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*ESOTERIC CATHOLICISM AND INTEGRAL TRADITIONALISM*

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From *Maschera e Volto dello Spiritualismo contemporaneo*



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We have already pointed out that one of the causes that has propelled the spread of neo-spiritualism is to be seen in the very character of religion that has come to predominate in the West, in Christianity and particularly in Catholicism. In its essential self-definition as an theologico-ritual system on the one hand and on the other as an devotional and moralizing practise, it seemed to offer very little to the need for the supernatural felt by many people of our time, who for this reason have been attracted by other doctrines that appeared to promise something more.

Naturally, in such a case we have in view the supernatural as *experience*. Otherwise Catholicism is characterised by the pretence of having in itself, more than any other religion, a true theology of the supernatural with respect to its conception of a personal God, separated from the entire natural world and powering over this world. But it is not any such theology that we went in search of, while the theistic Catholic conception of the personal God seemed be inadequate right from the beginning, in order to admit, by way of principle only a dualistic relationship between I and thou, between the created and the Creator.

It is true that there also exists a Christian mysticism in that Catholicism has known monastic orders whose goal was to cultivate a life of pure contemplation. However, this presupposed rather specific vocations that otherwise in every removal of the distance deriving from the conception of the personal God, was seen by the Orthodox as a dangerous heresy in mystical life itself (limiting enough the concept of the *unio mystica* [mystical union], the unitive life). In practice, Catholicism of modern times has always given less prominence to all that, the so called "pastoral care of the soul" having become its principle preoccupation, while keeping silent about the most recent post-conciliar upheavals of "modernisation" and "opening to the left", and calling for, as its priority, mere social applications and socialisations with notorious sordid humanitarian pacifist and democratic ingredients; everything that could have a character of true transcendence is set aside, or, at least, encouraged by no one. From here the emptiness that presses the crisis of the modern world has motivated many to look elsewhere, more or less along the lines of contemporaneous neo-spiritualism, exposing themselves to the danger that obscure forces will pervert their highest aspirations.

But in an objective analysis some acknowledgments impose themselves.

If we refer here to early Christianity, it is presented as a typical religion of the *kali yuga*, of the "dark age", a period that in the Western formulation of its very teaching corresponds to the "Iron Age", in which Hesiod considered "burning in Hell without glory" as the destiny for the majority. Christian preaching, originally addressed above all to the mass of disinherited and those without tradition in the Roman Ecumene. It had as premise a human type somewhat different from those who had traditions of a higher level in view, a type that for that reason regarded access to the divine found itself in a desperate situation. So it took the form of a *tragic doctrine of salvation*. The myth of "original sin" was affirmed and indicated the alternative of an eternal salvation or eternal perdition to be decided once and for all on this earth, exaggerated with horrifying depictions of the afterlife and with apocalyptic visions. It was a way to arouse, in certain nature, an extreme tension which, a type associated to the myth of Jesus as "Redemptor", could also give its fruits: if not in this life, at least at the point of death or in the *post-mortem*, that these indirect means acting on the human emotivity could succeed in modifying the basal force of the human being in their depth.

In addressing the vaster masses, the Catholicism subsequently veiled, in a certain measure, the extremist severity of these views, concerning itself with furnishing some support for the human personality, whose supernatural destination it recognized, and to exercise a subtle action on its deepest being by means of the power of rite and sacrament.

In this context we can indicate the possible pragmatic, practical *raison d'être* of some aspects of Catholicism. Already certain principles of Catholic-Christian morals, such as those of humility, charity, and the

renunciation of one's own will, if intended in the right way and the right place, could have been formulated as a corrective in view of the closure and individualistic self-affirmation to which western man was often inclined. In view of the same limitations on the intellectual plane and of the corresponding humanisation of every capacity of vision, it could have been opportune to present in the form of dogma and according to authority that which is situated above the common intellect though at a higher level, at least for an elite, it could instead be knowledge, direct proof, *gnosis*.

It is possible that, for a not very different reason, we can deem it opportune to speak of "revelation" and of "grace": in order to emphasize the character of relative transcendent of the true supernatural in respect to the possibilities of a more or less decadent human type and who always showed themselves more prone to every type of rationalistic and humanistic abuse.

Finally, it has already noted that the relationships of simple "faith" in a theistic sense with a gap that they allowed to incur, if they are certainly limits (for which in more complete traditions they would have been considered only for the lower strata of a civilization), they can be such to guarantee the integrity of the person, which, close to pantheistic mysticism, and in trespassing in the supersensible, as we have said many times, can no longer find solid ground.

These are limitations of Catholic doctrine, having possible positive merits, adequate in regards to the great mass of men and in view—let us repeat—of the negative conditions of the current period of the "dark age". Since what is held at this level, ideas, like those of Catholics such as Henri Massis and also Jacques-Albert Cottat, could also be correct: Catholicism represents a defence of western man, while every less dualistic, theistic form of spirituality (and in such regard we often like to point to the Orient) can represent a danger for him. But when one no longer keeps himself at that level, things change, and greatly. If one aims at the positive openings to the supernatural and if one has in view, as a goal, what could be called the super-personality, or rather the integrated personality beyond common human conditionalities, then referring to Catholicism (we are not speaking, then, of the Catholicism of our time), is no longer a limitation that protects and preserves but is a factor of petrification that kills itself by the reactions that its intolerance and bias can provoke and has provoked in whoever aims for that different self-realization and that called attention to non-western and non-Christian traditions and doctrines in which a metaphysical or initiatic content is more visible and not a religious, dogmatic, and ritualistic reduction of it with a rigid theistic mythology.

Today with difficulty, if not exceptionally in some close to dangerous existential crises, the potentiality of Christianity at its beginnings as that "tragic doctrine of salvation" can be re-actualized. The problem is not set and we even say without reticence that if anyone who has known, for some time, nothing other than the vainest constructions of philosophy and the secular plebeian university culture of today or the contaminations of the various contemporary individualisms, aestheticisms, and romanticisms, would "convert" to Catholicism and would experience truly the faith *at least*, with a total commitment and possibly in a "sacrificial" sense, that would signify not an abdication but rather, in spite of everything, a progress.

However, here we have to keep ourselves to the special problematic that we indicated for a different human type and for a different vocation. Therefore we can ask ourselves: *is there possibly a conception and an acceptance of Catholicism that is not constrained to look for a path somewhere else?*

There are spiritual circles that have considered this possibility in the field of what is called Christian esoterism and "Integral Traditionalism". Let us see how things look in that respect.

In a preliminary way, it is good to distinguish the concept of Christian esoterism from that of Christian initiation, the first having a doctrinal character, the second an operative or experiential character. Whether there

has existed, in general, a Christian initiation, is a controversial question that, if ever, concerns other times and that in our opinion has an essentially negative answer.

If we are completely clear about what initiation is, in the integral and authentic sense of the term, we can hardly miss, by way of principle, the opposition between Christianity whose doctrine is centered in faith and the initiatic way. In its origins there could have been admixtures by way of interactions with the ancient mystery traditions and the proximity of them; so traces of this last possibility can be found in the Greek fathers. In dealing with Theosophy, we mentioned for example, the distinction made by Clement of Alexandria between the *gnostikos* who had some marks of being initiated and the *pistikos*, who is the man who simply believes. But every precise retrospective investigation of such an aim is difficult, if not impossible, and everything that has been adopted by anyone to sustain the existence of a hypothetical Christian Initiation, referring especially to the Eastern Church, and not to Roman Catholicism, seems to have a character less initiatic than simply the impartation of "benedictions". Also, whoever thinks otherwise was predisposed to hold that Christian rites having an initiatic character, at its origins, which later on had not survived or were handed down only in one of their religious and symbolic reductions or transcriptions: starting already at the Council of Nicaea. Otherwise there remains only the world of the mystic. In the environment of the Church, there is not any trace of an initiatic tradition, which through its own nature should have been rigorously super-ordinated to that of the existing apostolic hierarchy.

As to the claims to Christian initiation in environments outside the Church and in our day, when inot about mystifications, they have as their basis spurious combinations in which Christianity is only one of the ingredients, without any true root of traditional transmission. That goes also for those who are self-described, again in our day, like the Rosicrucians.

Nevertheless, the problem remains open as far as it concerns not a attestable Christian initiation only in the past, but a "Christian esoterism", or else the possibility of integrating what is present in Catholicism (and not in a vague Christianity) into a larger system, referring to which, the dimension and the deeper significance of structure, symbols and rites can be also indicated. The integration, as we said, first of all, has a doctrinal character. It is not necessary for anyone to say that the plane to which we are referring here is not that of the "esoteric Christianity" of Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, not to mention the exegesis of the Gospels made by Rudolf Steiner with a muddle of incredible vastness.

Here instead there can come into question that which can furnish the current of "Integral Traditionalism", which had Rene Guenon essentially as the head of the school. The basic idea is the notion of a *unitary primordial metaphysical tradition* beyond every particular tradition or religion. The term "metaphysics" here is taken not in the abstract sense that it has in philosophy but with reference to a knowledge about that which is not "physical" in the broadest meaning, and to a reality that transcends the merely human world with all its constructions. This tradition would have had in the different particular historical traditions so many manifestations, more or less complete, with adaptations to various environmental, historical, and racial conditionalities, that arose by ways that elude secular research.

In such a premise the possibility would be given of finding again constant or homologous elements in the teachings, the symbols, and dogmas of those historical particular traditions and to rebuild them on a higher plane of objectivity and universality. Ideas of this type were raised even in Theosophy and some Masonic circles, although in inadequate forms; it is the precisely the Guenonian school that has known how to present them and develop them in a serious and vigorous way, with the corresponding thesis of the "transcendent unity of religions" (the expression is from Schuon and is the title of one of his interesting books).

We must emphasize here that it is not about "syncretism" and not even of those sometimes real but always empirical and external correspondences, that can be noted from the historical currents of religions. The

presupposition is just the opposite, a deductive method, based on fundamental knowledge and principles that, almost as, from the definitions of triangles, valid theorems can be deduced from singular cases. Similarly, they provide a way to understand how under certain conditions and the relation to a variety of possible expressive forms, besides keeping in view diverse needs, from certain meanings and symbols of the tradition, one reaches to the one or another *corpus* of teachings, beliefs, dogmas, mythologies, and even superstitions, keeping permanent those constants in spite of every difference and every apparent contrast.

Therefore, the first “esoteric” integration of Catholicism would consist precisely in this: starting from the symbols and doctrines of the Church, to know how to perceive what is in them, in order to be truly “Catholic” or universal (*katholicos* means universal), goes beyond Catholicism, gathering also illuminating connections of a character, so to say, “inter-traditional”. That would not entail an altering of Catholic doctrine but making its essential contents valid on a plane higher than that which is simple religion, on a metaphysical plane and with realizational prospectes that can meet those who aspire to the transcendent.<sup>1</sup> It is only necessary to take care not to invert the preceding — unfortunately as has already happened — in assuming as the primary element Catholic doctrines in their specific limitations in order to juxtapose in them some “traditional” reference. It is, instead, these references that should constitute the primary element and the point of departure.

It is not necessary to say that only in this “traditional” (or super-traditional) perspective could the axiom of the Church “Quod ubique, quod ab omnibus et quod semper” have value. [“That which is accepted everywhere, by everyone, and always.”] Certainly not on the plane of that Catholic apologetics of which it could well be called “modernist”, in so far as it, since early times, has insisted fanatically in the character of the novelty and unrepeatability of Christianity, with the only reservation being the anticipations and “prefigurations” that refer especially to the Jewish people as the chosen people of God.

The novelty can be conceivable only as a particular adaptation of the doctrine that is new only because it refers to new existential and historical conditions (which however imposed a presentation of the teaching anything but in a higher form). In order to able to sensibly affirm the Catholic axiom just cited, the attitude should be the opposite: instead of insisting on the “novelty” of the doctrines, almost as though this were a bonus, we should be inclined to highlight their *antiquity* and *perpetuity*, precisely while showing the measure with which they can be related in their essence to a super-ordinated body of teachings and symbols which that is truly “Catholic” (=universal) in order not to leave ourselves locked in to any time or any particular formulation, only remaining at the base of each one of them both in the pre-Christian world and in the non-Christian, western or non-western world, whether in extinct or past traditions in involitional or nocturnal forms, as is the case for beliefs often conserved among the same primitive populations. Catholicism admits the idea of a “primordial or patriarchal revelation”, made to the human race before the flood and the dispersion of the people.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> V. Gioberti spoke about a transcendent Catholicism (*Della Riforma Cattolica*, Torino, 1856, pp. 317 and 318): “True universality is found only in transcendent Catholicism. Common Catholicism, as practiced, being restricted to a place, time, determined number of men, has always more or less the aspect and the workings of a sect. Catholicism is therefore not truly Catholic to the extent it is not united to the transcendent. In common Catholicism cannot be called Catholic if not insofar it is not unified to the transcendent”. Except that Gioberti, tied to an intellectualizing ideology of an Hegelian type soaked with politics, was certainly the last who was able to have an adequate idea about the essence of “transcendent Catholicism”.

<sup>2</sup> These events are not “myths” if in the forms they are presented in the Old Testament and they concern, then, only a given historical cycle. The tale of the “flood” must be considered as the echo of memories of the catastrophe that destroyed the original Arctic and North Atlantic sites of the prehistoric race that had the legacy of

But of these ideas, it has not made any use that relates it beyond the limitations mentioned. The only exception is perhaps established by the Catholic ethnologist Father W Schmidt who in his ponderous work *The Idea of God* served it precisely on the plane of ethnology. How characteristic of contemporary Catholicism they remain a united closure to sectarian exclusivism.

As for the origins of the contents that in Catholicism are shown to be susceptible to a “traditional” assumption, and as to the singularity of many correspondences — in mythologies, names, symbols, rites, institutions of holidays and so on — with many other traditions scattered in time and space, which makes one think of something more than a simple case or of that which the efforts of historical and empirical research can lead to, the conception of the Theosophists, which they see as the personal actions of “Masters” and “Great Initiates” everywhere, is too simplistic.

Instead it is necessary to also take account of an action not perceptible and not always tied to a person, to a “subliminal” influence which, without the founders of the Catholic tradition suspecting it, could have made so that they, often with the idea of doing something else or even being pushed by external circumstances, became the instruments of the conservation of tradition, of the transmission of some elements of a primordial and universal wisdom that thereby — as Guenon says — are found again in the “latent state” in Catholicism, hidden from the religious, mythical, theological, and dogmatic form. Besides, a similar view could be in part accepted by the Catholic Orthodoxy, except that it would be understood in more concrete terms, that the action of the Holy Spirit throughout the history of the Church would have developed the primitive “revelation”, being invisibly and inspirationally present in every Council. In the self-formation of every great current of ideas one must take account of how much can be owed to influences of the sort (but in such case of another nature), much more than the common man can even imagine.

From the point view of contemporary Catholicism, a serious difficulty for traditional integration about which we are speaking regarding Jesus Christ, the founder of this very religion, because, as we said, the idea that his person, his mission, and his message of “salvation” present a unique and decisive character in universal history (whence precisely the exclusivist claim of Catholicism) cannot be accepted, while it constitutes the first article of faith for Christianity in general.

The same conception of the historical Jesus Christ’s function as the saviour or redeemer in the measure in which he is portrayed in terms of a “vicarious expiation”, that is of the expiation, on the part of an innocent person, of a guilt committed by others (in this case of “original sin” charged on the race of Adam), presents an intrinsic absurdity. The presupposition here is evidently a materialistic and deterministic conception of the supersensible in its foundation. In fact the theory, that guilt cannot be removed unless someone expiates it, implies the acknowledgment of a type of determinism or fatalism, of a kind of *karma*: almost as if the guilt had created a kind of burden that in every case *had to* be discharged, if not on the one, at least on the other, as the sacrifice of an innocent or of a stranger can have as much value, objectively, as the expiation in the person of the offender. All that returns to an order of ideas very far from that religion of grace and of supernatural freedom that Christianity wanted be in opposition to the ancient Hebraic-Pharisaic religion of the Law. Already in the first centuries the adversaries of Christianity rightly pointed out that if God wanted to redeem men he would have been able to do it with a simple act of grace and power without being constrained to sacrifice, in place of vicarious atonement, his son, giving men, thereby, the opportunity to carry out a new horrendous crime and as if remission was an almost physical iron law against which God himself can do nothing.<sup>3</sup> That speaks to the difficulty that arises

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the sole primordial tradition, leading thus to a shift and dispersion. On this, see Evola, *Revolt against the Modern World* and also *Sintesi di dottrina della razza*.

<sup>3</sup> The law of expiation, which is a particular case of that of causality, has effectively a validity only on a certain plane of reality in which it justified various rites of ancient peoples who were not superstitious; therefore

for whoever holds, in regards to the history of Christ, to the exoteric religious point of view and does not know how to separate, on the other hand, the eternal and essential side of the doctrine from the motives that come from inferior conceptions that only on the basis of sentimental needs (divine sacrifice for humanity, love, and so on) were able to pass in the first plane into be constituted into Catholicism itself as articles of faith.

In relation to the stories of the Gospels, the problem of historical reality is basically irrelevant. From the point of view here considered it would instead be important to establish the extent to which the life of Jesus — in the same way as different myths relative to demigods or “heroes” of the pagan world — can be interpreted *also* as a series of symbols that refer to phases, states, and acts of the development of the being consistent with a given path. We said “also” because in the case of given incidents or figures of history certain occult convergences can act as if reality is the symbol and the symbol is reality. So the life of a real being can simultaneously have the value of a dramatization or sensibilization of metaphysical teachings, almost as in dramatic representations of the classical Mysteries, intended to arouse deep emotions in the initiate, acted to begin to accomplish within themselves the given transformations of their being.

A symbolic interpretation of the material of the Gospels was already conceived by the fathers of the Church and in part also of the Old Testament, but it stopped at the moral, and at the most, mystical devotional plane. Of that, it was also the case for the called “Imitation of Jesus”, in which, apart from historical facts, Jesus is presented exactly as model to copy and as a pointer of a way. It is therefore to be noted that attributing to Jesus this meaning, obscuring his historical reality and the belief in his magical action of the redemption of humanity, was declared a heresy. Moreover, even in regards to the “Imitation of Christ” and of the utilization of this figure *sub specie interioritatis* it is necessary to keep always in mind the distinction between the mystical-devotional plane and the plane of a metaphysical realization, to which one can also rise up, according to the perspective of “Integral Traditionalism”. Nevertheless the fact remains that in general in Christianity the highest ideal is always, in its foundation, moral and not ontological, of the Saint, of *sanctification*, and not of that *divinization* which sometimes Greek patristic mentioned: it is the idea of “salvation” and not of the “Great Liberation”.

As to the esoteric interpretation, in terms of a “spiritual science”<sup>4</sup>, it can be said to be non-existent in Orthodoxy and that even in the early days; almost exclusively, moral and allegorical meanings were considered. The meaning of the Virgin, the so called “Immaculate Conception”<sup>5</sup> and the birth of the divine Child<sup>6</sup>, the expectation of the Messiah, the *curious* correspondence for which Bethlehem, the place of the birth of Christ,

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that law cannot have value with characteristics of ineluctability, for the divine order, if by it is meant that of the true supernatural.

<sup>4</sup> [Tr] This is a reference to the Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner

<sup>5</sup> Also the date of Christmas can be integrated in a vaster whole with a cosmic background, in that it corresponds approximately to that of the winter solstice, a point of the re-ascent of the light in the yearly cycle, an event which also made from the base to a sacred primordial symbolism in the prehistoric North Atlantic. Outside of Christianity it is known that “pagan” Romanity, in a certain relation with Mithraism, also knew date, as *Natalis Domini = Natalis Solis Invicti*.

<sup>6</sup> Its literal interpretation, which is an article of faith in common Christianity and in that constitutes the base of the Mariolatry or “Marian cult”, entails the absurdity of the most opaque exotericism. Apart from the accentuation of the sexual theme in relation to the exaltation of physical virginity, one does not see why should resort to an abnormal family in which properly married woman remains a virgin, nor is there indicated in the Gospels any exceptional title of merit and of excellence for which this “Virgin”, Mary, should be chosen, and after this simple instrumentality of having served for the incarnation, she was raised up to a divine figure and to the “Queen of Heaven”, with all attributes that are found in Catholic liturgy. The fact is that in Maria is re-poured a full canon of mythology already existing in the prehistoric Mediterranean (corresponding to the mother with divine child even in ancient Egyptian iconography) in a portrait predominating “gynocratic”.

refers to Bethel, the name given by Jacob to the place where he, asleep under a *rock*, had the famous vision and experience of the stairway to heaven; the “walking on the water” (not unrelated to Saint Christopher who carried the baby Jesus across the river); the changing of the water into wine; the stay in the “desert”; the ascending the “mountain” and the sermon on the “mount”; then, again, being covered in a false regal cloak and then being made naked; being crucified between *two* crosses; the thrust of the lance in the heart; the flowing out of water and *red* blood; the darkening of the “sky” and the opening of the earth; the Hell in which Jesus descended to visit the dead like Aeneas; the fact that no body was ever found in the Sepulcher; and the rising, the resurrection and ascension into “heaven”, after which followed the descent of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) and the gift of tongues; that was the spiritual body and the resurrection of the flesh, the water than satisfies the eternity of thirst, baptism not according to the water but according to “Fire” and “Spirit” and, finally, the “not having broken the bones”, and the “judgment of the living and the dead”; because twelve were the disciples of Jesus, three the Magi (which was their true significance), forty days and nights of the retreat to the “desert” and forty—again—hours laying in the grave, and so on. To give an explanation to all that *sub specie interioritatis* connecting it systematically to a body of esoteric doctrine, is a task that cannot be accomplished as long as one holds steady to the limits of faith, devotion and so much other that is characteristic of simple religious consciousness.

Perhaps a short fine tuning is appropriate for what concerns “miracles”, also because, as we said, for modern spiritualism it is above all the “miraculous” that makes a splash. To admit the reality of miracles, starting from those of Jesus, is not to go too far. We noted that the representatives of the ancient Roman tradition did not draw a reason for scandal and astonishment from the miracles attributed to Christ: in ancient civilizations, some paranormal possibilities were always admitted, even susceptible to a science *sui generis* (magic in the strict sense), for the production of certain “phenomena”; and there is only the “freethinker” of today who makes a big deal about these types of things, as if the little people only draw the reason for faith from the “miracle”. But Catholicism justly does not accommodate that. It distinguishes between miracles and miracles, and does not propose phenomena as the criteria, but the cause that — as we have already brought up about spiritism — can be quite different even for the same phenomenon. Nevertheless, as the criterion for the distinction, Catholicism remains in a weak position. To say that “occult” phenomena are due to diabolical or hidden, but always “natural”, forces, of man or of things while the true miracle is due to “God”, is not something that can practically furnish a secure criterion: among other things, it would be necessary to begin with making objectively precise what limits “nature” has, and not to recall what was said in the Gospels, it is worth saying that the Antichrist will have the capacity to produce “signs” of equal potency to those of the “Son of Man”. To pose, on the other hand, the condition that the phenomena have ethical or conversion goals, means to end up at a rather low level. The only element of a certain consistency is the demand for a meaning, for an illuminating force, that is connected to the phenomenon in an essential way, and, additionally, the relationship to a truly superior personality.<sup>7</sup>

That starts at the criterion proper to the metaphysical point of view, according to which *a phenomena is truly “supernatural” when it presents simultaneously, as inseparable parts of a whole, three aspects: magical, symbolic and an inner transfiguration*. We can explain that with an example. “Walking on the Waters” is an esoteric symbol, not only for Christianity, for a given meaning and a given period of existence. “Above” the waters, equivalent to above the “onrush of forms”, above the mode of being of natures subjected to becoming, composed of a desire that does not distort its life and deprives it of every stability. Now, it is possible to think that in given circumstances the integral realization of the meaning of that symbol on the part of a personality is accompanied by the realization of a magical power, which confers the effective possibility of walking on the water without sinking,

<sup>7</sup> On the distinction between psychic phenomena and miracles from a Catholic point of view, one can refer to the book of the Jesuit G. Bilchmair, *Okkultismus und Seelsorge*, Innsbruck, 1926, where some correct criticisms of the various forms of modern spiritualism are found.

as if the symbol is transmuted into a fact, which in its turn is symbolic, and that one makes a sign and illuminating testimony of a reality and a law of a higher order. We know that the example chosen corresponds to one of the stories of the Gospels. Others of the same type can be found both in them and in the texts of other traditions.<sup>8</sup>

It is in the capacity of understanding things from a similar point of view that could be raised by whoever wants to discover the latent metaphysical contents in the “sacred history” taught by Catholicism and to extend to the meaning of that which is truly “supernatural” in it and not phenomenalistic. These could also learn to read, outside that in the Gospels and in the Bible, even in many dogmas and in many Catholic theological doctrines: it could also mean—as Guenon noted—that much of what was said theologically about the angels is the same metaphysically as the transcendent states of consciousness to which ascetical practises can lead, the awakening and interior rebirth; while the “demons” symbolize forces and states below the human level.

In an examination of Catholicism one should also take account of everything that in it, beyond its doctrinal part, in order to have a sense and an objective meaning, he would refer back to *magic* in a strict sense. Magic is based on the existence of subtle forces of a psychic and vital character, and on the possibility of a technique that can act on them and with them, with the same character and necessity and impersonality and with the same independence from moral talents in the object and the subject, that the technicians of material forces present. Now, such characters are visible in that which Orthodoxy attributes to the rites of sacraments of Catholicism, in which, in truth, nothing is “arbitrary” and “formal”. We are thinking about the rite of baptism, considered capable of inducing a principle of supernatural life in which it undergoes, outside of anyone’s intentions and merits; to the quality established by ordination of the priest, that is not destroyed even when they commit moral turpitudes; finally to the power of absolution, ordinary and *in extremis*, which is that, at its foundation, of dominating and suspending what is called *karma* in the Hindu tradition. These are only some cases, in which Catholicism would remain at a plane of *spiritual objectivity*, higher than the unreality of sentimentality and human morality: exactly on the plane of magic. Without a reference of that type, the defense of Catholicism against anyone, with the profane and rationalistic mentality of the moderns, who attacked the superstitious and even *immoral* side of its sacramental aspect, can only be rather weak.

But it is difficult for a Catholic to be able to assume a similar point of view. Instead, he has to think that everything that is rite and sacrament, even when it had a true “magical” potentiality, had lost it and in Catholicism it remains on the plane of religious facsimile that only formally repeats the structure of the magical and initiatic rites.

Even in this context Catholic doctrine of the so called effects of *ex opere operato* must be examined. Rigorously speaking, this doctrine, if meant righteously, rules the aforesaid objective character of the forces that acts in the rite, which, once the required conditions are set, they act from themselves, they create a necessary effect, independent of the operator (not *ex opera operantis*) almost as in the case of a natural phenomenon. Therefore, as for the exact production of natural phenomena, so also here certain conditions are certainly required that are present. The structures of the rite, in themselves, are ineffective as much as the articulations and mechanisms of a motor, to which electric energy is not provided. In order to act, that is, in order to create certain conscious or infra-conscious psychic effects, the rite is required to be *vitalized*, or that there exists a state of relationship with that supersensible plane, which furnishes simultaneously the knowledge and consciousness of the primordial and non-human symbols and the magical force that gives exactly efficacy to the ritual operations: and, in one aspect of it, in the notion of the “Holy Spirit”, a type is brought back to the origins when it had not yet been theologized, it was only drawn from above. Without that, the ritual and sacramental *corpus* is a simple super-

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<sup>8</sup> See Evola, *The Doctrine of Awakening*, where other examples are indicated, with the distinction, made in the case of Buddhism, between “Aryan” (noble, holy) miracles “non-Aryan”.

structure — and then is as much value to put in the first plane everything that is simple religion, “faith”, and morality as Protestantism did with consistency, setting aside the rest.

The relationship with the metaphysical plane in an irregular and sporadic way can happen through states of exaltation, of “sacred enthusiasm” of the soul, while always an adequate orientation is maintained such as to be able to reserve from the evocations of invisible forces but of a lower character period. In a regular way, and when it concerns a tradition, it is necessary instead who makes a stable and conscious bridge between the visible and invisible, between the natural and the supernatural, between man and the divine. According to the etymology of the word itself, such was the *pontifex* (= maker of bridges), the Pontifex constituted precisely the point of contact which made possible the manifestation of efficacious and real influences from above into the world of men. And the chain of the Pontifexes — which in the higher and most original forms of traditional civilization made all one with chain of representatives of the “divine regality” — guaranteed the continuity and perpetuity of this contact, that is. It constituted the axis of the *tradition* in a literal sense, that is, of the transmission of a “presence” and of vivifying and illuminating sacred force<sup>9</sup>, of which, through participation, could benefit a regularly ordained sacred body, a force without which, as we said, every rite is ineffective and degenerates to a mere ceremony or symbol.

Nominally, the pontificate, an institution that was already existent in ancient Rome, is part of Catholicism, and stands at the center of the Church and at the top of her hierarchy. But we must ask what subsists in it of its primal function and of Tradition on the whole. The prophetic hope of a Joachim of Fiore in the coming of a “angelic pope” having almost the marks of an initiate and inaugurating a new “Reign”, that of the acting, vivifying, and living Holy Spirit, has remained a utopian illusion. And if we want to adapt ourselves to the contingencies of the latest times, in particular the figures of the two most recent pontiffs, John XXIII and Paul VI — with the climate of “aggiornamento” and of modernization, with the increasing aversion toward Catholic “integralism” and toward so-called “residual medievalism”—seem to definitively seal a disastrous balance sheet.

So the conditions, for which we can give a somewhat positive response to the issue we formulated on the principle, that of the susceptibility of Catholicism to furnish what many sought elsewhere and yet so often has pushed them into the confusions and errors of neo-spiritualism, appear to be nonexistent, at least if we consider the large picture. Given what we have said, it is problematic that in spite of everything the Church, the “mystical body of Christ”, is the carrier and administrator of a true supernatural power objectively acting through rites and sacraments, of which it can those benefit who become its members, hoping however to experience beyond the confessional religion and not seeing in the so-called “holiness” the paramount goal.

One can however recognize that Catholicism contains, in spite of everything, traces of a wisdom that can serve as the basis for an “esoteric” dimension of various contents on the part of one or another personality in the area of “integral traditionalism”, valuing then as the rallying cry what one exponent in this current had to say: “The fact that the representatives of the Catholic Church understand so little of their own doctrines must not make it such that we ourselves demonstrate the same incomprehension”. Otherwise, all the impediments and all the limitations appear difficult to remove. Leaving priestly Catholicism out of consideration, we could refer to the ascetic Catholic in regard, above all, to the ancient monastic traditions, to that which concerns, if not an initiation, at least an interior discipline that looks toward an opening to transcendence, an approach to the supernatural. But

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<sup>9</sup> That which in Christianity is the “Holy Spirit”, dwelling in the Church, is the *Shekinah* of the Kabbalah (Kabbalah among other things literally means “transmission”), the *prana* or *brahman* brought from the Brahmin caste, the glory — *havareno* — dressed up again as a “celestial fire” of victory by the Iranian kings, and so on. Given the nature of the present work we have to pass over the nature of the relationships of spirituality and regal traditions with the priestly traditions. On this topic see Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*. Considerations of the type cannot be put in light also negative function that Christianity and Catholicism had in the western world, as historical forces.

even here, a difficult work of purification and essentialization would be imposed, given the co-presence of devotional elements and specifically Christian complexes through which perhaps it is difficult to gather up valid tools for interior action without the consciousness also of what other traditions offer.

*A Catholicism that is raised up to the level of a truly universal, unanimous, and perennial tradition where faith can be integrated into a metaphysical realization, the symbol integrated into the way to awakening, the rite and sacrament into an act of power, dogma into expressions of an absolute and infallible consciousness because it is beyond human and as such alive in beings unbound from terrestrial chains through an asceticism, and where the pontificate recovers its primal mediating function—such a Catholicism could supplant every “spiritualism”, both present and future.*

But observing the reality, is this anything more than a dream?