectual. Any knowledge outside the spiritual realm is, properly speaking, not a traditional element; indeed, even the use of the word "knowledge" within a profane context is a misuse of the word by Guénon's reckoning. Tradition is synonymous with spiritual knowledge; moreover, it is "non-human" or "supra-human" by its very nature. A civilization preserving a genuine tradition, or body of symbols embodying a spiritual knowledge, is constructed as a reflection of divine principles. Consequently it both orients and offers the means for Self-realization or salvation for all members of that civilization, regardless of their livelihood. By containing the "principles" of spiritual knowledge as well as the "form", a traditional civilization is quite capable of adapting itself to whatever contingencies may befall it. "Principles" and "form" are analogous to "spirit" and "letter" and are at the heart of the notion of a perennial philosophy which assumes that the many forms in the various traditions around the world represent the same eternal principles.¹⁸

If we assume that primordial man was spiritual and traditional, while modern man is materialistic and utilitarian, it follows that symbolism comes before function. This of course must be understood as a logical priority where "symbolism" and

"function" are not, strictly speaking, two separate modes of human endeavor for traditional man. The symbolic and utilitarian sides of an act are co-existent, with the symbolic side fulfilling the higher spiritual purpose of any given act. Hence the traditional farmer simultaneously cultivates the land and re-enacts a cosmic myth. Furthermore the understanding that symbolism comes before function can logically be extended to include all human action, so that in reality every human act can be a rite. In this connection Guénon points out that karma means action but also has the technical meaning of ritual action. From such a viewpoint "every occupation is a priesthood."¹⁹ In this way every human act and form of livelihood, by being also a rite, may serve as a base of departure and a means of Self-realization as well as offering its more immediate utilitarian value.

Tradition should now be understood as a supra-human knowledge handed down from one generation to the next via a body of symbols properly adapted to each form of livelihood. It thus accommodates itself to every human possibility and serves as a means to Self-realization or salvation (these are two different spiritual paths we will deal with later), as well as serving its proper utilitarian function within society as a whole. The purpose of the class system (varna) in India is to account for those major divisions of human nature which constitute a fraction of the whole nature of "Universal Man" as indicated

by the purusha-sukta of the Rig-Veda. Universal man in this context refers analogously to primordial man,²⁰ which is man as an integrated whole who possesses all the possibilities of human nature in full. These possibilities become divided when applied to "average man" who is also "fallen man" who has lost the realization of this integrated wholeness. If we reverse the process of this fall from "Universal Man" to "average man" it becomes evident that when the latter recovers the wholeness of the former by integrating²¹ all the possibilities of human nature, he thereby transcends the class system and actually rises above it. This is the significance of the sannyasi who, by abandoning the lower stages of life within the class system, is performing the social equivalent of giving up his ego. By extension of these principles we may assume that primordial man, who, according to Guénon, was integrated, had no need of a class system since all men were equal in the fullness of their realized selves.²² Modern man, on the contrary, recognizes no class system because he does not acknowledge a natural social hierarchy, the net result being that all men are regarded as equal and uniform. Here we encounter again the syzygy, "uniformity" and "unity", which exists in the domain of all manifestation and which is here applied specifically to the social domain. Uniformity prevails when differences are discounted and superiority, in whatever degree or of whatever nature, is severely reduced. Since individuals must be reduced to their lowest common denominator to be seen as equals, "... the

'levelling' always works downwards, indeed it could not work in any other way, being itself only an expression of the tendency towards the lowest, that is, towards pure quantity..."²³

Thus an individual may be outside the class system in one of two ways; either above it, ativarna, as a fully integrated human being, or below, avarna,²⁴ as a profane being who is increasingly more individuated (egoistic) and hence separated from the true self.

It is appropriate to mention at this point the practice of anonymity as found in a traditional society. It is often noted how difficult it is to attach names of artists to specific works of art in the Middle Ages, both because of a lack of individual style and because of a lack of signature - a problem not encountered in the Renaissance and subsequent periods when individual style and authorship are quite evident. Anonymity in this case is the opposite of individualism and again is the social equivalent of ego-lessness. Anonymity ~~deserves to be con-~~trasted with modern ideas of individual expression in the art world today, where, more than ever, the artist is concerned with making a "name" for himself through some original form of aesthetic creation. Traditional man, on the contrary, uses his craft as a means for surpassing his individuality expressed in "name and form" (nama and rupa). Even if he did not realize his true self by transcending his "name and form", the tradition of anonymity nevertheless preserved the possibility of this

transcendental achievement of ego-lessness.

Those who have not effectively attained to such a state [ego-lessness] must at least, as far as their capabilities permit, use every endeavor to reach it, and they must consequently and no less consistently ensure that their activity initiates the corresponding anonymity so that it might be said to participate therein to a certain extent, and it will then furnish a 'support' for a spiritual realization to come.²⁵

A man's function in a traditional civilization is his "spiritual discipline"; it suits his nature, of whatever kind, and orients him towards Self-realization. This, according to Guenon, is just the opposite of anonymity in modern industry, since the laborer in that case is nothing more than a mechanical unit, equally interchangeable with all other units. The product itself, however, has no deliberate relationship to the real nature of the laborer, since any such consideration is incompatible with modern industry. The product of a traditional craftsman is the mimesis of a divine archetype - the artist expresses in form the formlessness of the divine. The product of industry on the other hand is nothing more than an exact duplicate of its prototype, designed purely for its utilitarian function, perhaps with aesthetic (in the sense of sensual stimulation) considerations. It has no value to the worker as a means to fulfillment because it in no way reflects the true nature of the divine through that individual and leads nowhere other than to its practical efficacy.

If a tradition is understood in its totality as a single doctrine, then account must be taken within that doctrine of

two complementary aspects known as the esoteric and the exoteric, terms that Guénon borrowed from certain Greek schools. These correspond respectively to the interior and the exterior of a doctrine, or to use Christian parlance, the spirit and the letter. The relationship between these two complements varies widely from one tradition to the next and from one age to the next. If we understand primordial creation to have had a transparent quality about it so that the formless had not yet become veiled by form, as happens when cosmic solidification occurs, but rather was reflected by form as a placid alpine lake reflects the sun, then we can understand that the initial condition of tradition was so unified that the exterior and the interior had not as yet separated into two distinct complements. Under those original conditions the use of the two terms, exoterism and esoterism, is not justified.

Guénon visualized the Hindu tradition as that tradition which "...dérive le plus directement de la Tradition primordiale, si bien qu'elle en est en quelque sort comme la continuation à l'extérieure...."²⁶ He declared that it makes the least distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric "...because the tradition is in fact too completely unified to appear either in two separate bodies of doctrine or even under two complementary aspects of this kind."²⁷ On the other hand there are other traditions where that unity is divided, and the two aspects are so unbalanced that one aspect predominates almost completely over

the other. We say "almost" since "interior" and "exterior" are correlative and always imply one another regardless of the imbalance in question. Alchemy, says Guénon, is an example in which the interior or esoteric almost entirely predominates so that only the written documents and the symbols may be considered its exoteric side, while the interpretation and oral transmission are the esoteric: "... but the part played by exoterism is in that case much reduced, and seeing that it has no real reason for existing except in relation to esoterism, it is even questionable whether these two terms can any longer be applied legitimately."²⁸

Christianity presents a special case for Guénon in reconciling the exoteric/esoteric division. He understands that Christianity originally had an esoteric character that subsequently became exoteric. He says this is confirmed by the fact that Islam regarded primitive Christianity as a tariqah (esoteric way) and not a shariyah (legislative and social way). Furthermore the well-known Gospel saying, "render unto Caesar what is Caesars", is evidence for Guénon that Christianity originally did not possess a political character which would be part of the exoteric function. He believes that Christians made a deliberate "descent" from the from the esoteric domain to the exoteric so as to avoid the loss of Christianity altogether. This descent was neither a degeneration, an accident, nor a deviation, but was rather a conscious effort by Christians to retain a genuine tradition,

which Guénon claims was in danger from the historical conditions of late antiquity. The net result was that esoteric Christianity became "exteriorized" in order to "preserve" the survival of tradition in the West.

This process of "exteriorization" centers on the efficacy of rites and the relationship of the individual to that efficacy. Guénon holds that a rite has an existence independent from the individual, and that, in the transmission of spiritual influence which occurs in a rite, individuals serve as mediums, playing a passive role as initiates and an active role as initiators. We will merely say at this time that the individual is a particular mode of the being; in other words the individual does not constitute the entire human being but is rather one of its elements. The relationship between the individual and the being will be clarified later in our chapter on cosmology where we discuss the microcosm. However, we must now state that since the individual serves as a particular mode of the being, it can also be said that the individual serves as its "instrument". Thus, if an unqualified individual were to be baptized (assuming for the moment that baptism is an esoteric rite) active realization will not have been initiated. Nevertheless, since that rite has an independent existence and all human individuals contain at least the potential for realization, by the very fact of being human, it follows that the rite must retain at least a virtual efficacy. The operation of the rite would then no longer be in the esoteric domain, which is the domain of

active realization, but rather the exoteric. Exoteric initiation is then virtual, like a seed which has been planted - not actively growing, yet "waiting" for the proper conditions for germination.

Guénon declares that this exteriorization of Christian rites occurred at least by the time of Constantine and the Council of Nicea (325 a.d.). However, from an exterior point of view, the rites and sacraments remained the same. Early Christianity was not open to all, but restricted its membership to those who had the proper qualifications or had fulfilled the proper requirements. The fact that infant baptism was a later practice (beginning around the time of St. Augustine) is, according to Guénon, positive evidence that initiatory qualifications had disappeared. A long and rigorous period of preparation for baptism is an obvious impossibility if infant baptism is performed as soon as possible after birth. He sees its introduction as evidence of a radical conceptual change in the function of baptism. The fact that the primitive Church did not perform its rites in front of non-initiates (whereas it does today) is additional evidence for Guénon that early Christianity was esoteric. One consequence of exteriorization is that the effects could not surpass the individual domain, hence salvation, rather than supra-individual states of realization, became the summum bonum of Christianity.

Guénon adds that since the exoteric rites contain the "letter" and are analogous to the esoteric order, the rites

still contain the possibility of operating on the esoteric level. Special conditions, however, must come into play for this transposition from a lower order to a higher order to take place and work as a true initiation. The exoteric rites could supplement the traditional initiations outside of Christianity proper and in that case the exoteric rites would serve an esoteric function.²⁹ Examples of such orders with initiations are the Rose-Croix and the Knights Templars and other forms of what he terms Christian "hermeticism".³⁰ According to Guénon, hermeticism is a body of doctrines of Egyptian origin. Although Hermes is Greek he is identical to the Egyptian Thoth who plays the role of conservator and transmitter of the tradition. The body of hermetic doctrines in the Christian tradition dealt with the "royal art" or the "little mysteries", contrasted with the "sacerdotal art" or the "great mysteries".³¹ The meanings of these two concepts will become more fully apparent later on.³² Guénon also mentions the Hesychasts of the Greek Church as definitely possessing an esoteric rite. There are certain formulas of words among this group which are comparable to the mantras of the Hindu tradition; comparable in that these distinct distinct formulas are passed on, along with a technique of invocation. All of this is quite distinct from the exoteric rites of baptism and confirmation.³³

Initiation is practiced in esoterism and implies a certain qualification. Religion, on the other hand, is available to all without reservation. Religion is therefore exoteric by defini-

tion, a fact which brings us to the specific characteristics of religion and its connection with tradition. Guénon understands a religion to be a specific mode in which a sacred tradition may be manifested. Therefore not all traditions are religions or even religious. He sees a religion as comprising three concomittant elements: dogma, moral law, and a cult or form of worship - the first being the intellectual, the second the social and the third its ritual aspect which participates in both of the former.³⁴ Each of these may, of course, be found in other traditions, but any of the latter must contain all three to be a religion. He is even more specific:

... religion is difficult to apply strictly outside the group formed by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which goes to prove the specifically Jewish³⁵ origin of the idea that the word now expresses.

Guénon further characterizes religion as one of the most sentimental forms of tradition,³⁶ and as most particularly suited to the western mentality which is so individualistic and moralistic.

The transmission of sacred knowledge, which the word "tradition" signifies, involves an initiation that confers spiritual efficacy capable of "transforming" the participants. This transformation may take place by an indefinite number of means but the aim is always the effective and active attainment of higher states of the being. The general notion of initiation was of primary importance for Guénon during his Cairo years and serves as the principal subject of two posthumous books, Aperçus sur l'initiation and Initiation et réalisation spirituelles, both

of which are collections of articles previously published in Etudes Traditionnelles. This concentration on initiation was probably instigated by the personal correspondences and requests of those "captured" by the spirit of his works and seeking a genuine initiatory path. Guénon declares in short:

...initiation proprement dite consiste essentiellement en la transmission d'une influence spirituelle, transmission qui ne peut s'effectuer que par le moyen d'une organisation traditionnelle régulière, de telle sorte qu'on ne saurait parler d'initiation³⁷ en dehors du rattachement à une telle organisation.

Initiation, as Guénon understands the term, is attached to the esoteric not the exoteric. Consequently, in the Christian tradition the sacrament of baptism is not, strictly speaking, an initiation; but there is certainly an analogy to be seen between the sacraments and initiation, or to use the Hindu terms, samskara and diksha.³⁸ All may participate in the sacraments, which is not to say that everyone participates in the same rites. For example, in the case of Hinduism, only one of the twice-born may participate in the upanayana when the investiture with the pavitra (the brahmanic cord) takes place, "mais à vrai dire, cette restriction est inhérente à la constitution même de la société traditionnelle hindoue..." and is therefore not an individual determining factor as an esoteric qualification would be.

Individuals who perform rites of initiation are transmitters and, in another sense, custodians of the tradition. The indi-

vidual as custodian is the support of the tradition and a link in the spiritual chain. It is the tradition which is important and not the knowledge or the moral purity of the transmitter: "Cela explique d'ailleurs que l'efficacité du rite accompli par un individu soit indépendante de la valeur propre de cette individu comme tel, ce qui est vrai également pour les rites religieux."⁴⁰ This is why the Church rejected the Donatist thesis that a morally impure bishop could no longer perform the sacraments. This likewise means that the transmitter need not be fully conscious of the profundity of the rite to confer them efficaciously. All rites and symbols are understood by individuals according to their own capacity, and if individuals perform rites the significance of which they do not understand, they transmit at least virtually the spirit as well as the letter, adding another link in the spiritual chain and thereby keeping intact the efficacy of the rite. As we have said, the efficacy of a rite is entirely independent of the individual who is performing it, provided of course that this individual has already fulfilled the proper qualifications to serve as the performer. These qualifications must be fulfilled because the individual as performer and transmitter is serving as a medium in transmitting the spiritual influence. Thus once the qualifications are fulfilled the efficacy of the rite is independent of the individual medium as such, and the morality or even the spiritual knowledge of the transmitter has no real effect upon the efficacy.⁴¹

Likewise, it matters not whether the individual believes in the rite's efficacy, only whether the technical rules are faithfully observed during the performance of the rite.⁴² Moreover the spiritual chain must be transmitted orally, since the individual is the medium. No genuine initiation can be transmitted by books or mail, as some of the occult groups have been known to do, this being at best a waste of time. It is the oral transmission that insures the spiritual influence of the tradition.⁴³

The chain of a tradition is preserved by the two higher social classes who fulfill the two functions of the spiritual authority and temporal power, represented by the sacerdotium and regnum (the brahmins and the kshatriyas of the Hindu tradition). The Christian equivalent of the spiritual authority is represented by the pontiff and temporal power by the emperor. The regnum, the class of action, is concerned with the social order, whereas the sacerdotium, on the side of contemplation, represents the bridge ("pontiff" means bridge builder) between God and man.⁴⁴ Thus the regnum derives its power from the spiritual authority. This is the significance of the divine right of kings in the West. Guénon points out that Dante, in De Monarchia, defined the respective functions of the pope and emperor and associated the "celestial paradise" with the pontiff and the "terrestrial paradise" with the regnum.⁴⁵ These two functions have corresponding initiations known both in the West and in India as the "little mysteries" or "royal art" and

the "great mysteries" or "sacerdotal art". These initiatory paths correspond to the pitriyana and devayana in the Upanishads. Guénon states that it is only natural that the sacerdotium fulfills a higher function, since a traditional civilization is always based upon a doctrinal principle, hence the function of teaching the doctrine and performing the rites would naturally possess a greater social significance than that which simply maintains the social order.

We have said that rites and symbols are the form by which a sacred knowledge is transmitted. It is now necessary to understand exactly what Guénon means by a "symbol", since he deals at length with symbols in many of his works.

NOTES

1. René Guénon, L'Etudes sur l'Hindouisme, (Paris: Villain et Belhomme - Editions Traditionnelles, 1968), p. 107.
2. René Guénon, Aperçus sur l'initiation, (Paris: Editions Traditionnelles, 1975), p. 61.
3. The present Manu is named Vaivaswata. Guénon, Le Roi du Monde, (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p. 14.
4. René Guénon, Introduction to the study of Hindu Doctrines, trans. by Marco Pallis (London: Luzac and Co., 1945), p. 213.
5. Guénon, Le Roi du Monde, p. 16.
6. See our chapter "Critique of the modern world", p. 19-20.
7. See our chapter "Metaphysics", p. 128-129.
8. Guénon, Formes traditionnelle et cycles cosmic, p. 37.
9. J.E. Zimmerman, Dictionary of Classical Mythology (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 132.
10. Ibid., p. 271. Guénon remarks that the name Tula or Thule is found among very diverse people, such as found in Russia, Central Asia and India. In Sanskrit the name Tula signifies "balance". The "balance" in question is the equilibrium or stability of the world (see Le Roi du Monde, chapter X, p. 82).
11. This is from a personal correspondence by Whithall N. Perry on behalf of Frithjof Schuon, June 15, 1976.
12. Guénon, Le Roi du Monde, p. 96.
13. Ibid., p. 50.
14. Ibid., p. 52. See also note 27 in our chapter on cosmology.
15. Ibid., p. 36.
16. Ibid., p. 95.
17. Guénon, Etudes sur l'Hindouisme, p. 113.

18. Although we might safely state, following Guénon's line of thought, that ultimately each tradition has the same essential ground in Being, manifested differently according to time and space and therefore with different emphasis on aspects of the sacred as a whole, we might also state, historically speaking, that each tradition has a specific role to fulfill within the overall human condition, just as each individual has his own specific role to fulfill. Guénon never does develop this latter theme but it is most certainly implied by a couple of brief statements he has made. In L'Erreur Spirite, p. 206 note 1, he refers to certain conceptions concerning posthumous conditions which are entirely special to the people of Israel. Also, concerning the Gypsies, he states: "Nous devons dire à ce propos [the origin of Gypsies] que l'existence de peuples 'en tribulation', dont les Bohémiens sont un des exemples les plus frappants, est réellement quelque chose fort mystérieux et qui demanderait à être examiné avec attention." Le Roi du Monde, p. 8.
19. Guénon, Quantity, p. 71, quoting A.M. Hocart, Les Castes, p. 27.
20. René Guénon, Le Symbolisme de la croix, trans. by Angus Macnab (London: Luzac and Co. Ltd., 1952), p. 6 note 1. Guénon uses analogies quite often (since it is one of the rules of symbolic correspondance) and this is one of the more important ones that will come up later.
21. This is the "integrated man" of the first six chapters of the Gita.
22. Guénon states: "C'est ce qu'indique dans la tradition hindoue, le mot Hamsa, donné comme le nom de la caste unique qui existait à l'origine, et désignant proprement un état qui est ativarna, c'est-à-dire au delà de la distinction des castes actuelles." Aperçus sur l'initiation, p. 31 note 3.
23. Guénon, Quantity, p. 66.
24. Ibid., p. 78.
25. Ibid., p. 79-80.
26. Guénon, Etudes sur l'Hindouisme, p. 114.
27. Guénon, Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines, p. 165.

28. Ibid., p. 161.
29. Guénon, Aperçus sur l'ésoterisme chrétien (Paris: Editions Traditionnelles, 1973), p. 23-24.
30. Guénon, Aperçus sur l'initiation, p. 259.
31. Ibid., p. 260.
32. See this chapter, p. 61.
33. Guénon, l'ésoterisme chrétien, p. 25.
34. Guénon, Hindu Doctrines p. 103.
35. Ibid., p. 105.
36. N.M.D. Boulet is of the opinion that Guénon had acquired this notion from Matgioi who was very adamant about Western religious sentimentalism.
37. Guénon, Aperçus sur l'initiation, p. 53.
38. Ibid., Chapter XXIII.
39. Ibid., p. 161.
40. Ibid., p. 58.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., p. 110.
43. Guénon does not preclude a "spiritual spark", so to speak, in which the efficacy of a rite may be renewed through the action of qualified individuals in special cases. Also a question arises as to the dream initiations which occur with many shamans. He does not answer the question since he did not raise it, but he does state in The Reign of Quantity, chapter XXVI, that shamanism is a degeneration from the Primordial Tradition. See also our chapter on symbolism, p. 72.
44. Guénon, Le Roi du Monde, p. 15.
45. Guénon, Aperçus sur l'initiation, p. 249.

SYMBOLISM

We have shown that the gulf separating the modern mentality from traditional values, as Guénon envisions them, is immeasurable. Often what the modern mind sees in the ancient and primitive ways as haphazard, self-righteous institutions erected for the vested interests of the social elite and based on nothing more than simple-minded superstition are, for Guénon, institutions founded on eternal principles. What the modern mind sees as a defect in traditional institutions (such as the role of the class system in inhibiting social mobility and thereby suppressing individual freedom and creativity) is seen by the traditional minded as the failure of the individual to fulfill his proper function.

Guénon set up for himself a double task - the destruction of the modern state of mind which he saw resting on nothing but relativism, positivism, and ignorantly chosen pseudo-principles; and, on the positive side, the restoration of tradition. This could be done only by re-establishing a sacred vision of the universe. The formation of an intellectual elite, able to recognize true principles founded in metaphysics, and capable of bringing about the influence of those principles in the world, was the means to this revival.

The formation of this intellectual elite and the restoration of traditional values were intimately connected with the function of symbols and the laws governing that function; Guénon envisioned the world as within a sacred context where "creation

is the primordial revelation."¹ Thus for him the world itself is a symbol and hence all the laws regarding the understanding of symbols apply equally to the world and all in it.

One might ask, "Why did Guénon concentrate so much on symbolism when philosophical or rational expression is so much less foreign to the modern world?" To this he would probably have replied:

Le symbolisme est le moyen le mieux adapté à l'enseignement des vérités d'ordre supérieur, religieuses et métaphysiques, c'est-à-dire de tout ce que repousse ou néglige l'esprit moderne; il est tout le contraire de ce qui convient au rationalisme, et tous ses adversaires se comportent, certains sans le savoir, en véritables rationalistes.²

Guénon devotes a chapter in Aperçus sur l'initiation to the distinction between symbolism and philosophy, which is the same, for Guénon, as symbolism and rationalism. Rationalism rests upon words and the complex formulation of those words. Words are nothing more than the exteriorization of a thought, and a thought is, in its highest sense, a symbol of the transcendent or pure consciousness:

... en ce sens, le langage lui-même n'est pas autre chose qu'un symbolisme. Il ne doit donc pas y avoir opposition entre l'emploi des mots et celui des symboles figuratifs; ces deux modes d'expression seraient plutôt complémentaires l'un de l'autre.³

Philosophy therefore, by its use of words, is really a body of symbols; but there is a major qualification to this claim, inasmuch as rationalism is analytical and discursive, while symbolism is synthetic and intuitive. Intuition, as Guénon uses the term, is not the instinctual intuition on a sub-rational

level such as is found among beasts, but is rather an intellectual intuition on a supra-rational level.

Philosophy's rational and discursive characteristics make it entirely incapable of expanding beyond any domain that is outside reason. The value of reason must be recognized as limited: "... cette valeur ne peut être que relative, comme ce domain l'est également; et du reste, le mot ratio lui-même n'a-t-il pas primitivement le sens de 'rapport'?"⁴ Reason fails in the face of the inexpressible, but where reason finds a barrier, symbolism transcends because of its inherent capacity to interconnect all levels of existence and experience into a synthetic whole as an expression of the principial unity. It thus serves an anagogical function through its ability to connect all levels with the highest. This is so because "Le véritable fondement du symbolisme, c'est, comme nous l'avons déjà dit, la correspondance qui existe entre tous les ordres de réalité...."⁵

However the discursive aspect of language may be minimized when the language is a sacred language or a clear reflection of universal principles, and naturally the purest language would have been the "Adamic" language at the beginning of this manvantara. Because Adam in his primordial innocence knew the essence of all things, he was allowed to name the animals with names that would naturally reflect that essence.⁶ Just as the primordial sacred center moves its location according to the conditions of the cycle, and secondary centers arise, so also

do secondary languages arise. These secondary languages are reflections of the primordial tongue, or the "Parole perdu" of the Masonic tradition, which itself was of supra-human origin like the Primordial Tradition itself.⁷ Languages must adapt to the conditions of a given cycle and if a language is profane it reflects the profanity of the world which uses it, and moreover, the profane language contributes to the successive profanization, just as one lost in a labyrinth becomes even more lost in his movement to escape.

Symbolism is inherent in the very nature of existence while rational thought is inherent only in human nature, seeing it is itself only a human faculty. Thus philosophy at best can only be one form of human wisdom. This human wisdom is also "... 'sagesse mondain', au sens ou le 'monde' est entendu notamment dans l'Evangile: nous pourrions encore, dans le même sens, dire tout aussi bien 'sagesse profane'...." The etymology of philosophia is "love of wisdom" and this indicates to Guénon that philosophy is a preparation for wisdom, or more accurately, an aspiration toward wisdom.⁸ The knowledge proper to symbolism is metaphysical, but this term must be understood with the very special meaning Guénon gives to it and not in the way it is often understood by Western philosophers. Guénon declares that metaphysics has been almost entirely misunderstood in the West, even by Aristotle who applied the term to ontology. Aristotle defined metaphysics as "knowledge of being",⁹ Ontology is certainly

an aspect of metaphysics, limited to the possibilities of manifestation - the primordial determinant - but by being restricted to those possibilities "... it is none the less clearly a determination, and every determination is a limitation at which the metaphysical point of view cannot stop short."¹⁰

Not only does metaphysics in the West stop at the knowledge of Being, it often does not surpass the theoretical realm and this is far too limiting even if the West were to account for the full theoretical side of metaphysics. Metaphysics, according to Guénon, is not only theoretical but actual, something with which philosophy, strictly speaking, cannot deal. All of this will be discussed later when we look at Guénon's concept of metaphysics in chapter V. For the moment we are dealing with symbols, which are the reflections of the metaphysical realm, just as the circumference of a circle, being limited to a given radius, within that limitation reflects the center.

"A first service to truth was Guénon's rehabilitation of symbolic understanding in opposition to scientific epistemology," says Jean Daniélou.¹¹ Guénon's understanding, interpretation and communication of the laws of symbolism are probably his strongest points in expounding the traditional Weltanschauung. Since symbolism itself conforms to the "divine plan" the origin of a true symbol is "non-human" just as creation is "non-human". Something is inherent in the very nature of a symbol which makes it non-human. Because a symbol is inherently so, it is

transparent for those who recognize it and anagogical for those who do not. It matters not whether a symbol is completely understood by those using it. Such a concern is only of relative importance and restricted to the individual involved. "It should be noted that symbols always retain their proper value, even when traced without conscious intention as occurs when symbols, no longer understood, are preserved merely by way of ornamentation."¹² The vestiges of a forgotten tradition remain floating on the stream of "folk-lore". This "folk-lore" may contain those vestiges from a past so far distant, especially among a stable society, that the origin goes far into pre-history. Guénon sees this "folk-lore" as a sort of collective memory rather than a "création populaire". These survivals remain as testimonies to the past, and if sufficiently intact, remain latent and are capable of revivification through renewed comprehension by a sort of spiritual spark - "... for the Spirit that 'bloweth where it listeth' (and when it listeth) can always come to breathe fresh life into the symbols and the rites and give them back their lost meaning and the fullness of their original virtue."¹³ Furthermore, language itself, being a symbol of higher realities translated onto our plane of reference, is also a kind of folk-lore. This explains Guénon's persistent use of etymologies to illustrate the original intention of a given word.

The knowledge Guénon speaks of originates from a "super-

consciousness" of man in contact with a supra-human (or universal) knowledge. The knowledge possessed by folk-lore is therefore retained collectively. The participants of a tradition may be unconscious to a greater or lesser degree of the full significance of a symbol, but it could not be said that the knowledge itself originates from the "unconscious" or, as Guénon prefers to call it, the subconscious or any baser faculties of the human condition.¹⁴ He saw Christianity as an institution surviving by a collective memory and he desired a restoration of true metaphysical values for Christianity. It was a tradition whose spirit, in many cases, was no longer attached to the symbols, but the symbols were genuine and of non-human origin and it was only a matter of rejoining the spirit to the symbol to restore a genuine tradition to its full stature in the Western world.

If these symbols communicate to everyone at their level, it necessarily follows that symbols convey more than one meaning, for all people are not on the same intellectual level. and must in some way be appealed to if they are to continue expressing and transferring a symbol, that is, to continue serving as custodians of the tradition. Guénon states that this is:

... parce qu'elle aide chacun à comprendre plus ou moins complètement, plus ou moins profondément la vérité qu'elle représente selon la mesure de ses propres possibilités intellectuelles. C'est ainsi que les plus hautes qui ne seraient aucunement communicables ou transmissibles par tout autre moyen, le deviennent jusqu'à un certain point lorsqu'elles

sont, si l'on peut dire, incorporées dans les symboles qui les dissimuleront sans doute pour beaucoup, mais qui les manifesteront dans tout éclat aux yeux de ceux qui savent voir.¹⁵

Thus Guénon dispenses, at least partially, with the objection that his metaphysical elucidations are merely inventions or mental fantasies which the members of a given tradition would not themselves understand. Truth is true for all, and if traditions or expressions of that truth vary, the truth is in no way affected, and if it takes a member of one tradition to restore the value of another then that is a perfectly valid function. Furthermore, if the epistemology of symbols operates on sundry levels, that operation has an ontological correspondence. That there are many, in fact an indefinite number of levels is what Guénon calls the "law of correspondence".

By virtue of this law, each thing, proceeding as it does from a metaphysical principle from which it derives all its reality, translates or expresses that principle in its own fashion and in accordance with its own order of existence, so that from one order to another all things are linked together and correspond in such a way as to contribute to the universal and total harmony, which in the multiplicity of manifestation, can be likened to a reflection of the principle unity itself.¹⁶

We will use an example of a circumference reflecting its center. Carrying that over into the "law of correspondence", we need to envision a common point for an indefinite number of radii of different lengths. If each radius expresses that point on its own level of functioning, there arises an indefinite number of concentric circles, each reflecting the same determining

center, yet each restricted to its own circumference. This illustrates the principle for a multiplicity of symbolical hermeneutics, but also we should keep in mind that this does not at all preclude an incorrect use or misinterpretation of symbols.¹⁷ Furthermore, while all levels may be justified and are perfectly valid within their own limits of operation, they are certainly not of equal importance if the principal point of view is taken into account.

Guénon uses two terms, "union of complements" and "resolution of opposites" (discussed respectively in chapters six and seven of Symbolism of the Cross) to express another law of symbolism not related to the "law of correspondence". Things that can be seen in opposition (contemplation and action for example) at one level, can, from a higher point of view, be seen as complements, though not necessarily equal. And, from the highest point of view, these complements can be seen as united and equal. Purusha and prakriti are respectively pure activity and pure passivity,¹⁸ the first cosmological duality and the cosmic male and female, whose "union" is found at all levels of universal existence, for without their "union" nothing exists in the cosmos. This primordial duality, active-passive, is at the very heart of the dual nature of all symbols, just as it applies to all beings in creation. Everything participates in purusha and prakriti, hence an object or a symbol may be viewed from either one of those two points of view, that is, as either

active or passive. The soul, for instance, plays an active role in relation to the body, whereas it plays a passive role in relation to the Spirit. And, as we will see later in our chapter on cosmology, in the macrocosm the lunar sphere plays an active role to the sublunar sphere and a passive role to the solar sphere, just as, mechanically, the moon passively receives the solar rays and actively diverts them to the earth. Each symbol inherently possesses this duality by its participation in existence, although as Guénon says this is not readily apparent to those who tend to systematize. These tend to assume that the various symbolic constructions are only arbitrary, and the consequence of irrational, primitive and superstitious minds.

The notions of malevolence and benevolence or also life and death are further results of the application of this notion of duality.¹⁹ The serpent is a good example of this dual nature of symbols, more aptly termed, the "coincidentia oppositorum". The serpent plays predominantly a malevolent role in the West. Examples are the dragon in the legend of St. George or the serpent which tempted Eve in the Garden. But there is also a less well known example in the biblical prefiguration of Christ known as the "brazen serpent" (Numbers XXI) "... which is also known to be a symbol of Redemption; in this case the perch on which it is placed is equivalent to the cross and also recalls the Tree of Life."²⁰ There is also the staff of Hermes, known as the caduceus, which has two serpents coiled around it. Guénon relates the

caduceus to this dualism:

The serpent that represents life must not be confused with the one representing death, nor the serpent that is a symbol of Christ with the one symbolizing Satan (even when they are so closely combined as they are in the curious figure of the amphisboena or the two headed serpent).²¹

Another example of this dualism is illustrated by Guénon with a quotation taken from St. Hippolytus - "The Messiah and the Anti-christ both have as their emblem the Lion."²²

We have now discussed the rudimentary laws of the language of symbols, and it is easy to see that the "law of correspondence" and the dual nature of symbols can make symbolical hermeneutics quite difficult, particularly for someone who is not acquainted with those laws, or who has a systematic bent of mind and wishes to apply a firm definition to all symbols. Any firm definition, which would limit a symbol, would be impossible if these "laws" are taken into account. These hermeneutical laws do not appear to be a Guénonian discovery, and he does mention the alchemical dictum that says "that which is above is like that which is below, but reverse", but unfortunately he does not give any more information about his sources. However, Guénon did spell those laws out most explicitly and forcefully and never ceased to apply them quite openly in all of his symbolical expositions and historical observations. Mircea Eliade gives similar methodological hermeneutics in his article "Methodological remarks on the study of religious symbolism",²³ but he restricts himself to the limits of Phenomenology instead of committing himself

to the unlimited metaphysical perspective as Guénon has done.

Rites are simply a different mode of symbolic expression. While they go beyond mere sentimental reflection and can be characterized as efficacious for intellectual development and the attainment of spiritual awareness, this is not at all the normal cause and effect relationship as we usually understand it, "The results they help to attain are by no means consequential. They place the being in the position requisite for attainment and that is all."²⁴ These rites and symbols act as a support, point of departure and orientation for the being and serve as a pathway for the being to rise up beyond those means, that is, to transcend them. But rites are not indispensable and Guénon points out that there are many examples in the Vedas of those who failed to perform their rites and yet attained realization. If the results are only fortuitous, they nevertheless must have a foundation in the principal determinant of manifestation for them to help the being retrace its steps back to its origin. In this connection Guénon says that a rite is "normal" and, deriving the term from the Sanskrit rita (cosmic order) he adds that "... le rite n'est pas autre chose que ce qui est conforme à l'ordre...."²⁵ If rites are efficacious and "place the being in the position for attainment", this must be understood in an entirely different sense from a sentimental orientation, although this would assuredly have validity and an efficacy in its own realm yet is not what Guénon is referring to. The efficacy must

be merely consequential to the extent that the being is modified on a psychological level. The non-corporeal modalities of the human being are forced to come into play along with a spiritual influence, and this is what is meant by the preparatory effects of initiation. To this we might add that whatever is "experienced" in the process of preparation is actually superfluous in terms of realization itself since it is the "experiencer" who is being realized. All things experienced are objects of experience, and no matter how subtle or fantastic that experience may be, to the extent that they are not an "experience of the experiencer" they are merely interesting phenomena.²⁶

One of the entirely unique Guénonian positions was his conviction that sacred symbols are more accurate than modern scientific language which is also a body of symbols but does not reflect a transcendental reality. His work Les principes du calcul infinitésimal is primarily a critique of the accuracy of modern scientific symbols, whose foundation is in mathematics.²⁷ It is interesting to contrast him with Jan Van Baal who's opinion typifies the modern conception of traditional symbols:

Religious and scientific symbols belong to opposite ends of the scale of lucidity. The certainties and truths offered by religion necessarily are bricoleurs type: imperfect, defective and fragile; an additional peculiarity is that they may have served other ends in bygone days.²⁸

NOTES

1. René Guénon, Symboles fondamentaux de la science sacrée (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 37.
2. Ibid., p. 31.
3. Ibid., pp. 33-34.
4. Guénon, Aperçus sur l'initiation, p. 131.
5. Ibid., p. 132.
6. Guénon, Symboles fondamentaux, p. 36.
7. Ibid., pp. 68-74.
8. Guénon, Etudes sur l'Hindouisme, p. 107.
9. Guénon, Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines, p. 156.
10. Ibid., p. 157.
11. Daniélou, Lord of History, p. 122.
12. Guénon, Symbolism of the Cross, p. 14, note 3.
13. René Guénon, "Language of the Birds", Sword of Gnosis, ed. Jacob Needleman (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1974), p. 303.
14. Guénon, Symboles fondamentaux, p. 65.
15. Ibid., p. 34.
16. Guénon, Symbolism of the Cross, p. 49.
17. Guénon often refers to the distinction to be drawn between synthesis and syncretism in the cross-traditional comparison of symbols: "Syncretism consists in assembling from the outside a number of more or less incongruous elements which, when so regarded, can never be truly unified; in short, it is a kind of eclecticism, with all the fragmentariness and incoherence that this always implies. Syncretism, then, is something purely outward and superficial; the elements taken in this way can never amount to anything more than borrowings that are incapable of being effectively integrated into a doctrine worthy of the name.
 Synthesis, on the other hand, is carried out essential-

ly from within; by this we mean that it probably consists in envisaging things in the unity of their principle, in seeing how they are derived from and dependent on that principle, and thus uniting them, or rather becoming aware of their real unity, by virtue of a wholly inward bond, inherent in what is most profound in their nature."
Symbolism of the Cross, p. X.

18. In Samkhya it is purusha which seems passive by its inaction and prakriti active by its creativity. In reality it is prakriti which is passive and purusha which is active (actionless activity like Aristotle's unmoved mover). Guénon's vedantic views of purusha and prakriti will be more clear in our chapter V on metaphysics.
19. Guénon, The Reign of Quantity, pp. 245-246.
20. Guénon, Symbolism of the Cross, p. 49.
21. Ibid.
22. Guénon, The Reign of Quantity, pp. 359-360, note 179. From P. Vulliaud, La Kabbale Juive, vol. II, p. 373, quoting from Hippolytus' Antichrist.
23. Mircea Eliade, "Methodological remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism," The History of Religions, Essays in Methodology, ed. Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 86-107.
24. René Guénon, "Oriental Metaphysics," Tomorrow, 12 (Winter 1964), i, p. 10.
25. Guénon, Aperçus sur l'initiation, p. 138.
26. Magic deals with "psychic" phenomena and therefore has nothing to do with any real change of state and should not be confused with initiation and rites of which the aim is a change of state for the being. Likewise, ceremony is merely of a sentimental nature and serves a social function, but has nothing whatsoever to do with real initiation.
27. Robert Amadou, who wrote the preface to Symbolisme de la croix (Paris: Editions Véga, 1957), states: "Quand Guénon declare le symbolisme une 'science exact', sa proposition constitue un 'non-sens'." Quotation taken from "René Guénon et la Loge 'La Grande Triade'", Denys Roman.
28. J. Van Baal, Symbols for Communication (Assen, Van Gorcum and Comp. N.V.? 1971), p. 277.

COSMOLOGY

The Greek word "cosmos" means harmony, and in Guénon's case it is the harmony and balance established through the union of the male and female principles, purusha and prakriti. We have already described the function of this pair in relation to the cyclical descent of time, that is, its progression away from the qualitative and essential principle. In this present chapter we must return to this pair and envision them in connection with the cosmic hierarchy in its ontological descent from the principle, a descent which is the determining factor for that hierarchy. Guénon expresses this double understanding of a spiritual descent in The Reign of Quantity:

This gradual movement away from essential unity can be envisaged from a double point of view, that of simultaneity and that of succession; this means that it can be seen as simultaneous in the constitution of manifested beings, where its degrees determine for their constituent elements, or for the corresponding modalities, a sort of hierarchy; or alternatively as successive in the very movement of the whole of manifestation from the beginning to the end of a cycle.

Existence, from a cosmological perspective, is the female principle playing herself out, that is, acting to manifest all of existence while the male principle, purusha, projects the "idea" which the female acts out.² Prakriti can be described in various ways such as the undifferentiated primordial substance,³ or the "universal substratum", or support of all manifestation. It is also the universal matrix giving birth to all existence:

... it is purely potential and passive, capable of every kind of determination, but never determining itself. Prakriti cannot therefore really be a cause by itself (we are speaking of 'efficient cause'), apart from the action or rather the influence of the essential principle, which is Purusha, and which is, so to speak, the 'determinant' of manifestation;...⁴

Mula prakriti or "primordial Nature" is also described as pradhana or "that which is laid down before all other things";⁵ thereby containing all things in potential. Guénon makes a very clear distinction between "potential" and "possible"; the former is applied to prakriti and the latter to purusha:

Moreover, it is important to distinguish very carefully between 'potentiality' and 'possibility.' The first of these two words implies aptitude for a certain development; it presupposes a possible 'actualization' and can only be applied therefore in respect of 'becoming' or of manifestation; possibilities, on the contrary, viewed in the principal and unmanifested state, which excludes all 'becoming,' can in no way be regarded as potential.⁶

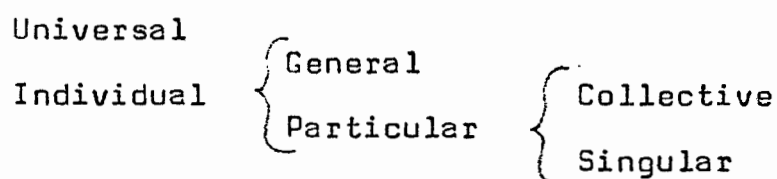
Purusha and prakriti are complementary and correlative when their relationship is taken from the viewpoint of manifestation, that is, a cosmological perspective; but outside of manifestation this correlation is illusory and purusha is seen as the superior principle containing within itself all the possibilities of manifestation, including prakriti. From this perspective the primordial duality is seen to be contained within a principal unity which is Brahma-saguna or Ishwara. This unity is Being, and is properly speaking the subject of ontology;⁷ at this point we are clearly in the realm of metaphysics (beyond physics - beyond nature). Purusha, from this metaphysical perspective, is

in reality Brahma-saguna.

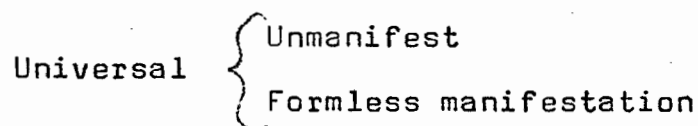
Guénon takes the vocabulary and constitution of the micro-cosm from the Samkhya darshana. He takes care to rectify the popular misconception of Samkhya as a philosophical school of dualism that is incompatible with the non-dualistic Vedanta. He states that Samkhya simply takes a cosmological perspective, rather than a metaphysical one, but that this in no way implies a denial of anything beyond the purusha/prakriti duality. He furthermore states that while Samkhya posits a plurality of purushas it uses the name in the singular thereby emphasizing its essential unity.⁸

The female principle prakriti, "... while necessarily one in its 'indistinction', contains within itself a triplicity which, on becoming actualized under the 'organizing' influence of Purusha, gives rise to the multiplicity of determinations,"⁹ This triplicity is the three gunas which are in complete equilibrium in the unmanifested state of prakriti, but **they become imbalanced or ruptured during manifestation**. All manifestation, of whatever order, contains these three gunas in varying proportions of disequilibrium. The three are sattva, the upward tendency, rajas, the expansive tendency and tamas, the downward tendency. Everything manifested is produced from prakriti - from the grossest field of existence to the finest celestial substance, while purusha remains unaffected and unmodified by that production of "becoming".

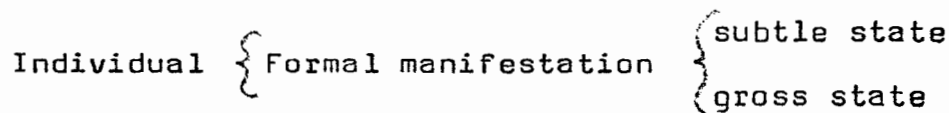
The following diagram is given by Guénon in Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta.¹⁰ It outlines the general characteristics and the major hierarchical constitution of manifestation and is essential for an understanding of many of the concepts mentioned in his works, especially the primary division between the Universal and the individual realms of existence.



The Universal is further subdivided into the unmanifested and formless manifestation. The unmanifested is of course beyond existence and is therefore not a product of prakriti.



The individual realm is also subdivided;



It is form which defines an individual as such, therefore the formless in the universal sense is beyond form or supra-formal, and hence beyond the individual realm. It is important to note that these diagrams apply to both the micro- and macrocosm so that a being in all of its states comprises all of these levels.

All degrees of universal existence, according to Guénon, correspond to states of the being. The formless realm includes the "angelique" (devas in Sanskrit) degrees in the macrocosm and the supra-rational states of the being in the microcosm.¹¹ The gross state is the corporeal world we live in, and the subtle state includes all "... the extra-corporeal modalities of the human being, or of every other being situated in the same state of existence, and also, in the second place, all other individual states."¹² Modes of the being and states are two sides of the manifested being. A state is the level of knowledge of a being which corresponds to a degree of universal existence. A being at a given state may possess several modes, thus the human being possesses both corporeal and extra-corporeal or subtle modes, which belong to higher states of existence than the corporeal mode; "Nevertheless," Guénon says, "if we situate them in the totality of universal existence, they still belong to that degree of Existence in which the human state as a whole is situated."¹³ Once a being has achieved the totality of a given state in its principle and has therefore become fully integrated, it then possesses the potential of achieving higher states while occupying the same mode.

It is difficult to determine the general and the particular since Guénon never clearly defines them; one could wish that he had clarified this rather than concentrating on the failings of his opponents:

The pseudo-metaphysicians of the West are in the habit of confusing with the Universal things which, in reality, pertain to the individual order; or rather, as they have no conception at all of the Universal, that to which they fallaciously apply this name is usually the general, which is properly speaking but a mere extension of the individual.

The individual realm, or the realm comprising both the subtle and the gross states, contains an indefinite number of levels, just as a given segment of line contains an indefinite number of points. If we confine ourselves to one point on that line, this represents a world, such as our corporeal world. Any one of those worlds is probably the general as Guénon understands it. A species within one of those worlds would then be the particular. A singular is a specific individual and the collective is a collection of singulars. Be that as it may, the notion of the general and the particular are really of only minor importance in Guénon's works, whereas the division of the individual and the supra-individual, or formal and formless, is paramount to understanding his view of traditional symbols.

The expression of this hierarchy is inevitably enveloped in traditional symbolism found in the various sacred writings,, traditional scientific works (astrology and alchemy) and artistic expression. The corporeal world we live in, as we noted in our chapter on symbolism, is a symbol for the higher spheres. Just as a beginning is the temporal symbol for principial unity, so the highest is the corresponding spatial symbol for that unity; and similarly, if the end of time represents the reign of quantity,

the lowest order in space is the most quantitative order of manifested existence. The earth is often a symbol for gross manifestation, while the sky is a symbol for the universal realm, either the formless or the unmanifest, depending upon the particular context of that symbol, since the context indicates the application. Also the various celestial bodies symbolically designate the milestones of the non-spatial celestial hierarchy, keeping in mind that as we go upward symbolically we go inward spiritually. We refer to these stations as milestone because the passage through all states, and even the modalities of one state, are really continuous, not discontinuous as one might be led to believe if these "milestones" were taken literally and as a determined number.¹⁵

With the preceeding in mind it is easy to see that ancient astrology was really a study of interior vicissitudes, accomplished by interpreting the "manifested" map in the sky. Astrology was not a study of the "influence" of the stars and planets. The conception of astrology as the study of a "cosmic" influence excercised by means of some kind of gravitational or magnetic waves from the various celestial bodies is really a modern "interpretation" of ancient astrology. The modern interpretation takes the symbolic representation literally. In the same way, the ancient and Far-eastern study of herbs and medicine is also based on a symbolic correspondence. In acupuncture, for instance, a part of the body is taken as a symbol for the whole and there

is a reciprocal relationship between the part and the whole. This is why the methods and effects do not at all correspond to Western physiological conceptions.

When the earth is seen as the center of the universe, as in the Ptolemaic world picture, the earth is a symbolic and existential center, serving as the point of departure for the human being when he passes on through other states. The various concentric circles surrounding the earth, as depicted by ancient astrologers and alchemists, represent ever more subtle realms of manifestation and higher states of the being as we move outward. This scheme of the universe where the center is the "earth" and the outer circle is "heaven" is no more a fixed representation than any symbol is. There is also another type of scheme which places "unity" or heaven in the center and the succeeding concentric circles represent ever **more quantitative** realms.¹⁶ Thus it is easy to see that the center, depending upon its use, may symbolize either purusha or prakriti, and this conforms to the dual nature of symbols which we discussed above.¹⁷

Returning to the celestial hierarchy, we must note that space is a condition of the corporeal realm, but not a condition of subtler orders. Therefore when various localities (loka in Sanskrit) or spheres or realms are mentioned, they are really states. This likewise pertains to the Christian and Islamic doctrines of heaven, purgatory and hell.¹⁸

The number of symbols found for the higher realities is

really indefinite since no one symbol can exhaust the full meaning of what it represents, otherwise the symbol and its object would be identical. The earth, atmosphere and sky are three symbols that Guénon says are found throughout the world. They comprise the totality of manifestation in their symbolism. In this case the earth represents the corporeal realm or the grossest state, the sky the formless and the atmosphere the subtle realm within the individual sphere. But as we noted earlier, symbols are susceptible of a multiplicity of applications in an analogous fashion: thus in the Far East the earth represents the equivalent of prakriti and the sky purusha.¹⁹ The earth may also be taken as the totality of the individual realm, in which case the summit of the mountain, where the earth touches the sky, is the summit of the individual realm. An individual situated on the summit is therefore symbolically represented to be in preparation for communication with the formless or the universal realm.

The symbolism of water will allow us to bring in temporal cycles which we touched upon earlier. Guénon states:

If the symbol of water is taken in its usual sense, then the sum of formal possibilities is described as the 'lower waters' and that of the formless possibilities as the 'upper waters.' From the point of view of cosmogony, the parting of the 'lower waters' from the 'upper waters' is also described in Genesis I, 6 and 7 The primordial waters, before their separation, are the totality of the possibilities of manifestation, in so far as the latter constitute the potential aspect of Universal Being, which is properly speaking prakriti.²⁰

In this case the significance of Genesis I, 2 becomes clear according to Guénon's scheme: "And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The spirit here is purusha and the waters are prakriti.

The biblical account of the separation of the waters mentions the firmament: "And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven."²¹ This subject of the firmament returns us to the concept of the lunar sphere:

... the Lunar Sphere determines the separation of the higher (non-individual) states from the lower (individual) states; hence the double part played by the Moon as Janua Coeli ... and Janua Inferni, a distinction corresponding to that between the deva-yāna and the pitri-yāna.²²

Just as the subtler realms serve as the cause (this can be understood as the seeds or germs) for all the succeeding realms, so the lunar sphere serves as the abode for the germs of the individual, or sublunar sphere.²³

It is in the sphere of the Moon that forms which have completed the full course of their development are dissolved; and it is there also that are preserved the germs of forms as yet undeveloped, since in the case of forms as of everything else, the starting point and the finishing point are necessarily to be found in the same order of existence.²⁴

The significance of the moon as a "narrow door" or "way" in connection with "transformation" (in the etymological sense of passing beyond form) becomes apparent when this relationship

between form and the moon is understood. Also in the Vedic tradition the "pathway of the gods" is beyond the lunar sphere. Gods are beyond form. The "pathway of the ancestors", on the other hand, is a return to form or the realm of individuality. These paths can also be identified with what in the West are the right and left hands of God, corresponding to the "hand of justice" and the "hand of blessing."²⁵ The "hand of justice" forces a return to the sublunar sphere, whereas the right hand allows those who are eligible to pass through and enter into the formless realm.²⁶ In this case the lunar sphere is "... itself sometimes looked on as the 'first heaven' under its aspect of Janua Coeli...."²⁷ Also, since this "first heaven" or lunar sphere is above the "lower waters" and is the abode of Manu, he is therefore just above the "current of forms". That is why:

... c'est Manu qui demeure en effet 'perpetuellement' (en hébreu le ôlam), c'est-à-dire pour toute la durée de son cycle (Manvantara) ou du monde qu'il régit spécialement. C'est pourquoi il est 'sans généalogie', car son origine est 'non-humaine', puisqu'il est lui-même le prototype de l'homme;...²⁸

A fuller development of the significance of a manvantara and its connection with cycles will now become apparent. The best source for Guénon's view of cosmic cycles is Formes traditionnelles et cycles cosmiques, which is actually a posthumous collection, by Roger Maridort, of works previously published by Guénon in Etudes Traditionnelles and Voile d'Isis. We can see now that a cycle is considered "... dans l'acception la plus

générale de ce terme, comme représentant le processus de développement d'un état quelconque de manifestation,...."²⁹ This is in addition to being a chronological process. In a manvantara, the development represented is that of the "lower waters". A change from one manvantara to the next is the process of the destruction of one manvantara and the unfolding of a new one. Thus a "deluge" represents a return to primordial undifferentiation and the flood attains to the level of the lunar sphere. Whatever is worthwhile serves as the seeds for the succeeding manvantara. It is evident that anything worthwhile does not become submerged and must consequently remain on the surface of the waters (Noah's Ark for example), or above the sublunar state so as to serve as a connection from one manvantara to the next. Because of this link the lunar sphere is referred to as the "cosmic memory" according to Guénon (manas, symbolized by the moon, is the rational faculty in the microcosm and also contains the memory). The lunar sphere is also the abode of the pitris, "... that is to say of the beings belonging to the preceeding cycle, who are regarded as the generators of the actual cycle, owing to that causal sequence of which the succession of cycles is but a symbol."³⁰

Ananda Coomaraswamy wrote The Flood in the Hindu Tradition and this serves as a perfect complement to our present subject, although it takes us beyond Guénon's thought per se. Coomaraswamy states that each Manu is a conscious survivor from the

previous manvantara "... and through him the sacred tradition is preserved and transmitted."³¹ In a kalpa there are fourteen manvantaras, each presided over by a Manu, as the name indicates. The present Manu is Vaivasvata. There is also Yama, called the brother of Manu:

Yama and Manu, both designated patriarchs (pitr), are contrasted in this respect, that what whereas Yama being the first man to die was also the first to find out the way to the other world, in other words to map out the outward passage on the pitriyana, and thereby as first settler became king and ruler of all those who followed him, Manu is at once the last and only survivor of the previous³² manvantara and progenitor and law-giver in the present,

If a mountain serves as a geological symbol for the link between the formal and the universal, when a deluge is taken into account it becomes evident that the summit will be the first land to appear as the waters recede, e.g., Mt. Ararat. A mountain summit may have the same significance as the terrestrial paradise: Dante, Guénon points out, situated his earthly paradise on the summit through which he passed prior to his celestial ascent. We must continue with the sublunar sphere. In the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita when mention is made of the pitriyana, the post-mortem voyage of the individual is described as an ascent to the sphere of the moon and then a return. Guénon insists that this "return" is not a reference to reincarnation, but rather a return to another individual state of subtler orders:

... at the end of the pitri-yana there is a return to

the 'world of man' (manava-loka), that is to say to an individual condition, so described by analogy with the human state, although it must of necessity be different, since the being can never return to a state through which it has already passed.³³

The being so living in this sublunar realm passes through a continual sequence of birth and death analogous to the human state, until it passes beyond the conditions which give rise to that process.³⁴ The being must reach the full course of its own development in order to traverse the sphere of the moon, in which case form is dissolved and the being is prepared to pass on to the formless realm. Christian purgatory, according to Guénon, is a prolongation of the human state after bodily death (continued by the subtler modes of the human being)³⁵ rather than a re-birth into a new individual state. He remarks that the purpose of funerals in all traditions is to prolong the human state.³⁶

We may now see how Guénon views the Christian conception of salvation and eschatology within the Upanishadic structure. Christian doctrines picture heaven as an abode of blessed individuals living a life of blissful immortality in the love of God. They do not often mention a "union" with God as the Upanishads (as understood by Shankaracharya) mention a "union" with Brahma in which one loses one's individuality - as a drop of water loses definition when dropped into the ocean.

"Salvation" is properly speaking the attainment of the Brahma-Loka; and we will further specify that by Brahma-Loka must here be understood exclusively the abode of Hiranyagarbha, since any more exalted

aspect of the 'Non-Supreme' lies outside individual possibilities. This accords perfectly with the Western conception of 'immortality' which is simply an indefinite prolongation of the individual life, transposed³⁷ into the subtle order and extending to the pralaya.

Thus it would seem that Guénon translates the "end of the world" in Christian eschatology as a pralaya or end of the present manvantara in Hindu terms. Christian salvation, according to Guénon, is attainable by both action and knowledge. In these cases the latter contains its own reward and the former is rewarded by the grace of God. But action does not overcome ignorance, therefore one cannot attain to the formless realms which are only attainable through the fruits of knowledge.³⁸ Also, in Brahma-Loka the being may return to manifested existence after the pralaya or continue along the ladder following the devayana.³⁹

So much for the individual order and the manvantaras. The "upper waters" or the formless realm is occupied by gods (or angels) and those beings who follow the "pathway of the gods" (devayana). Just as the realm of form has its own cycle, so the totality of manifestation (comprising the formal and the formless) has a corresponding cycle called a kalpa; and likewise, a manvantara terminates with a pralaya so a kalpa terminates with a maha-pralaya (great pralaya). Duration in this case must be understood as a symbol since time is one of the conditions of our world and not a condition of the formless:

... la succession temporelle n'étant alors qu'une image

de l'enchaînement, logique et ontologique à la fois, d'une série ⁴⁰ 'extra-temporelle' de causes et d'effets...

Each level of manifestation is analogous to the next, so that all levels interconnect and synthesize into total harmony and allow the realities of a lower level to apply as symbols to the higher order. With **this application in mind the lunar sphere** represents the portal leading to the "upper waters" and the solar door is the corresponding portal leading beyond the cosmos.

The axis of the universe connects all three worlds, gross, subtle and formless, and passes through the lunar and solar doors, thereby serving as a means of passage and communication between all levels of manifestation. Since Manu is the "cosmic intelligence" he is also the center and the determining point around which all the sublunar beings revolve, hence he may be designated as the "pole".⁴¹ Furthermore, the sacred mountain may also fulfill this axial role:

Il est à peine besoin de faire remarquer que cette désignation de 'Pôle' se rattache étroitement au symbolisme 'polaire' du Mêru que nous avons mentionné tout à l'heure, le Mêru lui-même ayant d'ailleurs pour exact équivalent⁴² la montagne de Qâf dans la tradition Islamique.

But enough of the macrocosm. We have shown the Guénonian structure, the next step is merely the application of the many symbols which correspond in that structure to the stages of Self-realization of the human being. Part of the difficulty of understanding symbols and how they apply to this structure is in grasping the rules of analogy and the dual nature of all symbols

which we discussed in our chapter on symbolism.⁴³ The list of symbols and their applications are numerous, as a glance at Guénon's sundry works on symbols will indicate.

We must now move on to the microcosm. This is most thoroughly dealt with by Guénon in La Grand Triade, L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta and Les Etats multiples de l'être. The last work is ontological and therefore pertains to that which is outside the microcosm. Nevertheless, since it deals with the "possibilities of manifestation" it is directly pertinent to the microcosm. In this connection the Symbolism of the Cross is also relevant. Each of these works stands on its own, and without contradicting ourselves, each serves as a complement by expanding upon points only briefly covered by the others. In the case of the microcosm the earth, atmosphere and sky now correspond to the hylic, psychic and pneumatic according to the Alexandrian philosophical schema (corpus, anima and spiritus respectively of Hermeticists).³⁴ The Alexandrian designation of men as hylics, psychics or pneumatics corresponded to the degree of spiritual awareness attained.

Guénon's source for the constitution of the microcosm in the mode of man is Samkhya which elucidates the twenty-five principles or tattvas. Purusha in this case is the possibilities of manifestation of the being, as well as the true Self (Atma) as we noted earlier. Guénon also designates purusha as the Personality while the ego (ahankara) is the individuality.⁴⁵

The formless manifestation of the being is the buddhi or intellect which reflects upon the transcendent (from an epistemological point of view). In the order of manifestation it is the "divine ray".⁴⁶ The "divine ray" reflects off the "waters" of formal possibilities to give the image of the jivatma or the "destructible" purusha or "living soul". Since this image of purusha is a reflection and manifested it is therefore "destructible"⁴⁷ while the purusha itself is "indestructible". The point of reflection of the "divine ray" upon the waters produces individual consciousness or ahankara. Directly attached to ahankara is the individual faculty of reason, memory and imagination, known as manas. Since manas proceeds from the individuating principle it exists in the individual plane of the microcosm. This further means that the operation of manas involves form inasmuch as it is incapable of attaining to the formless order of knowledge which is beyond its realm. Guénon mentions that "...this was doubtless Aristotle's meaning when he said 'man (as an individual) never thinks without images,' that is to say without form."⁴⁸ Guénon relates manas to the macrocosm and Manu in his Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines:

... [Manu] is properly speaking the name of a principle, which can be defined in accordance with the meaning of the verbal root man, as 'cosmic intelligence' or 'thought reflecting the universal order.' On the other hand, this principle is also regarded as the prototype of man, who is called manava in so far as he is considered essentially as a 'thinking being,' characterized by the possession of manas, the mental or rational faculty.⁴⁹

Returning to purusha, in chapter III of Man and His Becoming, purusha is said by Guénon to dwell at the center of the individuality where the "divine ray" intersects with the realm of vital possibilities and determines the "living soul".⁵⁰ This vital center is situated in the heart and explains why the heart is often taken as the seat of intelligence as Aristotle and Dante had done. The heart, of course, is to be taken as a symbol and not as an actual physiological abode. The brain contains the mental faculty or manas. Just as the moon reflects the rays of the sun, so manas reflects the "divine ray" emanating from purusha residing in the heart.⁵¹

At this point it is easy to see that the buddhi (which is in the formless realm beyond manas) is not, strictly speaking, a human or individual faculty - hence Guénon's constant talk about the supra-human knowledge as we indicated in an earlier chapter.⁵² Furthermore, manas is in contact with all "infra-human" states which are below the human state, below in this case meaning causally "antecedent" since the being must pass through these states in the course of its development.⁵³ These sub-human states may be regarded as "infernal" and hence below the "earth" if the earth is taken as the human state. The residues of those prior states remain with the human individual and must be dealt with or "transmuted" before the individual can be "transformed". In "Sur la Signification de Fêtes 'carnavalesques'",⁵⁴ Guénon says these residues, being regarded as "sinister" and "satanic", must

be dealt with and not ignored, otherwise there is the risk of them "exploding" or dominating the being. He points out that the purpose of medieval festivals was to deal with those tendencies:

... il s'agit en somme de 'canaliser' en quelque sorte ces tendances et de les rendre aussi inoffensives qu'il se peut, en leur donnant l'occasion de se manifester, mais seulement pendant des périodes très brèves et dans des circonstances bien déterminées, et en assignant ainsi à cette manifestation des limites étroites qu'il ne lui est pas permis de dépasser.

Carl Jung wrote of "unassimilated residues" which determine dream content. The symbols produced by these residues are a manifestation of what he termed the "individuation process", a process that could only be fulfilled by the individual dealing with them in some way other than ignoring or hiding them, otherwise they will inevitably arise in a distorted manner with more power than ever.⁵⁶ Jung repeatedly stated that to ignore these "unassimilated residues" is to give them power. On this score it is equally interesting to point out that Jung perceived those elements as residues left over from the "evolutionary" process (evolution in the modern meaning of a phylogenetic development): "Theoretically it should be possible to 'peel' the collective unconscious, layer by layer, until we come to the psychology of the worm, and even the amoeba."⁵⁷

Guénon's evolutionary process is "vertical" rather than "horizontal", a perfect example of the contrast between the traditional and modern interpretations of the same phenomena.

We will return later to the subconscious tendencies since they are an important factor in the initial process of a "cosmic" realization, which begins with a "descent" into the "infernal" regions.⁵⁸

To continue with the development of the manifestation of the human being, ahankara gives rise to the faculties of sensation and action. The five tanmatras are the incorporeal seeds for the corporeal sensible elements known as the mahabhutas. This is on the objective side (we are now dealing with objective/subjective because ahankara has established the "I and thou" division). On the subjective side are the five karmendriyas or inner motor organs and the five jnanendriyas or external sense organs. There is no need to dwell on these any further since they play a very minimal role in Guénon's expositions, although in the process towards realization these faculties first orient inwardly and then become reabsorbed.⁵⁹

A being (purusha) contains a given set of possibilities for development. The being comprises an indefinite set of possible modes and states (man is a state and his rational faculty is an example of a mode). Each of the above states contains an indefinite set of possible developments. If we employ the symbolism of the cross, that indefinite set of states is symbolized by the indefinite number of points on the vertical axis of the cross. In geometry the number of points on a segment of line is indefinite since there is no possibility of assigning them a determined number. The given set of possible developments of any particular

state would be the horizontal member which intersects at a given point. If this notion of Being is transposed to the universal sense we are then considering Being (Brahma saguna or the closest equivalent to the Christian understanding of God) which is the principle of manifestation and therefore the ensemble of all the possibilities of manifestation. At this level we are still speaking of an indefinite, rather than an infinite, multitude of possibilities. Guénon says:

... nous devons dire que l'Être n'est pas infini, puisqu'il ne coïncide pas avec la Possibilité totale; et cela d'autant plus que l'Être, en tant que principe de la manifestation, comprend bien en effet toutes les possibilités de manifestation, mais seulement en tant qu'elles se manifestent.⁶⁰

Being is therefore determined and limited to the possibilities of manifestation, although with Being it is a case of self-determination. Beyond Being we can then speak of the possibilities of non-manifestation and the possibilities of manifestation in so far as they are in a state of non-manifestation. Guénon continues: "Pour désigner ce qui est ainsi en dehors et au delà de l'Être, nous sommes obligé, à défaut de tout autre terme, de l'appeler Non-Être;...."⁶¹ In this case we are clearly speaking of an infinite that is "beyond nature" or metaphysical. This, combined with the process towards the realization of those possibilities, is the subject of our final chapter. Furthermore purusha is actually identical to Atma or Brahma, and Brahma in this case is Brahma nirguna, the totality of all possibilities of non-manifestation and manifestation.

NOTES

1. Guénon, The Reign of Quantity, p. 63.
2. The popular expression in the West of "mother nature" is a possible vestige of this notion of the creating female principle.
3. René Guénon, Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta, trans. by Richard C. Nicholson (New York: The Noonday Press, 1968), p. 46.
4. Ibid., p. 50.
5. Ibid. .
6. Ibid., pp. 42-43.
7. Ibid., p. 37.
8. Ibid., p. 54.
9. Ibid., p. 51.
10. Ibid., pp. 33-34.
11. René Guénon, Les Etats multiples de l'être (Paris: Les Edition Vega, 1957), p.78 note 1.
12. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 34.
13. Ibid., p.62.
14. Ibid., p. 32. Also in The Reign of Quantity, p.61, Guénon cryptically remarks: "Confusion between the general and the collective is yet another consequence of the tendency which causes moderns to see nothing anywhere other than quantity...."
15. Guénon, Symbolism of the Cross, -p. 119.
16. "As a symbol, the heliocentric world-view is the necessary complement of the geocentric. For the divine origin of the world - that is to say the one Intellect or Spirit through whom God produces the world - can just as easily be thought of as the All-Embracing (corresponding to limitless space), as it can be thought of as the one 'radiating' centre of all manifestation. Precisely because the Divine Origin is so high above all differentiation, each representation of it has to be complemented by its own inverted counterpart, as if seen in a mirror," Titus Burckhardt, Alchemy, p. 51.

17. See chapter III p. 75.
18. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 153.
19. René Guénon, La Grande Triade (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 21.
20. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, pp. 56-57 note 3. Also on page 152, note 4, Guénon expnds upon this symbolism: "The Apsaras are the celestial Nymphs, which also symbolize these formless possibilities; they correspond to the Hūris of the Moslem paradise; and this paradise (Ridwan) is the proper equivalent to the Hindu Swarqa."
21. Bible, Revised Standard Version, Genesis I, 7-8.
22. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 150 note 1.
23. The germs for this sublunar sphere are symbolized by Hiranyagarbha, or the "Golden Embryo". Hirānyaqarbhā may be transposed analogically to the universal realm as well. See Man and His Becoming, p. 101. And also Symbolism of the Cross, pp. 106-107.
24. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 149.
25. Guénon, Symboles fondamentaux, p. 148 note 2.
26. Ibid., p. 145.
27. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 158 note 2.
28. Guénon, Le Roi du monde, pp. 51-52. According to George Every, Christian Mythology (Toronto: The Hamlyn Pub. Group Ltd., 1970) Melchizedek was identified with Shem, son of Noah, by the Samaritans. Shem may have been another name for Adam (p. 52). This supports Guénon's analogy of Melchizedek with Manu. Just as Manu is the last survivor of the preceeding manvantara, Melchezedek was also a survivor of the Flood, according to Christian legend, along with Noah. This is one of the legends associated with Melchizedek in The Book of Cave Treasures, a fourth to sixth century Syrian compilation. Also some revealing legends are given by Rev. S. Baring-Gould, Legends of the Patriarchs and Prophets (New York: John B. Alden, 1885), pp. 235-237: "... some affirmed that he [Melchizedek] was identical with the patriarch Enoch, who came from the Terrestrial Paradise to confer with Abraham; and others, that the Magi who adored the infant Christ were Enoch, Melchizedek and Elias.

"And some have supposed that Melchizedek was created before Adam, and was of celestial race. Others again have supposed that he was our Lord Jesus Christ who appeared to Abraham."

29. Guénon, Cycles cosmique et formes traditionnelles, p.14.
30. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 149.
31. Ananda Coomaraswamy, The Flood in the Hindu Tradition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p.3.
32. Ibid., p. 6. Guénon also confirms that Yama is the "judge of the dead" and Manu the legislator. Le Roi du monde, p. 53.
33. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 159 note 1. As far as we know Guénon never gives his source for this kind of interpretation. It is of course very easy to interpret the pitriyana as reincarnation as it is cited in the Upanishads. Guénon also quotes Matgioi from La Voie Métaphysique, pp. 131-132: "... there is only one human stage, and the course once completed is never covered again." Symbolism of the Cross, p. 96.
34. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 152 note 1. Guénon adds: "... one can also understand what those [Greek] philosophers, and Aristotle in particular, meant when they taught that the sublunar world alone is subject to 'generation' and 'corruption'; this sublunar world, in fact, really represents the 'current of forms' of the Far Eastern tradition...."
35. René Guénon, L'Esotérisme de Dante (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 47.
36. When a being is reborn into "another world" of form there is no guarantee that he will attain to a "central" state in respect to that world. There is therefore every reason to wish to prolong the human state since a being may actively participate in its own development. See Aperçus sur l'initiation, p. 181. Nevertheless this line of thought certainly would not follow the conscious Christian purpose of funerals since the usual interpretation of Christian doctrine does not take other worlds of an individual order into account.
37. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 168. Guénon appears to contradict himself if we compare this quotation with what he says in Symboles fondamentaux, p. 354: "On peut donc dire, dans les termes de la tradition hindoue, que la 'porte

lunaire' donne accès à l'Indra-loka (puisque Indra est le régent du Swarga) et la 'porte solaire' au Brahma loka; dans les traditions de l'antiquité occidentale. à l'Indra-loka correspond l''Empyrée', le premier étant 'intra-cosmique' et le second 'extra-cosmique'...."

38. Refer back to the diagram in this chapter to ~~keep~~ in mind the distinction **between the formal and the formless** realms.
39. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 136.
40. Guénon, Cycles cosmique et formes traditionnelles, pp. 14-15.
41. Ibid., pp. 18-19.
42. Guénon, Le Roi du monde, p. 32. Islamic esoterism designates certain men as Qtub or spiritual "poles" of their respective times. Also Moses, of the Hebrew tradition, was regarded likewise. In these cases we are speaking of secondary poles in relation to Manu.
43. See our chapter III on symbolism for the "law of correspondence" and the dual nature of symbols, .p. 74-75.
44. Guénon, La Grande Triade, chapter XI.
45. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 28. Personality is not, however, identical with the Self (Atma). Personality corresponds to being, while the Self includes beyond being as we will discuss later in our chapter on metaphysics.
46. Ibid., chapters V and VII. Also Symbolism of the Cross, chapter XXIV, p. 104.
47. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 55. Guénon declares that a commonly found symbol of two birds in the same tree represents purusha and jivatma. One bird sits observing while the other acts - Symbolism of the Cross, p. 41 note 2. In connection with the buddhi he further points out: "It will be noticed that the buddhi is not unrelated to the Logos of the Alexandrians." Man and His Becoming, p. 67.
48. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 70 note 3.
49. Guénon, Introduction to Hindu Doctrines, p. 213.
50. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 66.
51. Ibid., p. 39.

52. See chapters "Symbolism" p.71 and "Critique of the modern world" p. 24-26.
53. Guénon, Symboles fondamentaux, p. 64.
54. Ibid., p. 162-166.
55. Ibid., p. 164.
56. Carl Jung, "The practical use of Dream Analysis," Dreams, trans. by R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 100-101.
57. Carl Jung, "The Structure of the Psyche," The Portable Jung, trans. by R.F.C. Hull (New York: Viking Press, 1971), ed. Joseph Campbell, p. 38.
58. See p.118 for our discussion of the "descent aux enfers."
59. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 139.
60. Guénon, Les Etats multiples de l'être, p. 25.
61. Ibid.

METAPHYSICS

If the Guénonian formulation for metaphysics takes a decidedly "Indian" form this is because...

... it is to the East that one must look if one wishes to discover the true meaning of metaphysics; or even if one's wish is to recover some of the metaphysical traditions formerly existing in a West which was in many respects much closer to the East than today, it is above all with the help of oriental doctrines and by comparison with them that one may succeed, since these are the only doctrines in the domain of metaphysics which can still be studied directly.

Since we have already pointed out the symbolism of water in connection with cosmology, we will continue to use the symbolism of water to illustrate Guénon's metaphysics. The ontological significance of water has already been touched upon in so far as it relates to cosmology.² Ontology, however, is an aspect of metaphysics and must be related to the latter:

The primordial waters, before their separation, are the totality of the possibilities of manifestation, in so far as the latter constitutes the potential aspect of Universal Being, which is properly speaking Prakriti. But **there** is also another and superior meaning to the same symbolism, which appears when it is carried over beyond Being itself: the waters then represent Universal Possibility, conceived in an absolutely total manner, that is to say in so far as it embraces at the same time in Its Infinity the domains of manifestation and non-manifestation alike.³

Infinity is defined by Guénon as the totality of universal possibilities, comprising both Being and Non-Being. It is evident that by their very definition these two aspects of Brahma exclude one another and are therefore limited to their

respective domains. Non-Being and Being are also termed the two faces of total possibility,⁴ and are respectively Brahma nirguna and Brahma saguna, the former as karana (cause) and the latter karya (effect). Guénon gives a quotation from the Maitri Upanishad, prapathaka 7, shruti II:

Waking, dreaming, deep sleep and that which is beyond, such are the four states of Ātmā: the greatest (mahattara) is the fourth (Turīya). In the first three Brahma dwells with one of Its feet; It has three feet in the last.

Guénon sees these first three states as constituting the realm of manifestation (both formal and formless) while the last three feet are a clear expression of Being (possibilities of manifestation in so far as they are unmanifested), Non-Being and Universal possibility.

The common mathematical notion of infinity Guénon sees as contradictory since it is not unlimited. He therefore applies it to a metaphysical conception, and for the commonly held mathematical infinity substitutes the notion of an indefinite. In numerical symbolism, one represents Being and zero Non-Being. Being is therefore unity containing multiplicity in its principle, just as the number one is the primordial unit containing the principle for all other units - without that unit ever being modified by its multiplicity. Non-Being, on the other hand, is beyond unity and multiplicity:

Dans le Non-Être, il n'y a pas de multiplicité, et, en toute rigueur, il n'y a pas non plus d'unité, car le Non-Être est le Zéro métaphysique, auquel

nous sommes obligé de donner un nom pour parler, et qui est logiquement antérieur à l'unité; c'est pourquoi la doctrine hindoue parle seulement à cet égard de 'non-dualité' (adwaita)....⁶

By containing in their principle all possibilities, Being can be considered distinct from all its modifications: "... in Being all beings (meaning thereby their personalities) are 'one' without being confused and **distinct without being separated.**"⁷ On the other hand, Universal possibility is a non-duality since it cannot be separated from its modifications, but at the same time it is beyond them: "... Ātmā is neither manifested (vyakta) nor unmanifested (avyakta)."⁸ And also: "Beyond Being one cannot speak of distinction of any kind, even principial, although at the same time it cannot be said that there is confusion either; one is beyond multiplicity and beyond Unity as well;...."⁹

Guénon sees no real problem in distinguishing between the possible and the real: from a metaphysical perspective he sees the possible and the real as identical. This of course does not mean that all possibilities are now manifested since we are dealing here with their principles. On the other hand Guénon does go so far as to say that all possibilities are necessary by the very fact that they are possibilities of manifestation; that is to say that manifestation is necessarily implied in principle by the nature itself of those possibilities.¹⁰ Furthermore, it follows that not only are the best of all possible worlds becoming manifested but that all possible worlds are becoming manifested. Universal manifestation is both necessary

and contingent - necessary in so far as its roots are in the immutable principle, and contingent in so far as it is manifested; "Tout ce qui existe en mode transitoire dans la manifestation doit être transposé en mode permanent dans le non-manifesté...."¹¹

A question arises immediately - what is a possibility of non-manifestation? One of those possibilities, already dealt with, is Being itself in so far as the possibilities it comprises are unmanifested. But Guénon gives other examples of possibilities which might also be termed non-manifestable. These are not to be confused with the impossible. The void, for example, is a possibility of non-manifestation. Guénon derives this notion from the a priori supposition that empty space is a contradiction (in fact impossible) since there cannot be a container without content. The void itself is not an impossibility, but it implies the exclusion of all substance, both formal and informal, and therefore it cannot be applied to any mode of manifestation. The void should not be confused with Non-Being according to Guénon, but is rather one of its aspects. Silence is also another possibility of non-manifestation with conditions analogous to the void. As for impossibilities, Guénon declares simply:

L'Absurde, au sens logique et mathématique, est ce qui implique contradiction; il se confond donc avec l'impossible, car c'est l'absence de contradiction interne qui, logiquement aussi bien qu'ontologiquement, définit la possibilité.¹²

A round square for instance is an internal contradiction, since

it contains two contradictory possibilities in the same figure. A round square is therefore an impossibility.

As previously noted, every state of the being corresponds to a degree of universal manifestation, likewise the being in its fullness corresponds to the degree of Being. Being, by containing all beings in principle, comprises a plurality of beings, each of which comprises an indefinite set of states. When a being realizes the fullness of its possibilities, it also realizes both itself and all things as residing principally in Being. This is so because outward perceptions are a reflection of inward realization; to realize Being as the container of our own being in its fullness is to realize Being's basis for all things. From that state all distinction disappears in the full realization that Atma is Brahma the Supreme principle, so that all things are within it and nothing is beyond.¹³ In the fullness of its own realization we may speak of a distinction between being and Being, on the condition that they are not to be regarded as separate. Upon absolute realization we cannot speak of distinction of any kind, but at the same time there is no confusion.

Several states of spiritual realization have been mentioned as we discussed the proper degree of universal existence with which to account for those states. We should like to review those states before embarking upon the discussion of various symbolic expressions that correspond to the stages in the

process towards metaphysical Self-realization, a process which in this case will begin and be completed in the human state of the being. Guénon has said that a being subject to the sublunar conditions passes from one individual state to another within the individual domain. He also mentioned the posthumous condition in which a being (the jivatma, since the purusha does not move from one state to the next but remains in its own unconditioned self) has become transformed and has thereby transcended the individual realm by passing through the seeds of formal possibilities into the realm of formless possibilities following the devayana. There is also the posthumous condition in which the being in the individual state remains in the Brahma-loka in a prolongation of the human state (salvation in the Christian sense). At the conclusion of the pralaya, the being in this state may either return to manifested existence in the individual realm or continue along the devayana; this is a "deferred deliverance".¹⁴ And further, there is a condition in which the being has realized the "Supreme Identity" or obtained deliverance only virtually and not effectively. Deliverance in this case occurs immediately upon death and the being is no longer under the conditions of any mode of manifestation - either formal or formless.¹⁵

Metaphysics, as Guénon understands it, is incomplete unless accompanied by "realization". Guénon calls these two sides of metaphysical knowledge the theoretical and the practical. The

first half of this chapter has dealt with the theoretical side and the present half will deal with the practical side, although from a theoretical point of view if we may call it that, since it is already evident that realization itself is outside any written or conceptual mold. In this case the word "metaphysics" has the meaning usually associated with gnosis. N.M.D. Boulet thinks that Guénon uses metaphysics in this sense, and avoids "gnosis", to avoid associating the occult milieu with traditional lines of thought.¹⁶ We wish to indicate some of the symbolic expressions found in the sundry modes of traditional knowledge - arts, sciences and scriptures - which Guénon has shown to be symbolic representations of states in the process towards complete Self-realization of the Supreme Identity.

The point of departure in the path towards the Supreme Identity is with the "average" or "fallen" man who has tasted the "fruit" and consequently become enmeshed in a self-willed and self-fulfilling reality of his own creation, causing a kind of individual psychic maze that continues to grow by a self-perpetuating momentum (this may also be seen as an indefinite series of descents) so that no escape seems possible. In fact in most cases escape may not even appear as a theoretical possibility given the conditions of that "fall". As with any maze, a supposed exit may merely lead to another dead-end or worse, may result in further entanglements, like the hunter's

net which ensnares an animal more closely the harder he struggles. The portal of escape leads to the condition of "normal" man, that is, to the human condition before the Fall, and thereby places a man in contact with higher spheres. This state is a prerequisite for the realization of higher states leading to the Supreme Identity.¹⁷

Initiation "introduces" the being into the realm of the sacred. Just as any change of state is at once a death and a birth, so initiation is often called a "second birth". The death is to the profane and the birth is into the sacred. This process sets the stage for all the analogies which follow the change of state. All changes of state must be accomplished by a death or a tenebrous phase symbolized by a "descente aux Enfers", Just as sleep must occur before the being passes into a new waking state. A "descente aux Enfers" is what Guénon calls a "recapitulation of antecedent states" to the human state.

These inferior states:

... doivent aussi participer à la 'transformation' qui va s'accomplir; d'autre part, elle permet la manifestation, suivant certaines modalités, des possibilités d'ordre inférieur que l'être porte encore en lui à l'état non développé, et qui doivent être épuisées par lui avant qu'il soit possible de parvenir à la réalisation de ses états supérieurs.

"Exhausted" is the key word. The residues of these states cannot be ignored, they must be taken into account and the being (jivatma) must take responsibility for them. To ignore these residues, as noted earlier, is to give them power: the symbolic

significance of the carnival, for example, was to allow those "sinister" residues room enough to move in order to contain their "explosive" tendencies.

If the earth symbolizes the human state, then the subterranean realm represents inferior states. The cavern, opening into the bowels of the earth, can be taken as the universal matrix, into which the initiate descends to death and from which he is reborn. The baptismal waters of the Christian sacrament represent the fluidity and plasticity of primordial substance as well as its cleansing role in giving rebirth. In alchemy, a science that deals with the "little mysteries" (the realization of the "normal" man), death is symbolized by "solution" and birth is "coagulation". In this case the steps alternate consecutively in a "spiraling" process back to the center of the being. This may also be seen as a continual "expansion" and "contraction", or "evaporation" and "condensation" which occur simultaneously in the modification or "transmutation" of the human being.¹⁹ In the Divine Comedy, as in other Himmelfart accounts,²⁰ the celestial voyage is preceded by a descent into the "Inferno" leading to an ascent up the mountain of "Purgatory". To Guénon purgatory is a symbol of the prolongation of the human state as the being is successively transmuted (change of form) in the process towards transformation (passing beyond form). If we take the symbolism of the cross into account, the vertical axis is the axis mundi connecting all degrees of uni-

versal existence and all states of the being. The horizontal bar is taken as a representation of the human state. The goal of the "little mysteries" is the point of intersection of those two lines, at which all possibilities of the human state are realized. This is the "primordial state".

The necessity of dealing with anterior states in the process of transmutation is also symbolized by the battle. This symbol is most clearly evident in the Bhagavad Gita where Krishna and Arjuna represent respectively the "Self" (purusha as Atma) and the "ego", while the chariot represents the being in a manifested state (jivatma). It is Krishna who drives the chariot while Arjuna fights the battle, just as the ego must be the faculty which deals with the tenebrous residues.²¹ The Islamic tradition speaks of a "greater holy war" (EL-Jihâdul akbar), as an interior struggle against our own sinister tendencies. The "lesser holy war" is the battle waged in the name of Islam against its enemies.

A return to the center of the being in the human state is a return to the "normal" condition of man, as he was before the Fall. This is why Guénon, in claiming to follow many traditions, designates this state the "primordial state". This is what is called the "edenic state" of the Judeo-Christian tradition²² or "true man" in the Far East.²³

This realization of the integral individuality is described by all traditions as the restoration of what is called the 'primordial state' which is regarded

as man's true estate and which moreover escapes some of the limitations characteristic of the ordinary state, notably that of the temporal condition. The person who attains this 'primordial state' is still only a human individual and is without effective possession of any supra-individual states; he is nevertheless freed from time and the apparent succession of things is transformed for him into simultaneity; he consciously possesses a faculty which is unknown to the ordinary man and which one might call the 'sense of eternity'.²⁴

This "sense of eternity" is one of the meanings inherent in the symbol of the two-faced Janus mentioned in connection with the passage to the lunar sphere. The two faces, according to Guénon, represent both the past and the future (sometimes figured by the old and young man respectively). Between the past and the future lies the true face of Janus, which is eternity. The past is gone and the future is only a dream of expectations, a mirage. Both are transitory and hence contingent, and thus the eternal present is the true source of reality.²⁵

In the "Symbolism of the Graal" Guénon makes a remarkable connection with the account of the Graal's origin. The Graal was allegedly carved from the emerald of Lucifer's forehead upon his downfall: "That emerald strikingly recalls the urna, the frontal pearl which, in Hindu (and hence Buddhist) symbolism, frequently replaced the third eye of Shiva, representing what might be called the 'sense of eternity.'"²⁶

Adam was given the Graal before the Fall but lost it when he was driven out of the Earthly paradise. Thus a return to the primordial state is also a recapture of innocence by transcending the opposition of good and evil and becoming re-estab-

lished with the Tree of life. This innocence is also "simplicity": "This 'simplicity' is also what is called elsewhere the state of 'childhood' (in Sanskrit balya) to be understood of course in the spiritual sense, and this 'childhood' is considered in the Hindu doctrine as an indispensable condition for attaining true knowledge."²⁷ Guénon also reminds us of the Gospel: "whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein."²⁸ This spiritual simplicity is also a worldly poverty, while the "rich" who cannot pass into the kingdom are those attached to multiplicity: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven."²⁹ The rich are the same as those in the Gita who are attached to the "fruits of action", while the state of innocence is that of the "integrated man" described in the first six chapters of the Gita, one who has transcended the "fruits of action". We are here reminded of a stage in the path towards realization discussed by Mircea Eliade in Yoga, Immortality and Freedom. Eliade described a "cosmic realization" or "cosmosization" of man, a necessary prerequisite in the process towards final liberation. He claims that this phase is encountered in all of the yoga techniques, although different stress is given by different schools. He describes this phase as a realizing of all the planes of the biomental life or as a homologizing the body and life of man with the cosmic rhythms.³⁰

Guénon notes that in the Hebrew version of Genesis man was

"created male and female", that is , in a state of androgyny, a **concept** found in other traditions and initiatic groups (alchemy for instance). This state of androgyny signifies purusha and prakriti as in complete harmony within the individual. This harmony existed before the fall into "self-consciousness", signified by the fig leaves ("It may be noted that in the Hindu tradition the 'World Tree' is represented by the fig;...").³¹ When the ego is assimilated to the "Self", the three gunas fall into a state of equilibrium. This is the meaning of the Gita's "beyond the three gunas". Guénon notes that the geometrical symbol of the sphere is often attached to the androgyne and adds that in the Symposium, Plato described the perfect or primordial man as being in the shape of a sphere.³² The sphere was regarded by the Pythagoreans as the most perfect figure of universal totality.

With regard to the androgyne we should recall the dual nature of a symbol, in which are contained at once the highest and the lowest (in this case of human possibilities). Androgyny is not a state of "confusion" between the sexes, which would be "uniformity" for Guénon rather than "unity". In uniformity the sexes are equalized with a tendency to regard them as interchangeable units, whereas in unity the roles are distinct with each operating clearly within its own sphere and complementing the other. In the spiritual sense this applies to purusha and prakriti although the social sphere is analogous. Eliade also

expresses himself on this dual nature:

There is every possible difference, for instance, between spiritual androgynisation and the 'confusion of the sexes' obtained by orgy; between regression to the formless and 'spooky' and the recovery of 'paradisaical' spontaneity and freedom according to the cultural context, this 'totality' may be either a primordial indistinction (as in 'orgy' or 'chaos'), or the situation of a jivan-mukta, or the liberty and blessedness of one who has reached the Kingdom in his own soul.³³

In Dante's Purgatory the summit of the mountain is where the Earthly garden is situated. This garden is of course the garden of Eden, representing the primordial condition that Dante had visualized. Guénon points out also that Christian legend places the Crucifixion at Golgotha ("the place of the skull"), the burial site of Adam, signifying that one must die at this place (state) before attaining higher states - represented by the ascension.³⁴ The abode of purusha-Atma is the heart, the spiritual center of the human being,³⁵ and upon integration, the primordial state in question, the jivatma withdraws into its original dwelling place, the heart, along with the purusha-Atma which resides there permanently.³⁶ The cavern serves the same symbolic function as the heart and we might recall along with this that Christ was placed dead in the cavern before he was to rise.

We have explained the jiva as an image of purusha reflected off the primordial waters by the celestial ray of buddhi. When these waters have settled and become purified they reflect a clear image of the source of that ray. The individual is now

prepared to realize higher states of the being by means of the supra-individual faculty of the buddhi. This post-integral process may be spoken of as an expansion of the heart if we remember that the integral process was a return to the heart. It is now the buddhi, of the formless realm, which guides the being through the phases of evolution in the universal realm: "This realization is depicted in different symbolisms by the opening of a flower on the surface of the 'waters'. In the Eastern traditions this flower is most commonly the lotus and in the Western ones the rose or lily."³⁷ This recalls the Easter lily in commemoration of the Resurrection. The upward movement along the "celestial ray" is a path leading the being back to its source of radiation. If we spoke of an extinction of the ego in the calming of the "lower waters", the final goal is an "extinction of the extinction" (Fanâ el-fanâi).³⁸

The being is now situated on the summit of the mountain in the earthly garden of Dante's Divine Comedy, having completed the via purgativa, in preparation for a celestial ascent into the formless realms of manifestation. The "transformation" begins by the being passing through the "ring of fire". The being is now ascending along the axis mundi and this axial movement is the symbol of an inward spiritual journey. This upward movement of spiritual expansion may of course be subdivided into an indefinite number of states in the process towards the Supreme Identity.³⁹ One of those higher states is the reali-

zation of Being as the basis of universal existence. Guénon refers to this as "Non-supreme"⁴⁰ knowledge and he further declares that theology, in the sense of a realization rather than theory, is always a "Non-supreme" type of knowledge. He states that this "Non-supreme" knowledge is Ramanuja's point of view, differing from Sankaracharya in that the former sees all beings within Being as distinct, whereas the latter speaks of a realization which transcends this distinction into the Supreme Identity.⁴¹

Final deliverance is symbolized by the "Universal Man" in Islamic esoterism and by Adam Qadmon in the Qabbalah.⁴² Both the "primordial man" and "Universal Man" may be characterized as mediators or "poles", uniting "heaven" and "earth". Such Beings are now identified with the axis mundi. With the former the mediation is for the human state alone, while "Universal Man" has united all levels of the being thereby serving as the mediator for all degrees of universal existence. Thus the two states are analogous. In Christian terms, the union of human and divine natures is evidence of this mediation role "par excellence" of "Universal Man". Scholem has pointed out this identical relationship between these two states in the Hebrew tradition. The Adam Ha-Rishon, the Adam of the Bible, corresponds on the anthropological plane to Adam Kadmon, the ontological primary man.⁴⁴ These two Adams may be seen from a cosmogonic perspective in which they are prototypes; they may also be seen from the

perspective of Self-realization where they serve as models.

Innocence applies to "Universal Man" as well, and a further attribute, kaivalya (isolation), applies to both of these states. Guénon identifies this attribute, kaivalyam, to the "void" used by the Taoists.⁴⁵ Paradoxically, the "void" is in reality "absolute fullness", and this again illustrates the dual nature of symbols. By the "law of correspondence" the symbols of "primordial state" are oftentimes identical to those applied to the Supreme Identity. The analogy of symbols and expressions of these two states is a source of confusion, and the two states may be wrongly identified with one another. Zaehner, in Mysticism, Sacred and Profane, proclaims:

Sankara and his followers, by establishing complete identity between the human soul and the Absolute, do in fact accept the Samkhya-Yoga view in practice, for self-realization means for them, no less than for the Samkhya-Yogin, the isolation of the immortal soul from all that is not itself.⁴⁶

Samkhya, for Guénon, is cosmological in perspective, and the realization it speaks of is the "primordial state", while Sankaracharya refers to the state corresponding to "Universal Man".

If the sky is taken as the formless realm, or even transposed to the unmanifest, it is easy to understand the symbolism of birds as they relate to "Universal Man". In the Gospel of Matthew XIII, 32, the "birds of the air..."⁴⁷ symbolize higher states of the being. There is in the Upanishads the symbol

of two birds in the same tree: "Two birds, inseparably united companions, dwell in the same tree; the one eats of the fruit of the tree, while the other looks without eating."⁴⁸ Guénon says that the first of these birds is the jivatma, involved in action and its "fruits", the second is Atma. The tree is the Tree of Life as the axis mundi which passes through the center of each state of the being. There is also a "language of the birds" spoken of in several traditions. Guénon cites the Koran: "'Et Saloman fut l'héritier de David; et il dit: O hommes! nous avons été instruit du langage des oiseaux (ullimna mantiqat-tayri) et comblé de toutes choses....'"⁴⁹ He sees this as a clear indication of communication with higher states of the being.

We would like to step aside for the moment to make a related point. Guénon states that the two portals of the cosmos, the "door of men" and the "door of the gods", leading to their respective pathways, are the southern and northern ends of the axis mundi. In the annual cycle of the sun, the winter solstice corresponds to the north and is the "door of the gods", while the summer solstice is the southern portal and the "door of men". The vernal equinox and autumnal equinox correspond to the Orient and Occident respectively. The "door of the gods" corresponds to the winter solstice because it marks the beginning of the waxing of the sun; it is likewise **regarded** as beneficent since it opens the terrestrial world to the gods. The "door of men" is the summer solstice and is regarded as maleficent since it is

an opening from below.⁵⁰ The southern portal is an entrance and an exit for the initiates while the northern portal is only an exit (although it is an entrance for the gods as we shall see). In following the time of day, midnight corresponds to the north and the winter solstice since it marks the point where the sun begins to ascend, and noon to the summer solstice and the south.⁵¹ Guénon emphasizes that the time of the birth of Christ corresponds in a double sense to the "door of the gods" (descending in this case) since his birthday is held on the winter solstice (according to the Julian calendar December 25th was the winter solstice) and at midnight.⁵² We note in passing that the Fleur-de-lis, or the Easter lily, is the traditional designation for north on the compass. Also in passing, Dante entered purgatory from the south⁵³ and exited it at noon into paradise.⁵⁴

The acquisition of a given state of realization is always permanent. "Transiency" is one of the characteristics that Happold and William James have noted in "mystical" experiences.⁵⁵ Guénon would agree with them as long as they confine themselves to "mystical" experiences **as Guénon understands them.** He insists that mysticism is not to be confused with initiation into higher states of the being. He even remarks that mysticism is strictly a Christian phenomenon: "... le mysticisme proprement dit est quelque chose d'exclusivement occidental et, au fond, de spécifiquement chrétien."⁵⁶ He later adds that mysticism can

be found among the Hassidic Jews,⁵⁷ which is a group of very recent origin. He criticizes the Western orientalists for projecting Western concepts onto oriental doctrines and, for example, finds that R. Nicholson's translation of tasawwuf (Guénon says initiation is a perfect translation) as "mysticism" is not correct. The primary difference between mysticism and initiation is the "passive" character of the former and the "active" character of the latter. The mystic in a passive role must receive what is presented to him, with the consequence that he becomes open to all sorts of influences of different orders without the means to discriminate between them. Initiation serves as a guide, as Vergil was for Dante, through the "maze" of experiences, saving the initiate from falling by the wayside, overwhelmed by the psychic residues. Mysticism is also an exoteric phenomenon: "... mysticisme relève exclusivement du domaine religieux, c'est-à-dire exotérique...."⁵⁸ Furthermore, the exoteric experience is primarily sentimental; at best the religious experience may attain the "primordial state". N.M.D. Boulet states that Guénon's distinction between initiation and mysticism is found in La Gnose (a journal he published in at the beginning of his career) and is probably a conclusion Guénon reached by himself, although the source for this distinction, she says, may have been the masonic anti-Catholic literature of the nineteenth century.⁵⁹ It could just as well have been his own personal knowledge of initiation.

Guénon is not alone in differentiating the active and passive modes of the numinous experience. R.C. Zaehner has called our attention to this, using the terminology "theist" and "monist":

The latter achieves liberation entirely by his own efforts since there is no God apart from himself to help him or with whom he can be united. In the case of the theistic mystic on the other hand, it is always God who takes the first step, and it is God who works in the soul and makes it fit for union. Such language is typical of all Christian mystics: in all cases they feel that there is very little that soul can itself do, for it is God himself who works in them and makes them fit for union.⁶⁰

What Guénon takes as a sign of inferiority, however, Zaehner sees as an indication of superiority. For Zaehner, the passivity of Christian mysticism attests to the "praeternaturalness" of the experiences over and above "natural" experiences obtained through individual efforts.

Our thesis is not one of comparative mysticism, however enticing that may be at this point. Guénon made some very valid points and enlightening clarifications. His supreme contribution, however, is the hermeneutics of symbols as they relate to the experiences of the initiate in the unfolding of his spiritual development. That hermeneutics, moreover, cannot be given full justice without outlining the totality of Guénon's thought and showing the place of the Supreme Identity in that synthetic framework. It goes without saying that the symbols we have used, taken from Guénon, are not at all to be exclusively confined to initiation and metaphysical realization, and the

"law of correspondence guarantees that no such unilateral interpretation can be accepted. But Guénon does claim that his metaphysical interpretations of the operations of symbols are the highest.

NOTES

1. René Guénon, "Oriental Metaphysics," Tomorrow, 12(Winter 1964), 1, p. 6.
2. See chapter on "cosmology", p. 91.
3. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 57 note 3.
4. Guénon, Les Etats multiples de l'être, p. 25.
5. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 110.
6. Guénon, Les Etats multiples de l'être, p.36. Sometimes Guénon identifies Non-Being with the Supreme Principle. See Man and His Becoming, p. 159 note 2.
7. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 165.
8. Ibid., p. 112.
9. Ibid., p. 165.
10. Guénon, Les Etats multiples de l'être, p. 96.
11. Ibid., p. 98.
12. Ibid., p. 14.
13. René Guénon, "Le Demiurge," Etudes Traditionnelles, 292 (June 1951), p. 153.
14. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 137.
15. Ibid.
16. N.M.D. Boulet, "L'Esotériste René Guénon," La Pensée Catholique, 80 (1962), p. 74.
17. Guénon, "Oriental Metaphysics," p. 11.
18. Guénon, L'Esotérisme de Dante, p. 46.
19. Guénon, La Grande Triade, pp. 56-57.
20. The Kitab el-isra and Futuhât el-Mekkiyah by Moyiddin Ibn Arabi. Don Miquel Asin Palacios has of course shown the similarities in form between these works of Arabi and Dante's Divine Comedy in La Escatología Musulmana en la

Divina Comedia, Madrid 1919. Christ's descent into Hell or the Harrowing of Hell is reiterated in the Apostle's Creed. This pattern of descent/ascent is also found in shamanic initiations - see Mircea Eliade, The Quest (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 116, for a brief outline of this pattern.

21. Guénon, Symbolism of the Cross, p. 41 note 2.
22. Ibid., p. 8 note 2.
23. Guénon, La Grande Triade, p. 153.
24. Guénon, "Oriental Metaphysics," p. 11.
25. Guénon, Symboles fondamentaux, pp. 145-151.
26. René Guénon, "The Symbolism of the Graal," Tomorrow, 13 #2, (Spring 1965), p. 70.
27. René Guénon, "Al-Fagr," Studies in Comparative Religions (Winter 1973), p. 17.
28. Bible, Revised Standard Version, Luke XVIII, 17.
29. Ibid., Matthew V, 24. Quoted in Symbolism of the Cross, p. 36 note 4.
30. Mircea Eliade, Yoga; Immortality and Freedom, trans. by William R. Trask, second edition (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 109.
31. Guénon, Symbolism of the Cross, p. 48 note 1.
32. Ibid., p. 29.
33. Mircea Eliade, The Two and the One, trans. by J.M. Cohen (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 123 note 1.
34. Guénon, Symbolism of the Cross, p. 48 note 1.
35. Guénon, Symboles fondamentaux, p. 218.
36. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, pp. 142-143.
37. Guénon, Symbolism of the Cross, p. 108.
38. Ibid., p. 34 note 3.

39. The gradual process in a posthumous condition is the krama-mukti. See Man and His Becoming, p. 170.
40. Ibid., p. 168.
41. Ibid., p. 165 note 1.
42. Guénon, Symbolism of the Cross, p. 6 note 1.
43. Guénon, La Grande Triade, p. 123.
44. Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken Books, 1941), p. 279.
45. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 175.
46. R.C. Zaehner, op. cit., p. 204.
47. "... The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in the branches." Matthew 13, 31-32.
48. Guénon, Man and His Becoming, p. 41 note 1.
49. Guénon, Symboles fondamentaux, p. 75, citing the Koran XXVII, 5.
50. Ibid., p. 242.
51. Ibid., p. 240 note 2. In this case darkness symbolizes the unmanifest and light the manifest.
52. Sir James Frazer, Adonis, Attis, Osiris, Studies in the History of Oriental Religion (part IV of the Golden Bough) (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1941), third edition, p. 303. This corresponds with a pagan custom of the Nativity of the Sun. This Natalis Solis Invicti was celebrated in Egypt, and following Frazer: "...the celebrants retired into certain inner shrines, from which at midnight they issued with a loud cry 'The Virgin has brought forth! The light is waxing!' p. 303.
53. Dante, The Divine Comedy, "Inferno," canto XXXIV.
54. Ibid., "Paradisio," canto I.

55. Frederick C. Happold, Mysticism, A Study and an Anthology (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 45. William James, Varieties of Religious Experience (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902), p. 38.
56. Guénon, Aperçus sur l'initiation, p. 15.
57. Ibid., p. 16 note 5.
58. Ibid., p. 15.
59. N.M.D. Boulet, "L'Esoteriste René Guénon," La Pensée Catholique, 80, pp. 67-68. Boulet remarks that this active/passive distinction could not have been of oriental origin. We disagree, given the widespread variety of religious experiences in India. The bhakti cults from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries, and in particular the Virasaiva cult which appeared in Karnataka in the twelfth century, are strikingly similar to the Catholic tradition in their emphasis on devotion and faith - see Speaking of Shiva, A.K. Ramanujan, (Baltimore: Penguin 1973). Furthermore, the essential difference between the northern and southern Sri Vaisnava (the Markata Nyaya or "monkey school" and the Marjara Nyaya or "cat school") rests upon the importance of Divine grace and individual effort in the attainment of liberation or salvation. This also raises questions as to **Guénon's claim of the exclusively Christian phenomenon of mysticism.**
60. Zaehner, op. cit., p. 192.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have endeavored to show the close symbiotic relationship between all elements which make up the totality of Guénon's thought, a thought which he claims is derived from traditional sources. These elements of his thought come together and are fulfilled by the active metaphysical realization of the being, described by Guénon as the Supreme Identity.

We laid the groundwork in our first two chapters, "Critique of the modern world" and "Primordial Tradition", by contrasting the modern or profane conceptual framework with Guénon's traditional conceptual framework. Our third chapter on symbolism served as a kind of pivot between the first two chapters and the last two. With the first chapter we began with the profane concepts, progressed into the sacred, or traditional concepts with the second, and then our third chapter served to complete the sacred concept of existence. We completed the traditional view of reality by giving the role of symbols and, indeed, stated that the world itself is a symbol of the very principles it is derived from. In the "law of correspondence" and the dual nature of symbols we showed how all the degrees of universal existence, as Guénon conceives them, fit into a whole to create

the synthetic harmony of existence in its totality. The third chapter also introduced us to our final two chapters where we could begin to apply symbols more accurately as we gave the traditional construct of the nature of the macrocosm and the microcosm. In our final two chapters it was also necessary to remember, as we stated in chapter three, that symbols have an effective influence on the nature of the being when those symbols are used in initiation rites, and the influence they carry is more than just sentimental in nature.

In our chapter "Cosmology" we discussed the degrees of universal existence, according to Guénon, and how they correspond to the states of the being. We used various symbols, and related the laws governing symbolism, to some elements which make up the totality of the human being. Our most important distinction was the formal from the formless elements of the being. It was this last distinction which was the most important to be understood in order to comprehend how Guénon envisions realization.

Finally, our last chapter dealt with the metaphysical principles of the being, that is, the being's metaphysical possibilities which are realized when the being reaches its full development. After giving a theoretical outline of metaphysics and the nature of different possibilities (possibilities of manifestation and non-manifestation) as well as the impossible, we could then back-track and follow the being in the course of

its realization as symbolized in traditional symbolism.

In our chapter "Cosmology" we had already given some indication of the application of Guénon's symbolic hermeneutics. In "Metaphysics", our final chapter, lies the heart, the kernel so to speak, of Guénon's thought. A look at the application of Guénon's symbolic hermeneutics to metaphysical realization was the very purpose of this thesis. Once we had given his hermeneutics and the nature of the human being we then ventured to follow the being, by means of expressing **ourselves with traditional** symbols, from his "fallen" state to the "primordial state". This term, "primordial state" is understood by Guénon as both the primary ontological condition of man as well as his original historical condition. We, of course, made allusion to various symbols, the Tree of Life, the Earthly paradise, the summit of the mountain, and the lunar sphere as they related to the expression of this "primordial state". From the "primordial state" we followed the being up the axis mundi as he crossed the realm of form into the formless, symbolized by the "upper waters", or supra-human states. It is at this stage of the initiate's development, upon entering the formless, that metaphysical realization begins. We briefly touched upon the "Non-supreme" realization, that is, the realization of Being as the basis of manifestation. **Then finally we gave some of the symbols for** full Self-realization, such as the "pole" which symbolizes the fact that the being himself has become a kind of axis mundi

around which all degrees of universal existence can be said to revolve. We also showed how the symbols can be applied analogously to levels of realization so that the symbols applied to the "primordial state" could also apply to the Supreme Identity.

We have thus worked our way from the "profane", which can be described as the outer circle, progressing inward using symbols as our vehicle. Our chapter on metaphysics finally culminated in showing, following Guénon, the very raison d'être of the human being, that is, the identification of the being with the totality of its possibilities or the Supreme Identity.

BIOGRAPHICAL APPENDIX

René Guénon was born November 15, 1886 to René-Jean-Marie Joseph Guénon, and Anna L. Jolly, in Blois on the left bank of the Loire in the suburbs of Vienne.¹

His parents, according to Chacornac, were very Catholic and Guénon was baptized January 4, 1887 by the priest of St. Saturnin in Vienne. His family later moved to a larger house in the suburbs of Foix on the right bank of the Loire. His maternal aunt, Madame Duru, lived next door and became a second mother to Guénon and, being an instructress at a school in Blois, she gave him his first school lessons. His first communion was June 7, 1887 in the church of St. Nicholas which was one of the steps on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella.

In October 1898, when Guénon was 12 years old, he entered the school of Notre-Dame des Aydes. This school was a religious establishment directed by a secular priest. Guénon was a brilliant student and often at the head of his class. He remained there until November 1901. In January 1902, his father enrolled him in the college of Augustin-Thierry as a student in rhetoric. Guénon had been born of fragile health which plagued him all of his life and, according to Chacornac, impeded his studies, but he succeeded in being presented to the

Concours Général where he studied Latin, science and philosophy. In August 1902, he received the Baccalauréat degree. In July 1903, he received the bachelier de lettres philosophie. He had shown a natural aptitude for mathematics and received a medal offered by the association des Anciens Elèves. Chacornac believes that the philosophy professor Leclères may have had an important influence upon Guénon, since Leclères was called by the schoolboys "L'Excellent" and had a markedly strong personality.

In 1904, Guénon went to Paris to Rollin College intending to obtain his "licence" in mathematics. His health continued to plague him and Chacornac mentions that he failed to continue in his courses for the mathematics "licence". He was not succeeding in his grades probably because of his ill-health, and his professors advised him to leave. However he did obtain his "licence", according to Denys Roman, at some time in his career.² During this period Guénon lived on the left bank in the Latin Quarter. He moved to l'île Saint-Louis at 51 Rue Saint-Louis en-l'île where he was to live for more than twenty-five years. This move begins the period in his life which is marked by his involvement with the neo-spiritualists, occultists, and the Masons, as well as his initiation into genuine traditions of Hinduism, Taoism and Islam. His occult period lasted from 1905 to 1913 and presents us with the most important and enigmatic chapter in the formation of his thought. Sometime during

this period he was introduced to Sanskrit and Arabic. We have Guénon's word for it, and the testimony of others, that he did not learn these languages in a formal setting, nor was his acquaintance with the Vedic, Taoist and Islamic esoterism the result of mere book study. How he acquired Sanskrit and Arabic is somewhat of a mystery, but J.P. Laurant remarks that all of those who knew Guénon personally were struck by his "phenomenal" memory.³ He knew also Latin, Greek, English, Italian, Spanish, German, Hebrew, and perhaps Russian and Polish.⁴ Unfortunately the importance of this period is matched by our dearth of information. It is certain that he was initiated into the Vedic tradition, and most probably by direct sources (see note 13). His initiation into Taoism and Islam was probably by Western mediaries, although this is not certain. Guénon's overt activities at this time centered on the occult movements which had blossomed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries throughout Europe and even in America. Alphonse Louis Constant, known as Eliphas Levy, is regarded as the father of the occult (he coined the term "occultism"), but his activities were in the mid nineteenth century. By the time Guénon came on the scene the best known occultists were Annie Besant of the Theosophists, and Gerard Encausse, who was connected with the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor and other orders of the Martinist and Masonic line, along with his own Hermetic school. Guénon entered the the Hermetic school of Papus, as Gerard Encausse was known, and

later became a member of the Martinist order in which he received the level of "Supérieur Inconnu". Papus(1865-1916) claimed to have been initiated into Martinism by a friend, Henri Delaage. Papus established the order called Ordre des Silencieux Inconnus. These Martinist orders stem originally from Louis Claude de Saint Martin(1743-1803), known as the "Unknown Philosopher", who had become a Mason and prominent member of the Rites des Élus Coëns. He was influenced by Piqually and Swedenborg, and later in his life by Boehme.⁵ Guénon also entered the Masonic "Humanidad" Lodge of the Rite National Espagnol and the "IN-RI" chapter and temple, of Swedenborgian origin.

In 1908, Papus called together the Congrès Spiritualiste et Maçonnique. During this congress Papus gave a speech affirming reincarnation and other theories which Guénon knew to be false. For Guénon this **then cast doubt upon the validity** of the thought of Papus.⁶ At this same congress Guénon met Léon Champrenaud, a member of the Supreme Council of the Martinist order. Champrenaud had been initiated into Islam under the name of Abdul-Haq. He had founded La Voie(1904-1907) along with Matgioi (Albert de Pouvourville, 1862-1939). These men, together with a number of others of the Martinist order hostile to Papus, held a seance and received a communication in writing which instructed them to establish an "Order of the Temple" and to make Guénon the chief.⁷ However, that "Order of the Temple" did

not last and Guénon joined the Universal Gnostic Church, founded by Fabre des Essarts (Synésius), and became the bishop of Alexandria under the name of Palingenius. Champrenaud took the name of Théophane and Matgioi that of Simon. La Gnose lasted from November 1909, until January 1912, under the direction of Guénon/Palingenius who wrote articles on the demiurge, religion and sentimentalism, mathematics and metaphysics, the symbolism of the cross, and some other articles that were later used in Man and His Becoming according to the Vedanta. In collaboration with Synésius he also made the first French translation of the first book of Philosophumena attributed to Origen.⁸

In this La Gnose period. Guénon was extremely involved in the occult and, according to Laurant, Guénon never liked people to recall that episode in his life.⁹ N.M.D. Boulet remarks that the quality of the articles by Guénon, in La Gnose, contrasted remarkably with the "pensée vraiment misérable" of the other collaborators.¹⁰

"Le Demiurge", the first of his publications, appeared in La Gnose and exhibits the Guénonian metaphysical terminology found throughout his later works. This work is remarkable for the intellectual maturity of a man at the age of twenty-three, an early maturation that adds to the mystery of why Guénon was involved in the occult. Furthermore, since the principles he held in "Le Demiurge" are identical to those at his death, his reason for leaving the occult could not have been the result

of a change of principles. This perhaps lends credence to his contention that he only entered the occult to destroy it.

Boulet, cited by Laurant, notes that Guénon always expressed himself **contemptuously towards the occultists and Gnostics.**¹¹

Both Reyor and Chacornac believe that Guénon was not seeking a "way" in the occult milieu - his knowledge was too mature so soon afterwards. Reyor said Guénon's occult days were an "investigative obligation" and quotes Guénon: "Si nous avons dû, à une certaine époque, pénétrer dans tels ou tels milieux, c'est pour des raisons qui ne regardent que nous."¹² If we are to take Guénon's word for it we must assume that he had assimilated some genuine traditional knowledge from an unknown source, but for some reason or another Guénon has chosen to keep that source a secret. It is fairly certain that he had studied Hinduism, Taoism, and Islam from direct sources and not just from books: "D'autre part, nous savons que Guénon n'a pas étudié des doctrines orientales et des langues orientales de façon livresque. Nous avons eu à ce sujet son témoignage catégorique."¹³ Our only hint as to his Hindu master was the picture of a Hindu woman he used to show his friends, claiming it was the wife of his master. By 1909, according to Jean Reyor, Guénon had one or more Hindu masters in France, and he surmises that this was probably as early as 1904-1905.¹⁴ It is most certain that his master or masters were from the school of Sankara judging by his **metaphysica** position. The important role that this source plays should not

be underestimated, and Chacornac believes that this determined quite strongly the course of Guénon's career. As for Guénon's Islamic ties, it has been surmised that Guénon never really encountered the Sheikh Abder-Rahman Elish el-kébir to whom Symbolism of the Cross is dedicated, and that Ivan Aguéli transmitted the barakah¹⁵ to Guénon in 1912.¹⁶ Ivan Aguéli, whose real name was John Gustaf Agelii, had been initiated into the Sufis and had taken the Muslim name of Abdul-Hadi. He met Guénon/Palingenius in 1910 and the two collaborated from December 1910 to January 1912. Ivan Aguéli was probably the intermediary between Guénon and the Sheikh el-kébir. He made several translations of Arabic works such as Traité de l'Unité and Les Catégories de l'Initiation both by Moyiddin Ibn Arabi.¹⁷ Boulet states that the Sheikh el-kébir believed himself to have established a concordance between Islam, Christianity, and the Masons, and speculates that this is the source of what she terms Guénon's key errors on religion. Boulet also believes that Guénon personally knew the Sheikh during this La Gnose period.¹⁸ Robert Amadou, in his **preface** to Le Symbolisme de la croix, remarks that some unpublished reports have claimed that Guénon received the barakah from Sheikh el-Alaoui de Mostaganem while he was in Algeria (Sétif, 1917-18 and Hamman Rirha, summer 1918). If so, this may have been in addition to the barakah from Aguéli.¹⁹

Regarding Guénon's Taoism, it was originally assumed that

Matgioi had played the role of initiator for Guénon. Matgioi was initiated by the "Master of Sentences" while serving with the army in the Gulf of Tonkin. R. Maridort states that Guénon was in direct contact with Tong-Sang Luat (whom J.P. Laurant refers to as the son of the "Master of Sentences"²⁰) who was in Paris for a while.²¹ Paul Sérant believes that Matgioi played a decisive role in Guénon's intellectual evolution, and cites passages in which Guénon refers to Matgioi as "Notre Maître".²² Jean Reyor, on the other hand, says that "Notre Maître" was out of deference to an older man (Matgioi was in his fifties²³) and Chacornac quotes Guénon from La crise du monde moderne as evidence that Matgioi was not Guénon's master:

... bien que cela nous oblige à parler de nous, ce qui est peu dans nos habitudes, nous devons déclarer formellement ceci: il n'y a pas, à notre connaissance, personne qui ait exposé en Occident des idées orientales authentiques, sauf nous-mêmes; et nous l'avons toujours fait exactement comme l'aurait fait tout orientale qui s'y serait trouvé amené par les circonstances.²⁴

It is also a fact that Guénon's first works were on Hinduism while Matgioi and others involved with La Gnose were Taoist and Sufi initiates.

Guénon's relationship with Christianity was always somewhat uncomfortable from both sides. In Laurant's opinion Guénon did not practice the sacraments,²⁵ despite his belief in the necessity of an exoterism (although when he went to Cairo he did practice the exoteric Muslim rites). When asked by Gonzague Truc why he

had not continued in his natal religion Guénon replied that the "sentimental" character of Christianity had held him back, and that its dogmatism had acquired a rigidity in spite of its suppleness and richness.²⁶ We might add that the very subject of exoterism was approached by Guénon only through the repeated questions of Jean Reyor, and then answered only reluctantly.²⁷

During his occult years it appears that Guénon obtained the conviction that true satanic groups existed which had tried to discredit genuine traditional groups. This conviction surfaces clearly much later in his work The Reign of Quantity, published in the 1940's. His conviction came as the result of the Leo Taxil affair, of which Guénon had ~~documents~~ in his possession due to his position with Papus.²⁸ Leo Taxil had admitted in 1897 to having fabricated the entire story of the luciferian high Masons behind the Masonic facade. He had attributed many crimes to these Masons and had convinced the Catholic world of his allegations.²⁹ In spite of his admission of fabrication the Catholics continued their attacks against the Masons. Guénon participated in much of this on both sides of the fence; at the same time that he worked with Clarin de la Rive, editor of La France Anti-maçonnique (Guénon's real opposition to the Masons was their modernism which had dominated their true initiatory character), he also belonged to the Masonic Thebah de la Grande Loge de France and wrote an article in Le Symbolisme (January 1913) entitled "L'enseignement initiatique".³⁰ The First World War,

according to Sérant, put the Masons "to sleep" and Guénon never participated in Masonic activities after that time.

The same year as Guénon was initiated into Islam by Ivan Aguéli he married Mlle. Berthe Loury, a friend of his aunt. His wife was extremely Catholic, a fact which adds to the Guénonian enigma. Boulet writes:

Mais puisque j'ai l'étrange privilège de n'avoir fréquenté Guénon que pendant sa période au moins apparemment Catholique, alors qu'il était l'époux d'une femme qui, tant par éducation que par conviction personnelle, n'auraient jamais consenti à épouser un musulman ni un franc-maçon³¹

While Guénon was writing for La France Anti-maçonnique a little known individual by the name of Hiram Singh wrote a series of articles in F.A.M. under the pseudonym of Swami Narad Mani. He made allusions to a Mongolian organization which served as a cover to an important spiritual center. This organization was known as the "Taychoux Maroux" or the "Teshu-Maru".³² This of course recalls Guénon's work Le Roi du Monde published a decade later, and this "Teshu-Maru" must have certainly verified for Guénon the possibility of a supreme spiritual center, which had been mentioned already by Saint-Yves d'Alveydre.³³ Swami Narad Mani published a number of anti-theosophical works and seems to have been well acquainted with the many secret societies of the East and the West. He must have had considerable influence on Guénon: Guénon later used much of Mani's documentation for his own work against the Theosophists.³⁴

Chacornac has shown that Guénon's thought showed a slight alteration more favorable to religion in the period subsequent to La Gnose. In La Gnose, Sept.-Oct. 1909, in "La Religion et les religions" Guénon declares "... si la Religion est nécessairement une, comme la Verité, les religions ne peuvent être que des déviations de la Doctrine primordiale." In La France Anti-Maçonnique Guénon now defends organized religion as an "adaptation" of the Primordial Tradition.³⁵ It was during this period from 1913 to 1930 that Guénon wrote La crise du monde moderne, in which he categorically stated that Catholicism was an authentic tradition and could serve as the basis for a revival of the Western tradition. But, however much he openly approved of Catholicism, his personal participation was, as we noted, minimal. Incidentally, the milieu in which he participated at this period was very Catholic and J.P. Laurant thinks that it would have been impossible for him to have practiced any Sufi techniques such as he would have learned from Abdul-Hadj, except perhaps for some interior techniques.³⁶

The intellectual quality of Guénon's associates rose considerably during this period, with the most notable being the neo-scholastics and Jacques Maritain. In addition to participating in this Catholic milieu Guénon wholeheartedly rejected all of the occult schools, the Theosophists, the spiritualists and even to some extent the Masons, although as we shall see

later, he must have retained the hopes of finding a genuine Western tradition lurking somewhere amongst these groups. Guénon now spoke and wrote as a Catholic; Oliver de Fremond, in a letter to L.A. Charbonneau-Lassey, remarked that "... les vieilles lettres que j'ai de lui respirent un parfait esprit catholique."³⁷

By 1916 Guénon's revenues had diminished and he found himself obliged to work for a living. During the summer of 1916 he was professor of philosophy at the Lycée of Tulle (secondary school).³⁸ In 1916-17 he taught at Saint-Germain en Laye during the school year. Later he was named professor in Algeria at Sétif, and moved there with his wife and aunt. In 1918 he was professor at Blois at the College de Blois and resided at his parents' residence. He resigned in order to devote himself to his studies and work.³⁹

Boulet tells us that Guénon returned to Paris in 1919 for an examination for a university fellowship. He was one of the seven over twenty-four years of age who were chosen after the first test, but he failed the orals in August because of the university's preference for more youthful candidates (he was then thirty-three). Guénon abandoned his efforts at formal education after the fellowships were closed by a new rule the following October to those older than thirty. He then had the intention of preparing a doctoral thesis "... malgré la difficulté de faire accepter un sujet général de métaphysique pure."⁴⁰

Boulet adds that by June 1920, Guénon had completed Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues and had had it accepted for publication with a favorable notice from Jacques Maritain. In November Guénon decided to use it as a doctoral thesis. The title was registered, but in March 1921, the great Sanskritist Sylvain Lèvi gave a negative report on it and ended Guénon's attempts to earn a doctor-ès-lettres degree with Introduction générale.⁴¹ Sylvain Lèvi's comments deserve to be quoted:

Il [Guénon] exclure tous les éléments que ne correspondent pas à sa conception (Bouddhisme et Protestantisme)... tout est dans le Vedanta... il fait bon marché de l'histoire et de la critique historique... il est tout prêt à croire à une transmission mystique d'une vérité première apparue au génie humain dès les premiers âges du monde....⁴²

During this "Christian" period Guénon collaborated in La Revue Philosophique (1920-1921), Revue de Philosophie (1921-1922), and La Revue Bleue (1919). He also collaborated with Jacques Maritain during this period and was especially close to N.M.D. Boulet with whom he carried on a lengthy correspondence. Through them he was led to the catholic writer Gonzague Truc.⁴² At this time, in addition to Introduction générale (1921), he published Le Théosophisme, histoire d'une pseudo-religion (1921), L'Erreur spirite (1923) and Orient et Occident (1924).

Guénon's proclivity for Oriental metaphysics caused a break with the neo-scholastics. During this period he met M. Charbonneau-Lassey, author of Le Bestiaire du Christ, which Guénon

often cited in his works, and he in turn introduced Guénon to R.P. Anizan, the editor of Requabit. Anizan was more receptive to Oriental symbolism and from 1925 to 1927 Guénon wrote on Christian and Oriental symbols in this journal.⁴⁴ R. Maridort says the neo-scholastic hostility did not surprise Guénon. In 1933 Guénon wrote from Cairo:

Pour ce que j'ai dit dans Orient et Occident au sujet du rôle possible de l'Eglise catholique (comme représentant une forme traditionnelle occidentale, pouvant servir de base à certaines réalisations, ainsi que cela a d'ailleurs eu lieu au Moyen Age), je dois dire que je ne me suis jamais fait d'illusions sur ce qui pouvait en résulter en fait dans les circonstances actuelles; mais il ne fallait pas qu'on puisse me reprocher d'avoir paru négliger certaines possibilités, au moins théoriques, ou ne pas en tenir compte.⁴⁵

In 1925 Guénon attended a conference at the Sorbonne and gave his speech of "La Métaphysique Orientale," setting forth the superiority of Oriental doctrines over those of the West. In that same year he also began his collaboration with Le Voile d'Isis directed by Paul Chacornac, with the expressed aim of studying various esoteric movements, both ancient and modern.⁴⁶ In 1933 Le Voile d'Isis became Etudes Traditionnelles and up to the present day it continues to republish Guénon's articles as well as works on tradition by others.

It was during this period that Guénon authored Le Roi du monde, a very unusual work in which mention is made of the legendary underground kingdom of Agartha. This work was

stimulated by a book by Ferdinand Ossendowski entitled Men, Beasts and Gods, in which Ossendowski describes his travels through eastern Russia and Mongolia. Ossendowski recounted the legend of this underground kingdom and spiritual center in which the "king of the world" resides. Guénon connected this legendary personage with Manu of the Vedic tradition and Melchizedek of the Bible. In 1924 Nouvelles Littéraires sponsored a conference on the subject of this legend, organized by its director F. Lefèvre. The orientalist René Grousset, Jacques Maritain, Ossendowski and Guénon participated. The conference seems to have been inconsequential. Needless to say Catholic reactions to Le Roi du monde were unfavorable since Guénon made clear in the book his opinion that Christianity is merely a branch of the Primordial Tradition.⁴⁷ After this Guénon left Regnabit, concluding that the Church had lost its tradition and that circumstances made it extremely difficult for the Church to serve as a basis for a renewal of tradition. He had also written at this time L'Esoterisme de Dante (1925), La crise du monde moderne (1927), and L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta (1925) chapters of which had already appeared in La Gnose.

It seems that Guénon was still in contact with occult groups. In 1927 a certain "Polaires" group had published a work entitled Asia Mysterosa. L'Oracle de force astrale comme moyen de communication avec "les petites lumières de l'Orient", by Zam Botiva, whose real name was Cesare Accomani. He claimed to

have received from a mysterious hermit, Father Julien, a method based upon numbers by which one could communicate with groups in contact with Agarttha.⁴⁸ Guénon wrote a preface for this work but retracted it just before publication. Sérant states that Guénon claimed to have undertaken to write this preface to attain "... le résultant d'une verification à laquelle il tenait à proceder..." and retracted it after he became convinced that the book's principal concerns were mere ceremonial magic. Guénon moreover claimed later that his preface was only of vague generalities.

Catholic reactions to Guénon's thought changed his mind and possibly the course of his life. It had become evident to him by this time that if there still existed an esoteric Christianity in Europe it was certainly well hidden and that the unfavorable reactions he was receiving were not about to change. In 1928 both his wife and his aunt, Madame Duru, died. Both deaths were a real sorrow to him, but perhaps left him free for the events of his life which followed. On March 5, 1930, Guénon left for Cairo with the intention of doing research and only staying a few months. As it turned out he remained in Cairo until the end of his life in 1951. Before leaving for Cairo two more of his works were published; Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporal (1929) and Saint Bernard (1929).

Boulet posits the theory that Guénon may have gone to Cairo with the double purpose of doing research and to reconnoitr

with the idea of living in a warmer climate and less expensive place to live.⁴⁹ However, the mysterious side of Guénon again reappears. According to Dr. Grangier, who, along with others, used to meet with Guénon, it was understood that he had left for Cairo because he had been called by a superior initiatory center.⁵⁰

Ever since his initiation into Sufism in 1912, Guénon had taken on the name of Abdul Wahed Yahia, and this was his name in Cairo. He settled down and lived the life of an urban Muslim and continued his studies. During the last twenty years of his life he kept up an immense correspondence with readers in Europe who questioned him on where to find an authentic initiation. Guénon was regarded by many of those readers as a spiritual master, **judging** by the manner in which the letters were written. During World War II his correspondence was interrupted and he wrote Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps (1945), Les principes du calcul infinitésimal (1946), Aperçus sur l'initiation (1946) and La Grande Triade (1946). In the late 1940s he and Frithjof Schuon (author of The Transcendent Unity of Religions, Understanding Islam and Logic and Transcendence) disagreed over the role of the Christian sacraments and whether they still retained an esoteric effect. He was also visited by Marco Pallis and the son of Ananda Coomaraswamy, who wished to discuss with him the opinions he held on the nature of Buddhism. Guénon had always professed the opinion, following

Matgioi from La Gnose days, that Buddhism was unorthodox (in terms of the Primordial Tradition). Coomaraswamy and Pallis persuaded him with evidence that this was not the case.

Guénon married a Muslim girl in Cairo who bore him two sons, a daughter was born posthumously. On January 7, 1951 Guénon died. The last prayers were said at L'Azhar and he was buried in the cemetery of Darassa.⁵¹

It seems that Guénon must have had an impersonal demeanor which, although not unamiable, must have contributed to the mystery of the man. His intellect assumed the **dominant** role in his personality and the little importance he placed on the individual sentiments is quite in accord with his personal disposition. His life illustrates the path of an intellectual pilgrim so devoted to his goal that little else matters. However, this was not an obsession for, according to Jean Tourniac, he was quite capable of showing normal human responses and devotion to his family and sons. It was only in matters of knowledge that the individual was relegated to second place. Dr. Grangier, who regarded Guénon as the chief of a metaphysical school, recalled in 1951:

Pendant que je parlais, il était toujours assis, immobile, légèrement courbé en avant, le regard clair et sans expression, fumant. Il souriait légèrement parfois en homme qui est la vérité... il m'a répondu enfin, en de brèves paroles, que sa vérité était impersonnelle, d'origine divine, transmise par révélation, détachée et sans passion.⁵²

Gonzague Truc says in a somewhat panegyric tone, but doubtless without exaggeration:

... j'ai rarement rencontré une physionomie aussi pure que celle-ci. Qu'on ne se méprenne pas là-dessus. Quand je parle ainsi de pureté, j'entends la parfaite intégrité de l'esprit et l'absence de toute compromission. Quel fut l'homme intime, sinon l'homme intérieur, chez René Guénon? Cela n'a regardé que lui, et il n'en a rien laissé passer. Il a été, dans l'espèce douée de la parole, un de ces êtres infiniment rares qui ne disent je. Tout ce qu'on peut avancer, c'est qu'il était d'humeur égale et bienveillante et incapable de faire aucun mal. Ce n'est pas peu. Cet homme qui a eu des adversaires passionnés, des ennemis qu'il connaissait et dont il savait qu'il pouvait attendre le pire, n'a été l'ennemi de personne et n'a songé à répondre à la violence et aux violences que par la raison. Et il se pourrait même qu'il ait préféré la fuite à une autre sorte, plus directe, de défense.⁵³

If we omit Matgioi, Guénon's contemporaries and any direct contact Guénon may have had with oriental sources, all of which we have briefly mentioned, we may look to the first modern mythologists of the era of Romanticism for possible sources of influence on Guénon. Such ideas as evolutionism and positivism had not fully coagulated in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It is during this era that we encounter the notion of a "Primordial Tradition" and ideas similar to those of Guénon concerning the role of myths and symbols. Laurant points out that Boulanger in L'Antiquité dévoilée par ses usages (1776) had recognized a common mythology among all men that was perhaps a sacred language.⁵⁴ Friedrich W.J. Schelling (1775-1854), Joseph von Gorres (1776-1884) and Friedrich Creuzer (1771-1858) also postulated

theories of a "Primordial Tradition" of some sort. In Mythengeschichte der asiatischen Welt, Gorres, as a result of his contact with the Vedic tradition, posited a primordial theocracy.⁵⁵ Creuzer felt that priests from India had brought their knowledge to the West and had communicated with symbols; these symbols he saw as gods revealing themselves, and not as arbitrary inventions: "... all symbolism through which the priests know how to reflect the higher reality rests not on names arbitrarily designated by people, but on that original relationship itself."⁵⁶ Schelling, in Philosophie der Mythologie (1828- lectures), stipulated that myths are not mere human fabrications but may have a reality and spiritual power over man which is truly significant.⁵⁷ This significance made it impossible for him to see myth as a mere human invention. Herder, perhaps the founding father of the modern study of mythology, in his Alteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts, saw myths not merely as a collection of allegories, but as true symbols-hierophanies.⁵⁸ Guénon most certainly would have been acquainted with these men, though he does not mention them in his works. Laurant sees many similarities between Guénon's thought and Creuzer's Les Religions de L'Antiquité (1825), which was translated into French in 1852; however, Laurant points out that Guénon recommended to his friends the works of Frédéric de Rougement who drew upon Creuzer,⁵⁹ although Guénon never cited him in his works. If that is the case, then we may see a direct connection between Guénon and these Romanticists

concerning a general philosophy of history and conception of myths, although Guénon's metaphysics must certainly be derived from a Vedic source. Frédéric de Rougement was the author of le Peuple primitif (1857), Quelques mots sur les Nombres rythmiques (1862), La vie humaine avec et sans la Foi (1869) and Philosophie de l'Histoire aux différent âges de l'humanité (1874).

We will briefly mention some of the similarities traced by Laurant between Guénon and Rougement. The universality of myths indicated for Rougement a common origin for the various sacred traditions around the world. He also believed that various mythical acts and personifications represented cosmogonic and cosmological facts. It follows from this that the real meaning of myths and symbols had become progressively veiled and that a primitive monotheism had been fragmented into sundry legends, polytheism, and idolatry. Given these precepts, Rougement questioned whether primitive mankind was really a brute, as modern man conceives him, or whether perhaps he was a savant. Rougement theorized that Melchizedek was the last representative of the primitive world, and discussed his connection with Abraham - a theme that Guénon was later to follow in Le Roi du monde where he sees Melchizedek as the representative of Manu or the "king of the world", passing on the tradition to Abraham. Rougement also discussed the different ages of humanity and the various temporal cycles. Laurant points out that Guénon, in Les principes du calcul infinitésimal and L'Homme et son devenir

duplicated a statement by Rougement that the Latin aevum was an age without beginning or end. Rougement analysed the various forms of trinities, mentioning the sky, earth and man as the Taoist triad. This is, of course, the subject of La Grande Triade. Rougement also discussed the three worlds: earth, atmosphere, and sky, which Guénon makes so much use of throughout his works. Rougement also connected chaos with mer, mère and matière - an extremely important connection that Guénon uses often and develops more fully in the Reign of Quantity. Rougement also declared that the great gulf between the sacred and profane was a very late separation, a theme that Guénon develops much in his critiques of the modern world. This distinction and relationship between the sacred and profane is usually associated with Mircea Eliade, who continually repeats this theme throughout his many works. In particular, Guénon seems to have borrowed from Rougement on the symbolism of the tree.

Laurant continues by showing some similarities in Guénon's thought to that found in Creuzer's work Les Religions de l'Antiquité. Probably the most outstanding similarity concerns the polar origin of the Primordial Tradition, which Guénon develops in Le Roi du monde.⁶⁰ Creuzer also regarded the dualism of Mithraism as a popular mask for an esoteric non-dual doctrine. In "Le Demiurge" Guénon remarks that many dualist doctrines, **Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism for instance, are really dualist**

doctrines only exoterically.⁶¹

Laurant also sees some general borrowings by Guénon from DeBièrre who wrote Essai sur le symbolisme antique d'Orient (1847) and Eclaircissements sur la destination de trois Zodiaques. Like Guénon, DeBièrre was particularly critical of modern science. Two other men, Frédéric Portal, Les symboles des Egyptiens comparés à ceux des Hébreux (1840) and Louis Jacolliot, Rois, Prêtres et Castes (1877), La Genèse de l'humanité (1875) and Spiritisme dans le monde. Jacolliot, like Guénon, denounced the "classical prejudice" of the West and saw India as the closest representative of the primordial Indo-European civilization. Guénon briefly mentions Jacolliot in Le Roi du monde for his reference to Agarttha, but he criticizes Jacolliot for being too "fantaisiste" in his accounts of India and the occult practices found there.

Expounding upon some of the Western sources for Guénon's thought is a pursuit beyond the scope of this thesis. We have merely wished to highlight some of those possible sources and to show that Guénon's thought falls within a European historical continuity, and is not entirely innovative. Guénon never understood originality to be a virtue and was mainly interested in reasserting the ancient truths. If those truths appear to some as "original" that is due to their ignorance of those truths. The formation of his thought, taken from various Western sources, as we have indicated, and supplemented by an oral teaching from a genuine Oriental doctrine, represents the theoretical aspect

of his development. There is also the practical side to be considered, that is, the quest for a means of Self-realization, which serves as a general background for the events of his life. Theory, no matter how brilliant, was recognized very early by Guénon as far too limiting. The experience of the true Self was his goal and Guénon saw early that the doors of that perception could be unlocked by a genuine traditional initiation. He must have been initiated by his Hindu master(s), but that did not preclude a search for a genuine Western tradition. There are perhaps two possibilities for his dabbling in the occult if we set aside for the moment his own testimony that his motives were to destroy it: he was seeking a genuine Western tradition and understood that it might be found in the occult milieu; or, he may have been seeking to establish a Western elite, the very ephemeral existence of his Order of the Temple being his first attempt, and wished to draw his members from the ranks of the occult. Having failed at the latter, his next step was towards Christianity, with his settling in Cairo possibly representing an admission of failure on that score even though his original intention to visit Cairo was to do research. In the final analysis he remained tied to the Oriental doctrines which had initiated his quest.

To return to the theoretical side, the Guénonian contribution is a wholeness in his world outlook. Whatever may have been his faults, his conceptual framework was developed into a concep-

tual synthesis that was capable of being accomodated to many contingencies. This synthetic framework is the background we have established, and it serves as the basis for what we consider to be his central contributing theme, the symbolic expression of metaphysical Self-realization.

NOTES

1. Biographical accounts will be taken from Paul Chacornac, La Vie Simple de René Guénon.
2. Denys Roman, "René Guénon et la loge 'La Grande Triade'", 267.
3. Jean-Pierre Laurant, Le Sens Caché selon René Guénon (Lausanne, Switzerland: Editions L'Age d'Homme, 1975), p. 41 note 1.
4. Chacornac, op.cit., p. 85.
5. W.B. Crow, A History of Magic, Witchcraft and Occultism, (No. Hollywood: Wilshire Book Co., 1968), pp. 291-292.
6. This raises the question regarding Guénon's motives for joining the occult groups. He claims to have joined the occult to destroy them, yet this reason for leaving Papus' group implies he was motivated by a "quest."
7. Laurant, Le Sens Caché, pp. 43-44.
8. Chacornac, op. cit., p. 40.
9. Jean-Pierre Laurant, "Le problème de René Guénon ou Quelques questions posées par les rapports de sa vie et de son oeuvre," Revue de l'Histoire des Religions, 179(1971), p..54.
10. Noele-Maurice-Denis-Boulet, "L'Esotériste René Guénon, souvenirs et jugements," La Pensée Catholique, 77(1962), p..2'
11. Laurant, "Le problème de René Guénon," p. 57.
12. Jean Reyor, "En Marge de la Vie Simple de René Guénon," Etudes Traditionnelles, 345(Jan.-Feb. 1958), p.8.
13. Chacornac, op. cit., p. 41.
14. Reyor, "En Marge de la Vie Simple," p. 7.
15. Barakah is usually understood as an informal blessing conferred by the touch of a Muslim holy man and not a formal blessing conferred by initiation.
16. Robert Amadou, preface to Le Symbolisme de la Croix, p. 15.
17. Chacornac, op. cit., p. 46.

18. N.M.D. Boulet, "L'Esotériste René Guénon," La Pensée Catholique, 80(1962), p. 66.
19. Amadou, op. cit., p.15.
20. Laurant, "Le problème de René Guénon," p. 42, from note 2 beginning on p. 41.
21. Roger Maridort, Biographical notice to Le Symbolisme de la Croix (Paris: Editions Vega, 1970), p.309.
22. Paul Sérant, René Guénon (Paris: La Colombe éditions du vieux Colombier, 1953), p. 9.
23. Jean Reyor, "A propos des 'maîtres' de René Guénon," Etudes Traditionnelles, 243(1971), p. 8.
24. Chacornac, op. cit., Quoting from Guénon in La Crise du monde moderne (Paris: 1957), p. 119. On the other hand Boulet remarks: "Déjà [1916] il exaltait Matgioi (A. de Pourville); le révélateur du taoïsme, comme un de ses maîtres.
25. Laurant, "Le problème de René Guénon," p. 58. Laurant seems to base this conclusion on the fact that Boulet never mentions Guénon's participation in the sacraments in her reminiscences, an omission that Laurant takes as an affirmation of Guénon's non-participation, since the sacraments were such an essential part of Boulet's life.
26. Gonzague Truc, "Souvenirs et perspectives sur René Guénon," Etudes Traditionnelles (Special edition, July-Aug., Sept., Oct.-Nov., 1951), #293-294-295, p. 338.
27. Laurant, "Le problème de René Guénon," p. 63.
28. Chacornac, op. cit., p. 52.
29. Ibid., p. 51.
30. Laurant, Le Sens Caché, p. 62.
31. N.M.D. Boulet, "L'Esotériste René Guénon," La Pensée Catholique, 78-79, p. 140.
32. Chacornac, op. cit., p. 53.
33. Guénon cites Saint-Yves d'Alveydre in Le Roi du monde, p. 7.

34. Chacornac, op. cit., p. 53.
35. Ibid., p. 54.
36. Laurant, "Le problème de René Guénon," p. 58.
37. Ibid., p. 57.
38. Boulet, La Pensée Catholique, 77, p. 24.
39. **Serant, op. cit., p. 12.**
40. Boulet, La Pensée Catholique, 77, p. 35.
41. Ibid., pp. 35-36.
42. Laurant, "Le problème de René Guénon," p. 43. "Rapport de Sylvain Lévi au doyen Brunot motivant le refus de la thèse de doctorat de René Guénon, 1919 ou 1920."
43. Ibid., p. 56.
44. Sérant, op. cit., p. 13.
45. Maridort, op. cit., p. 311.
46. Sérant, op. cit., p. 13.
47. Laurant, "Le problème de René Guénon," p. 60.
48. Chacornac, op. cit., p. 90.
49. Boulet, La Pensée Catholique, 78-79, p. 139.
50. Laurant, "Le problème de René Guénon," p. 62. Laurant then adds in a note that Guénon wrote to Dr. Grangier telling him that he, Guénon, had converted to Islam (without however mentioning that he had done so in 1912).
51. Laurant, Le Sens Caché, p. 246.
52. Laurant, "Le problème de René Guénon," p. 58. From Dr. T. Grangier, "Souvenirs sur René Guénon," conference Feb. 25, 1951.
53. Gonzague Truc, pp. 334-335.
54. Laurant, Le Sens Caché, p. 29.

55. Jan de Vries, The Study of Religion; A Historical approach (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967), p.48.
56. Friedrich Créuzer, Symbolik und Mythologie der Alten Volker besonders der Griechen 1 (Leipzig und Dormstadt: Heyer und Leske, 1819-23), p. 36. From Jan de Vries, p. 50.
57. Jan de Vries, op. cit., p. 45-46.
58. Ibid., p. 45.
59. Laurant, Le Sens Caché, p. 29.
60. In our chapter on the Primordial Tradition we mention Guénon's theory of its polar origin, and in our chapter on metaphysics we discuss the symbolism of the North.
61. Guénon, "Le Demiurge," p. 147.

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