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ORIENS AND OCCIDENS (II)

However, before concluding, we should heed an element which was already mentioned: the counter-initiation. As we saw, René Guénon suggested that “the *counter-initiation* appears through a degeneracy... the degeneracy had to go back into the past; and, as obscure as its origin is, we may admit as credible that it is attached to some distortion of an ancient civilization that disappeared in a cataclysm of the present Manvantara”; and, in the same way as the Atlantean current and others spread, so the counter-initiatory elements invaded the world, trying to break the “cutting” of the sacred places, to take advantage of any fissure in the protective wall.

At any level, the greater danger did not come from a known enemy, but from the false friend, the inner adversary. In the case of spiritual realization, the worst enemies are not the outer but the inner ones; therefore, Muhammad, the Prophet, made a distinction between “the greater holy war” (*el-jihâdul-akbar*), an inner war, and “the lesser holy war,” the external one. In other words, counter-initiatory centers could have invisible “locations” in the very Orient, more dangerous because nobody noticed them. René Guénon wrote:

“Counter-initiation,” we must say, cannot be considered a purely human invention, which would be no different from “pseudo-initiation.” In fact, it is more than that, and to be so effectively, it must, in a specific mode, and with regard to its origin, derive from the unique source to which every initiation is attached, and, generally speaking, everything that manifests in our world a “non-human” element. (Guénon, **Le règne**, p. 351)

Guénon also specified in a letter that “counter-initiation always tries to establish its centers in those locations where the possibilities of an opposite order [that is, initiatory centers] exist, thus striving to combat the development of these possibilities.”¹ We have to accept, beside spiritual centers with beneficial influences, the existence of satanic centers that spread evil into our world; the latter are called “the Seven Towers of Satan.”²

¹ Guénon added that “in the case of ancient spiritual centers,” counter-initiation would like to establish centers close to them, “to take advantage of what these places could still have as special [vestiges], which could help the transmission of psychical influences.”

² See *The Everlasting Sacred Kernel*, p. 36.

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The Devil couldn't restrain itself from imitating and profaning the number seven and the symbolism of the tower. In 1927, William B. Seabrook published a curious book¹ in which he described his journey among the Arabs and Muslims, and he has a special chapter about the "Towers of Shaitan" (p. 316). Seabrook made comments on a legend, widely known in the Middle-East, about the existence of the fabulous "Seven Towers" or "Power Houses" of the Devil (p. 289), a chain of towers stretching across Asia, from Northern Manchuria, through Tibet, west through Persia, and ending in Kurdistan. In each of these towers, a priest of Satan, by "broadcasting" occult vibrations, controls the evil in the world (p. 290). Seabrook confessed that he did not believe this legend for a moment, which seemed as mythical as the Chinese "subterranean kingdom" or the caves of Sinbad, yet arriving among the Yezidees, north of Baghdad, he saw one of the Towers (p. 316). René Guénon examined Seabrook's information in a note of *Études Traditionnelles*, confirming the existence of the "Seven Towers." He also, in some private letters, considered the towers to be in a direct relation with counter-initiation²; yet Guénon underlined as well that such towers, more or less important, can be found in the West too, and explained that the agents of counter-initiation use the Western pseudo-initiation. This last statement has to be understood not only as a corporeal link between these two, but also as a subtle and invisible channel, which means that we have to be careful when guessing where these "counter-initiation" centers are located.

Bhagavata Purana's text we quoted at the beginning of this study, "When reign deceit, falseness, inertia, sleep, wickedness, consternation, dismay, confusion, fright, sadness, that is called Kali-yuga, which is the dark age," considered the world as a whole and not only the Occident. What scenario can we envisage? The evident one is the invasion of Western modernism, which occurs right now. As a friend was telling us, "the West is now in the East with us"; sentimental teachings, modern scientist views, blind devotion, sectarian patriotism and religious violence and extremism, in the detriment of the Intellectual Tradition are the characteristics of the modern Orient. Yet, we should not be surprised. *Kali-yuga* means a dark age also for the Orient and not only because of the West, but because of its own decadence.³ And there is no doubt that one day this humanity has to go, not only a part of it, but all.

¹ William B. Seabrook, *Adventures in Arabia*, Paragon House, 1991.

² Guénon stated, for example, that Agha Khan and his group were a "cover" for one of the "Seven Towers of the Devil." He suggested too that there could be a connection between the localization of these "towers" and the oil sources.

³ Regarding the destructive role of the West with respect to Eastern Tradition, it is curious that the Christian traditional society, which started its agony at the same time as the trial of the Templars, was subjected to the invasion of the Mongols from the East, that had, no doubt about it, a destructive role (similar to the function of the "Barbarian" invasions that prepared the birth of Christianity as a traditional society). This destructive role of the Mongols – Guénon admitted in a letter – could be a manifestation of Rigor (the hand of divine Justice), which raises the question that maybe the Christian society itself was degenerating as a traditional society and thus subtly causing a reaction manifested by these invasions. We always have to keep in mind this fundamental law called by Matgioi, following the Far-Eastern tradition, the law of "concordant actions and reactions." (Matgioi, *La Voie Rationnelle*, Éd. Trad., 1984); which means that we cannot accept the reaction without looking also for the action. For this reason, even if the tendency of "westernizing" the East is obvious, it could not occur if the Eastern mentality (a part, at least) had not become open and attracted to the modern influences, as a consequence of the *Kali-yuga*.

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When Guénon wrote about the Anti-Christ, he stressed that this one is an impostor whose reign is “the great parody” imitating and mocking everything indeed traditional and spiritual (Guénon, **Le règne**, p. 362). René Guénon also affirmed that the counter-initiation is able to penetrate the traditional organizations, but only those, which both in the West and the East are decayed, or in the course of decaying.¹

Today we witness the decadence of the whole world; but we have to understand one important thing: when we say that now the West is also in the East, considering the world as an immense *Occidens*, we do not imply that *Oriens* is no more. As Guénon explained, our world will never become purely “quantitative” or “inert,” since pure quantity and inertia belong to *materia prima*, which is the support of manifestation, but not the manifestation itself. Without a trace of “quality” the world could not exist. Similarly, the world cannot exist only as a profane world; in fact, that is why Guénon was saying that there is no profane domain, only a profane perspective. The world has reality only because of its sacred kernel, which is *Oriens*. More or less hidden, this *Oriens* is today the immutable keeper of Tradition, gathering at the same time the elements which will become the germs of the future cycle.² Moreover, if there still are genuine initiatory ways, they can be found only inside the Oriental traditions (within very closed organizations which counter-initiation could not penetrate), while Occident can offer, in the best of cases, just a sort of virtual initiation through some very limited initiatory organizations; we should not consider here the Hesychastic way as an Occidental spiritual possibility, but as an Oriental one (since its core is part of *Oriens* and the modern influence cannot touch it).

Let us quote again, *in extenso* this time, what Guénon wrote:

Regarding the Orient, we agree that the ravages of modernism extended considerably, at least externally; the regions which resisted longer against modernism seem now to be changing in an accelerated mode, and India itself is a striking example.³ However, nothing has yet reached the heart of Tradition [*Oriens*], which is the only important thing in our view; it is enough that the traditional point of view, with all that it implies, is completely preserved in the Orient in an inaccessible retreat [the same *Oriens*], far from the modern world’s agitation. Also, we must not forget that everything modern, even in the Orient, is nothing else but the mark of the Occidental mentality’s trespassing [*Occidens*]; the veritable Orient [that is, *Oriens*], the only one that deserves this name, is and will be forever the traditional Orient, even when their exponents are reduced to a minority. It is this Orient we have in mind, in the same way as when we talk about the Occident, we have in view the

¹ Only when a traditional organization has “fissures” in its protective “wall” or “cutting,” can the adversary penetrate. The same thing is valid for an entire traditional society.

² We have to understand that even if the whole present cycle has to die, the new cycle will be based on the old one’s sacred kernel. The synthesis of spirituality will be saved by our humanity (that is, a chosen part) and this will become the kernel of the new cycle, in accordance to the continuity of the universal helix.

³ We may note, in comparison to Islamic extremism (a sign of the modern times), that in India there developed a weird nationalism (we know scholars who are convinced that everything in the world, religions, social customs, etc., have an “Indian” origin, a very modern view indeed, similar, for example, to the Western idea of a French “center of the world,” which materialized in the days of Mitterrand).

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Occidental mentality, that is, the modern and antitraditional mentality; it can be found everywhere, since we envisage first of all the opposition of these two points of view and not simply the two geographical terms. (**Orient et Occident**, p. 229-230)¹

Julius Evola, in his article **René Guénon, Orient and Occident** (1954), tried, like many others, to argue that what Guénon was saying about a “traditional civilization” still existing in Orient is not valid anymore². Evola affirmed:

If we are turning to Orient, [Guénon’s] considerations have to be updated; many things have changed since the first edition of his book [**La Crise du Monde Moderne**]. It becomes more evident every day that Orient itself, considered the exponent of the traditional civilization, is on the verge of a crisis. China is not a part [of this civilization] anymore. In India, the nationalistic and modernist tendencies become stronger. The Arabic countries and even Tibet are in disarray. Therefore, a large part of Guénon’s Orient seems to become a thing of the past, and those elements of Orient where the traditional spirit survived due to an uninterrupted continuity, and which could perform the function we discussed [that of saving the Occident], can be found only in some small closed groups.

As Guénon himself said (see the last quotation), the modern mentality invaded the East too, and continues to do so. This invasion took (and takes) control over “the many” that are open to accept such influences and over the extremists that think they are rejecting them; but the traditional *oriental* core with its initiatory ways remains untouched and that is all that counts, since not quantity but quality is the nature of the sacred kernel. Evola was a Westerner by his nature; therefore he praised the royal initiation more than the sacerdotal one, action more than contemplation, and was fond of Buddhism. And his *swadharma* did not let him correct the errors. For the same reason he tried to revise Guénon’s perspective about Orient and Occident, and (in the same article we mentioned) he invented a curious picture of the present Manvantara. Evola affirmed that it is possible to see the Occident solving its crisis and passing to a new cycle (and to a “Golden Age”), while the Orient will fall in its own “Iron Age,” reaching the position in which the Occident is today. First of all, we see here again a “magical” (a word abused by Evola) perspective: a *Deus ex machina* will save the Occident... which is impossible; the Occident does not have the necessary tools and means to recover by itself. Second, the laws of the cosmic cycles are not negotiable and, we like it or not, these laws will follow their course. Third, the present crisis is a general one comprising the entire world, but even if the Orient is engulfed by it, there still is the *oriental* sacred kernel with its more or less outwardly traditional envelops.³

¹ Guénon added these lines as an *Addendum* to the new edition of his book.

² Julius Evola, **Orient et Occident**, Archè, 1982, pp. 40 ff.

³ Seven years later, in 1961, Evola used almost the same words in the first chapter of his book **Cavalcare la tigre** (“Riding the tiger”), stressing again that the East becomes more and more “modern”; a traditional mentality in the East subsisted – Evola suggested – not because there is no decline there, but because the process is not so advanced as in the West (Julius Evola, **Chevaucher le tigre**, Guy Trédaniel, 1996, p. 21). And again Evola fantasized that the West will surpass by itself the crisis and will become a guide and a

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In 1955, Martin Lings, in his “translator’s note” (the second edition of Guénon’s **East and West**¹) wrote:

Judging by outward appearances, one might say that by a sudden headlong collapse the East has reached that state of mental chaos, which was only reached in Europe after the degeneration of several centuries. Western influence shows itself in various ways: a large part of the ruling classes in the East appear to accept wholeheartedly the antitraditional outlook and to be obsessed with the idea of making themselves as Western as possible. For such people traditional belief is merely a sign of ignorance; and having rejected such belief, while still retaining the instinct for strong attachments, which they have no doubt inherited from generations of ancestors who followed faithfully the ways of their tradition, they attach themselves to modern ideas and habits with a fervour which often exceeds that of the Westerners themselves.

Yet Lings concluded, quoting the same text of Guénon we presented above:

As the author [Guénon] says in his post script, “it is enough that the traditional outlook, with all that it implies, should be wholly preserved in some Eastern retreats which are inaccessible to the outward agitations of our age.” Such retreats would inevitably be Eastern today, even if they happened to be situated in the West since the tradition in question would be one of the Eastern ones rather than the no longer complete Western one; but these particulars would matter little to anyone who sincerely desired the truth, since such an individual would necessarily be above sentimental attachment to the forms of any one tradition.

More recently, in 1987, Elie Lemoine, reviewing Charles-André Gilis’ book, **Introduction à l’enseignement et au mystère de René Guénon**, expressed the opinion

leader, while the East will decay completely, replacing the present West. Titus Burckhardt wrote a review about **Cavalcare la tigre**, pointing out some of Evola’s errors. He stated at the end: “Considering all the prophecies, the sacred deposit of the integral Tradition will subsist to the end of the cycle; this means that it will be always somewhere an open door. For the people capable to surpass the exterior surface and driven by a sincere will, neither the decadence of the surrounding world, nor their belonging to a specific nation or milieu, constitute absolute obstacles” (Titus Burckhardt, “**Chevaucher le tigre**”, *Études Traditionnelles*, no. 372-373, 1962, p. 187).

Regarding this theme, we should mention here the Romanian logician Anton Dumitriu, who was in contact with René Guénon through Michel Vâlsan and Vasile Lovinescu. In 1943, Dumitriu wrote a book called **Orient and Occident**, visibly influenced by Guénon. In 1987, he revised it and his attitude with respect to Tradition became a strongly profane one. He considered that Guénon was carried away by enthusiasm [!] and distorted the ratio Orient-Occident; that even the Hindu contemporaries (like Vivekananda [!]) have not been so tough on Occident. Even if Dumitriu used in his book many of Guénon’s ideas [without quoting him!], his conclusion is that the Occident has its own tradition, which is the “scientific spirit” and the [profane] science, and this “traditional spirit” will organize the world. Obviously, for this individual (who seemed so promising at the beginning), the influence of Hesychasm and of René Guénon’s work did not operate the necessary change; and we also know what happened to Matgioi, which makes us understand why Guénon was so tough with regard to initiation and spiritual realization.

¹ Sophia Perennis, Perennial Wisdom Series.

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that today we cannot talk anymore about an “immutable Orient” (as Gilis does), since this “immutable Orient” has disappeared and the entire world is facing decadence¹. And he ended the article pointing out the case of Islam: this part of the Orient decayed very fast so that “there are not too many real initiates left in the exterior world.” Let us say it again: the “immutable Orient” (an equivalent of *Oriens*) cannot disappear. It is known that Satan’s greatest ruse is to make the world think that it doesn’t exist. Yet another ruse is also very efficiently used: the one which makes the people believe that there is no more Tradition, sacred and initiation in this world. In fact, if the world still has a degree of reality that is because the divine presence is among us. A profane domain does not have reality; there is only a profane viewpoint. And even if this world will decay completely and disappear, the sacred kernel, this “immutable Orient,” will live forever².

¹ Lemoine’s article was reprinted in Elie Lemoine, **Theologia sine metaphysica nihil**, Éd. Traditionnelles, 1991, see p. 210.

² Regarding the dispute Lemoine-Gilis, we must say that Lemoine, a Catholic, “had to” criticize Gilis because he could not accept his Islamic perspective that challenged the Catholic position. Charles-André Gilis responded to these critics in the new edition of his **Introduction à l’enseignement et au mystère de René Guénon** (Édition Traditionnelles, 2001, pp. 137 ff.), quoting Guénon’s text from **Orient et Occident** that we presented above. He also used Michel Vâlsan’s words: “Moreover, the alteration caused by the modern mentality is a lot less deep than the Westerners believe, even the ones with a traditional mentality, who let themselves be too easily impressed by the superficial degradations of the social style. In North Africa itself, where the Western presence has been long and direct, and where the traditional degeneration should therefore be the most accentuated, we know, from our own experience – and this not only in the world, naturally restricted, of the contemplative order – of a humanity which continues its millennial life of spiritual fidelity” (Michel Vâlsan, **L’œuvre de Guénon en Orient**, Études Traditionnelles, no. 411, 1969, p. 33, article translated in English in *Oriens*, September 2004). However, today, the danger of a “fire without light” is acknowledged and has to be taken seriously: “In the absence of traditional civilization like the modern contemporary world, in the West and now also in the East, religion, at the collective and the individual level, is assimilated and propagated in a profane and fragmented manner such that the element of light is withheld and what reaches the recipient is only heat, mere sentimental warmth. ... It is also not difficult to observe the superficiality and lack of doctrinal and metaphysical perspective that generally marks the popular and as such vulgar religious discourse. All too often, while presenting the intellectual and esoteric aspects contained in various religious forms into contemporary idiom, their profound depth is flattened out, their rigour diluted and their potential for liberation of human soul killed” (see Mansoor Ahmad, **A Fire without Light**, *Oriens*, September 2004).