

# The Doctrine of the Multiple States of Being in Christianity

## Introductory Note

The text that we are presenting is constituted by almost all of the three letters that Michel Valsan addressed to Philippe Guiberteau<sup>1</sup>. The latter planned to publish his annotated translation of Dante's *Banquet* in Gallamard's collection "Tradition": it was at this occasion that he was put in contact with Michel Valsan. The extent of the developments of this essentially doctrinal correspondence and the strongly restricted individual aspects almost naturally made it necessary to give these three letters the form of a single article, by adding a title, some linking sentences, while leaving out the rare private and individual sections.<sup>2</sup>

In this sense, Philippe Guiberteau, in his letter of February 4, 1959, wrote: "Your letter [of January 26, 1959] confuses me by its density; the difficulty for me is going to be to use it without copying you, because this letter has value as the Introduction to my work yet constitutes a text that belongs to you. And that leads me, as I write, to ask myself if we couldn't:

1. Correct me and smooth over a whole series of my notes in your direction.
2. Include in the Foreword a text which would be, roughly, your letter.

To the extent that the doctrinal interest in publishing correspondence has sometimes been questioned, this is an opportunity to clarify the status of the epistolary genre. Since a letter is a message addressed explicitly to one or more recipients, the question is whether we can change this first recipient.

The best answer is provided by the Koranic Risalah which is literally nothing other than a "Letter", the prototype of the genre par excellence, addressed first to the Prophet, then to his relatives, before finally concerning the whole of humanity. At the beginning of the Revelation, the Divine Discourse is of interest only to the Nabi, that is to say, the Prophet. It is only from the Order enjoining him (O you who are clothed in a mantle, arise and warn!)<sup>3</sup> that the Risalah itself begins. The strictly private character of this Message ceases at that time, and the recipient is responsible for transmitting it in turn. We note, during the following Revelation, that the very name of the new "Missive", "The one who opens" or the Fatilah, clearly indicates the passage to the status of "open letter"<sup>4</sup>.

We see, by this example, which falls within the domain of prophecy, that a letter can change its status, and that a teaching, initially private, can then be extended to third persons. In all traditions, moreover, and more particularly in the field of holiness, there are many examples that show us the integration of the masters' correspondence into their public works. Authentic epistles of all kinds have never been called into question, although it is true that their initial confidentiality places them in general more on

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<sup>1</sup> Letters dated on June 28, 1958 July 17, 1958, and January 27, 1959.

<sup>2</sup> The few sentences added by us are in square brackets, and it was Michel Valsan who underlined the passages that we have put in italics.

<sup>3</sup> Koran 74, 1-2 The mantle — here that of Prophecy - is a usual symbol of investiture for an external function.

<sup>4</sup> It is in the same sense that one can understand the title of Risalah al-Futuhah by Ibn 'Arabi.

the side of reserved teaching, but this only increases their value. So there is no question, for us, of minimizing, let alone rejecting, this type of writing. On the contrary, we will rather be happy to know that the already known work can be enriched with new information.

Except in the case where the author explicitly opposes the distribution of his letter, it is for those who are the legitimate owners to decide whether all or part of its content should be published. If published, an adaptation may be necessary. For example, the strictly "personal" and special characters of correspondence, if any, are generally left out to focus only on doctrinal aspects and, possibly, certain documentary elements. We will add that in some cases, such as those of the saints, everything can be a source of teaching and receive a symbolic interpretation. The rule to be observed with regard to them then consists essentially in avoiding, as far as possible, causing them any damage.

In his three letters to Philippe Guiberteau, Michel Valsan proves that the metaphysical doctrine of multiple states, which considers man in his totality, that is to say as a being mainly "divine", "angelic" and "human", is present in Christianity. Its developments are ordered, in this article, in three parts: first from the theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas, then from the current of spirituality represented by Ruysbroeck the Admirable, and, finally, from Catholic esoterism, with Dante.

The texts quoted by Michel Valsan demonstrate "that Christianity also has a doctrine of the universal Self and multiple states. Certainly, this doctrine is more explicit among the masters of spirituality than among the scholastic theologians, but the latter themselves support it, and in any case do not exclude it."<sup>5</sup>

This last statement contrasts completely with what most Christian authors have claimed, after having read Guenon, namely that the theory of multiple states and, more generally, the metaphysics expounded by René Guenon, do not agree with the teaching of the Church<sup>6</sup>. However, there are a few exceptions that should be noted. Thus, Father Henri Stephane, who specified "that it will be useful, if not essential, for a Christian reader of René Guenon, to research and study this healthy theology. Let us mention that Greek Patrology, the mystical theology of the Eastern Church, and many other works help them in this work"<sup>7</sup>. Let us add, with the "Monk of the West", Latin Patrology: it is to him, that this Cistercian refers to most often, and his translation and interpretation of a passage taken from *De Consideration* of Saint Bernard<sup>8</sup> deserve to be taken up here: "What then is God? That without Whom there is nothing. It is as impossible that anything be without Him as He Himself is without Him. He is to

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<sup>5</sup> Letter of July 16, 1958.

<sup>6</sup> Until recently, Philip Sherrard attempted to refute the Guenonian exposition of multiple states in chapter 4 of *Christianity: Lineaments of a sacred Tradition* (1997). Reference is made to the excellent review that Dr. Alvin Moore published in *Sophia* (Vol. 7, No. 2, Oakton, U.S.A., 2001). In this long account, the author also refers to the doctrine of the Essence and the "energies" in Saint Gregory Palamas, which proves, once again, that despite the almost total absence of mentions of Christian doctrine in *The Multiple States of Being*, like Jewish and Islamic doctrines elsewhere, we can always show full agreement between what René Guenon teaches on the one hand, and the representatives of the various traditional forms on the other hand.

<sup>7</sup> *Introduction à l'Esotérisme chrétien*, Tome 2, « Response to M. Paul Sérant », Paris, 1983.

<sup>8</sup> Book V, 6, 13, text cited, precisely, from the *Latin Patrology* of Migne, Vol. 182, col. 796, in chap. 1 of his book *Doctrine de la Non-Dualité et Christianisme*, Paris, 1982 (the variants of detail mentioned in the *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, Vol. 3, p. 477, Rome, 1963, do not alter either the translation or the interpretation of the monk). References to Saint Thomas Aquinas are frequent in this work.

Himself as He is to everything and, therefore, in a certain way, He alone is, who is the very Being both of Himself and of everything."

## Sacred Science

"Let us immediately address the *quodammodo*. Saint Bernard does not say absolutely that things are not, but 'in a certain way'. Monism is excluded. Conversely, he does not limit himself to saying that God is the Being (Esse, and not Ens) of Himself and of everything, which would be *who ipsius est*, and *omnium esse*, he specifies: Being itself (his "Being"), which *suum ipsius est*, and *omnium esse*. Let us insist again. Saint Bernard does not say that God is the Being of Himself (genitive) and of everything, which would be *qui sui ipsius est*, et *omnium esse* but that He is the very Being (nominative) of Himself and of all. In other words, *Suum* qualifies *Esse* as both the *Esse* of God (*Ipsius*) and of everything (*Omnium*). There is nothing, to our knowledge, in the whole of the certainly Orthodox Catholic tradition, which comes so close, even in expression, to the Vedantic doctrine of the Supreme Self (Paramatma)."

As we see in the interpretation of this text by the last of the Fathers of the Church, and, in general, in that of medieval theologians, "for those who have conscientiously read Guenon, it is always possible to read the scholastics at two levels: the ontological level, which is very often that of neoscholastics, and the properly metaphysical level that Gilson very happily qualifies as "trans-ontic". To tell the truth, scholasticism is limited only by those who read it in a limited way."<sup>9</sup> The doctrine of multiple states is indeed present in many Fathers and Doctors of the Middle Ages, and it is therefore always possible to connect the teaching of such of them to this theory that René Guenon has masterfully exposed: it suffices for this to take into account, at the doctrinal level, the identities, similarities and correspondences which exist, and to adapt, if necessary, the terminologies<sup>10</sup>. It will be kept in mind that

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<sup>9</sup> François Chenique, *A propos des Etats multiples de l'être et des Degrés du Savoir*, L'Herne : René Guenon, p. 259, Paris, 1985.

<sup>10</sup> In this last perspective, one will read with interest the details that Michel Valsan brings to the subject of the terms *mens*, *mente* and "mental". To these, we refer, for the term "mind", to *Man and his becoming according to the Vedanta*, chapters 1 and 8, and the *Multiple States of Being*, chap. 8. *Mente* is defined by Dante as "that fine and very precious part of the soul which is deity" ("quella fine e preziosissima parte de anima che è deitade", *Banquet*, Book 3, chap. 2, 19), that is, it is the higher part of the soul, or the "intellective" power that the human soul has over the "vegetative" and "animal" powers.

As for the term *mens*, it is attested in the *Vulgate*: its meanings are multiple, and vary according to the contexts where it is cited. So, for example, it is the "wisdom", the "righteousness of mind", of *Proverbs*, 19, 8 (= φρόνησις) in the *Septuagint*); the "heart" of *Leviticus*, 26:41 (= καρδία); the "memory" of *Tobias*, 4:5 (= μνήμη); the "courage" of *I Maccabees*, 11:49 (= δίανοια) ... Saint Jerome therefore seems to "reduce", in a way, into a single term, *mens*, what the *Septuagint* designates under various terms; the terminological details of the Greek version of the Bible, which correspond, in large part, to those of the Masoretic text, therefore appear to be absent from the *Vulgate*. However, we must not forget that Saint Jerome benefited from eminent graces, and that his Latin translation is inspired by divine Wisdom which assigns to everything its place and its rank. Hence, the *mens*, taking into account the meanings attributed to it, senses which relate to the human degree and which extend to the highest degrees, this *mens*, therefore, is a perfectly adequate term to express the principle of continuity of the different degrees of Reality. Thus, paradoxically, the apparently reductive restitution of the Latin translation brings, as we see, a particularly remarkable doctrinal enrichment from the perspective of the theory of multiple states.

On the other hand, although it comes from the same root as the word "mind," *mens* is nevertheless identical to it only as a faculty, or property, which is properly individual human. In this case, *mens* is identified with reason (=

the teachings of the true metaphysicians cannot, finally, ever oppose each other, and that is because the Truth is one.

Finally, we must remember that “theory” cannot stand on its own, and that it must “be ordered expressly with a view to a corresponding realization”<sup>11</sup> As Mr. Jean Borella rightly remarks, “the point of view of “realization” is thus the “carrier” of a metaphysics as ample, if not more, than that of the

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ratio, dianoia; cf. also the expression "rational soul", mens rationalis). It is only by a purely analogical transposition that one can envision, in some way, its correspondence in the universal: Saint Thomas will thus use the expression Mens divina, Divine Intelligence (*Summa theologica*, I, q. 84, art. 5). On another level, Mens designates the Angel: "the separate substances which we call angels [...] in the works translated from Greek, they are called Intellects or Spirits" ("substantiae separatae quas nos angelos dicimus [...] ] in libris de graeco translatis, dicuntur Intellectus seu Mentis", *ibid.*, q. 79, art. 10). Thus, as long as there is identity between mens and “mind”, we are dealing with an individual human faculty: the translation of mens by “spirit”, or by “intellect”, is then inadequate. This is what René Guenon affirms, after reading a pamphlet by a theologian who quoted Saint Thomas: “almost everywhere where we translate “spirit”, the Latin text actually bears the word mens, which obviously is not the same thing at all. So the passages which seem to deny intellectual intuition are self-explanatory, since as far as they are concerned, they deny it: this amounts to saying that Buddhi is not included in manas, which is correct; and it is also true, moreover, that Buddhi is not a "human" (individual) faculty. In short, that would suffice to resolve all the difficulties; only these people are far from suspecting that the being who is human is also something quite different ... "(letter of July 2, 1935). However, and correlatively, it must be taken into account that “the Western term “intellect” as well as its equivalent “spirit”, or as in addition the terms mens, ratio, understanding, etc., has been applied, by an analogical transposition of notions that one might call normal, to the degree of Prime Being. This is how there is a divine Intellect who identifies with the Word or Logos. This also accounts for the role that the notions of intellect and intellectuality play in the metaphysical teaching of René Guenon himself, teaching which, while asserting itself from the beginning as coming from an oriental inspiration, was to use, by adapting and transposing them, certain doctrinal means of Aristotelian intellectualism” (Michel Valsan, “Preliminary remarks on Intellect and Consciousness”, ET, 162, p. 203).

Now, the *mens*, which is transposable to the various degrees of being, is also the organ of knowledge par excellence; it is also found in various expressions, among which we will retain: the “eye of the spirit” (*oculus mentis*, which Richard de Saint-Victor uses indifferently for the “eye of the heart”, *oculus cordis*; cf. Hélène Merle, ET, 1963, p. 218, note 28), and the “fine point of the soul” (*acies mentis*, *acumen mentis* or *apex mentis*, according to the medieval Fathers and Doctors). In the 15th century, the Franciscan Henri Herp (= Harphius) writes, after having distinguished the “soul”, the lower part, the “spirit”, the middle part, and “the supreme part of the soul”, these three superior powers “by which man approaches God so closely by continual contemplation that he becomes one and the same spirit with him [...] is this in which these three powers are originally united, and whence they “flow, like the rays of the Sun, and once again flow back there; and it is the soul essence called *Mens* in Latin, it is also the *center* of the soul, bearing the Image of the Holy Trinity imprinted in the self. This part is so noble that no proper name can be assigned to it, but it has several to be more easily recognized, and it is the highest point of the soul” (*Escole de Sapience*, chap. 49, translation of Guillaume de la Rivière cited in the Dictionary of Spirituality, Volume 1, col. 458, Paris, 1937). In chapter 55, Herp calls the *Mens* the “essential unity”, the “supereminent unity of the soul”.

Finally in the linguistic order, one will notice the details, very succinct but well worthy of interest, that Huré has brought: *Mens*, in Greek Νοῦς, comes “from the old verb meno, or meneo, or from the fictitious participle ens, entis, from the Greek ὦν τοῦς.” with the affix m; the spirit, the soul, being the principle of life and being in us, it is not surprising that it has for its root the word which signifies being and life” (*Dictionary of Sacred Philology*, published in the Theological Encyclopedia of Migne, Volume 2, col. 1040, Paris, 1846).

<sup>11</sup> *Oriental Metaphysics*

“doctrine”<sup>12</sup> The principle of identification by knowledge, posited by Aristotle, then by his scholastic continuers, is common to the West and the East. However, according to René Guénon, in the Stagirite and among those who followed him, it *seems*<sup>13</sup> to have remained purely theoretical, of the order of doctrine, and not that of metaphysical realization.<sup>14</sup> Now, even if we limit ourselves to the purely theoretical level, we must take into account nuances and details provided by René Guénon himself. Thus, he is the one who teaches that “in the Middle Ages, Western civilization was unmistakably traditional in character. Whether it had it as fully as the Eastern civilizations is difficult to decide, especially when providing formal evidence one way or the other.”

To stick to what is generally known, the Western tradition, as it existed at that time, was a tradition in religious form; but that does not mean that there was not something else, and that is not why, among a certain elite, pure intellectuality, superior to all forms, had to be necessarily absent...] On the other hand, we must not forget that religious or theological truths as such,, not considered from a purely intellectual point of view, and not having the universality which belongs exclusively to metaphysics alone, are still principles only in a relative sense; *if the principles properly so called*, of which these are an application, *had not been fully consciously known by some at least, however few they were*, it seems difficult to us to admit that an externally religious tradition may have had all the influence that it has effectively exercised over such a long period, and produced, in various fields which do not seem to concern it directly, all the results that history has recorded and that its modern falsifiers cannot entirely conceal.

It must be said, moreover, that *in scholastic doctrine there is at least a part of true metaphysics*, perhaps insufficiently freed from philosophical contingencies, and too little clearly distinguished from theology; to be sure, it is not total metaphysics, *but still it is metaphysics*, whereas there is no trace of it among the moderns; and *to say that there is metaphysics there is to say that this doctrine, for all that it embraces, must necessarily be in agreement with any other metaphysical doctrine*. Eastern doctrines go much further, and in several ways; but *it may be that there were, in the Western Middle Ages, supplements to what was taught externally, and that these supplements for the exclusive use of very closed circles, were never formulated in any written text*, so that we can only find, at the most in this regard, only symbolic allusions, clear enough for those who know what it is, but perfectly unintelligible for any other [...] Western civilization of the Middle Ages, *with its truly speculative knowledge* (even leaving aside the question of how far it extended), and with its hierarchical social constitution, was sufficiently comparable to Eastern civilizations [...] Nothing proves that there was, in the traditional civilization of the Middle Ages, only the exterior and properly religious side; *there was certainly something else, even if only scholasticism*, and we have just said why we think there must have been more still”<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> "Gnose et gnosticisme chez René Guénon", Les dossiers H: René Guénon, Lausanne, 1984. The third part of this article deals mainly with the theory of multiple states of being.

<sup>13</sup> The verb "to seem" is not here a "figure of speech". René Guénon uses it precisely in the chapter on "Metaphysical Realization" of the *General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*, in the final chapter of *Man and his becoming according to the Vedanta*, and in the chapter entitled "The realization of being through knowledge" of the *Multiple States of Being*.

<sup>14</sup> We will come back to this question at another time.

<sup>15</sup> All citations are taken from East and West, in the chapter "Agreement on Principles". Italics are ours.



Doctor Philippe Guiberteau, reader of René Guenon since 1924 and of *Etudes Traditionnelles* since 1934<sup>16</sup>, publishes *Musique et Incarnation*<sup>17</sup> for which René Guenon reviews<sup>18</sup> by approving "the intentions of the author, and the principles on which he understands". However, he regrets that this study concerns modern writers who, "for lack of traditional data, while they believe they are symbolizing, very often in reality the write only individual fantasy". Finally, René Guenon wants the author "to give us other studies of the same inspiration, but preferably devoted to writers or poets who were really something other than 'literati'".

In 1935, he collaborated with the *Cahiers du Sud*<sup>19</sup> and, from 1947, he published his first study on Dante<sup>20</sup>: the *Etudes Traditionnelles* will mention his translation of *Paradise* "soberly commented, but in a traditional spirit fully aware of the initiatory value of the work of Dante, by an author familiar with the work of René Guenon as well as that of Luigi Valli"<sup>21</sup>. We could therefore hope that his annotated translation of the *Banquet* would offer any guarantee of traditional orthodoxy<sup>22</sup>. During their epistolary exchange, Michel Valsan brings to Philippe Guiberteau doctrinal elements of prime importance, elements which will be integrated into the book *Introduction* and the notes of its translation<sup>23</sup>.

But Philippe Guiberteau's adherence to the teachings expounded by René Guenon soon showed certain limits: "I am far from having the necessary science nor the sufficient practice of traditional language [...]"

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<sup>16</sup> Letter of April 29, 1958. Born in 1897 into a Calvinist family, he was baptized in 1933 (cf. Henri Bosco's *Preface to L'Enigme de Dante*, posthumous work by Guiberteau, Paris, 1973). In his letter of May 31, 1958, he specified: "As regards my personal position, I owe to Guenon extremely great gratitude because it is his reading which [...] showed me that it is essential to 'belong to an authentically traditional ritual society. Guiberteau died in 1972.

<sup>17</sup> *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, Paris, 1933. The epigraph included a quotation from the Symbolism of the Cross "concerning the 'law of correspondence' considered as the basis of symbolism".

<sup>18</sup> *Le Voile d'Isis*, 1934, p. 82.

<sup>19</sup> August-September No. 175. His article is titled: "*Islam, West, Christianity*". In this same issue, René Guenon published: "*Islamic Esoterism*".

<sup>20</sup> *Dante, Le Paradis*, Italian text and glossed translation, Le Raincy.

<sup>21</sup> June 1957. Philippe Guiberteau clarified that he had studied Dante uninterruptedly "for more than 30 years" (op. Cit. P. 41). He was also President of the "Dante Studies Society". For a complete bibliography, cf. *Dante's Enigma*.

<sup>22</sup> At the end of his letter of June 27, 1958, Michel Valsan wrote: "with the doctrinal elements that we have in common, it should not be difficult for us to get along [...] I do not see anyone in France so far. who is attached to his study [that of Dante] with a disposition like yours." For his part, and in the same spirit, Philippe Guiberteau specifies that he "always tends, between two interpretations, to choose the one which gives the richest metaphysical meaning" (letter of August 30, 1958).

<sup>23</sup> This work will eventually be published in "Belles Lettres", Paris, 1968. The name of Michel Valsan appears only twice in the Introduction (p. 18); however, this part of Philippe Guiberteau's work is largely inspired by letters from his correspondent. He further states: "I have isolated a number of other points of study about the *Convivio*. The pages of related notes are at least as numerous as those of this letter" of 16 pages from January 26, 1959!

As for Michel Valsan's contribution to the notes of the *Banquet*, we can see it in II, 1, 3 (concerning a reading difficulty); II, 15, 1 (the third heaven); III, 2, 19 (*deitate* and *mente*); III, 15, 18 (the letter iod); IV, 10, 8 (creation ex nihilo); IV, 18, 2 (the uncreated aspect of being ...

Finally, we will notice the mention of this correspondence in the Foreword to the book by Mr. Jean Canteins, *La passion de Dante Alighieri*, Tome 1, Paris, 1997.

at least now. I would have to start by establishing meticulous concordance of the terms of the Thomist vocabulary and the Guenonian vocabulary: that is beyond my competence"<sup>24</sup>. Even more serious: "there is however a point where I do not manage to be 'totally' Guenonian, and it is precisely on the question of multiple states of being where I cannot help but see a contradiction with Roman teaching which seems obvious to me."<sup>25</sup>

After having developed this question at length in the three letters which serves to constitute this article, Michel Valsan will regret that, "in the question of the multiple states of being, you have in fact changed nothing, since in this respect, Dante would be precisely, according to you, the opposite of the 'irreproachable Catholic' that theologians want to see in him. You are thus more exclusivist and more intractable than simple exoterists. I thought that you had been put at ease by the quotations which I had given you previously and which allowed a logical distinction between the naturally 'virtual' continuity of the degrees of the total being and the 'effective' realization of this continuity, a realization which can only be the result of a process in which supernatural Grace intervenes according to all the species and according to all the modes, both religious and initiatic, that include the rites and the traditional institutions, or freely granted by the Divine will and without conflict with Providence. In all of this there is agreement between what Dante says, what Guenon says, and what the Church teaches."<sup>26</sup>

In this same letter, Michel Valsan pointed out to his interlocutor that "another point which thus remains very badly situated in your comments is the situation of the initiatory path of Christianity in relation to the whole of the Christian tradition. Do you basically admit that there is legitimately and regularly a Christian esoterism, and that this esoterism is of the order of knowledge par excellence? It appears that you often oppose it to the Church, and that you even confuse it with 'heretical sects' whatever their origin, that is to say that they are deviations in the simply exoteric order or in the properly initiatory order. The truth being that the Church, in its full definition, includes the way of Knowledge or, to use the terms of the Greek Fathers, Gnosis; there can be no question of an opposition between exoterism and esoterism, or if the purpose and method of the latter differ from those of the former, the two are also necessarily linked, and this by a kind of relation of complementarity; and it is so, just as in Judaism and in Islam where the initiatory path takes its point of support on the general religious basis. Moreover, it is the 'exoterist' bias rather than the exoteric spirit which, everywhere and not only in the Christian world, wants to exclude this path from the normal order of tradition. So, if there is in Dante, as you say, 'something other than Roman Catholicism, that which is taught in the catechism made for everyone in an exoteric Church', that is only normal, because Dante was effectively attached to a Christian initiatory lineage and normally reflected its spirituality."

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<sup>24</sup> Letter of April 19, 1959

<sup>25</sup> Letter of May 31, 1959

<sup>26</sup> Letter of January 26, 1959

The “Fedeli d’Amore” are, in the eyes of Philippe Guiberteau, a “sect”<sup>27</sup> whose doctrine is a “monism”<sup>28</sup>: “Gnosis”<sup>29</sup>, that is to say a “heretical tradition”<sup>30</sup>. He even went so far as to speak of the “Florence tariqa” as “an esoteric, Gnostic sect”<sup>31</sup> to which Dante would have been affiliated ... Aren't all these terms or expressions chosen to “terrify” the reader who cannot see in Dante a perfect Catholic? For René Guenon, the “Fedeli d’Amore” “were never neither a ‘sect’ nor a ‘society’”<sup>32</sup>. As for Dante, it is more correct to consider his work “as constituting in some way a ‘super-Catholicism’; it would even be difficult to find a more exact expression to characterize it; and we will add that this results moreover directly from the very nature of the esoteric tradition to which Dante was attached.”<sup>33</sup>

It seems that Philippe Guiberteau, among others, failed to “understand Dante much better still”, as “knowledge of an esoteric and initiatory nature, even if incomplete.”<sup>34</sup> It is these gaps that made him fail to understand the orthodox character of the initiatory path of the ‘Fedeli d’Amore’ within Christianity. These are the same shortcomings that did not allow him to recognize in the texts of Saint Thomas, Ruysbroeck, and Dante that Michel Valsan addressed to him and, often, translated, the metaphysical theory of the multiple states of being. Thus, by favoring certain conceptions specific to the theological point of view, interpreted more restrictively, he did not really understand that “what Dante constantly has in view”, “is indeed” sacred science”<sup>35</sup>.

## The Doctrine of Multiple States in Christianity

Insofar as the theory of multiple states of being is metaphysical in nature, it is certain that difficulties arise in making a comparison with the doctrines of Catholic theology. Yet, deep down, these difficulties are much less in the revealed or sacred Texts in general than in the conceptions which interpret them; they are even much less in the dogmas properly so called, in the fundamental texts inspired by the Church herself than in their more or less “official” (not formally obligatory) meanings, based on such and such theological school. Thus the doctrine of Saint Thomas is not always the whole of Catholic theology, and even less of other Christian theologies, Greek or otherwise; thus, the doctrine of the Western

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<sup>27</sup> *L’Enigme de Dante*, p. 55 ; on this word and the adjective “sectarian”, cf. see the “Table of notes” in *Banquet*, pp. 481-482.

<sup>28</sup> <sup>28</sup> *L’Enigme de Dante*, p. 69; “monism which, for the Church is the most dreadful error of all”, *Banquet* p. 15

<sup>29</sup> *L’Enigme de Dante*, p. 70; in the Gnostic “esoteric doctrine” “there is no question of supernatural help from Christ through the channel of the Roman Church”, *Le Banquet*, p. 21. Ulysses, according to Guiberteau, is “the typical character of the Gnostic, who considers that he can achieve supreme knowledge through his own virtues or human capacities”, (“Spirituality of mythology according to Dante according to some passages from Paradise”, included in *Dante et les Mythes*, Paris, 1965, p. 192).

<sup>30</sup> *L’Enigme de Dante*, p. 76

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76 and 78.

<sup>32</sup> E.T., 1937, p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 1935, pp. 503-504. This is what Philippe Guiberteau did not understand; thus, for example, he established an opposition between Beatrice, “symbol of the exoteric Church”, and Donna-Filosofia, figure of Gnosis. In reality, “this opposition is only one in the order of simple ‘spiritual modalities’, and it concerns two perspectives, both of an initiatic and esoteric nature” (letter from Michel Valsan of January 26, 1959). Despite these profound differences, Philippe Guiberteau will have the delicacy to thank Michel Valsan for this last letter as follows: “such a letter from you shows me your love for the Truth, and your love also for your neighbor since you give him so much of your time” (letter of February 4, 1959).

<sup>34</sup> E.T., 1936, p. 41.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.



Church is not the whole of Christendom. Hence, Christian doctrine as a whole is not all religious or metaphysical doctrines. But we speak in this way however about their more or less immediate forms, and the difficulties of finding an agreement in relation to this form first of all. Now, we are quite convinced that this agreement is nevertheless always reserved and safeguarded in the deep reality of the doctrinal forms, while agreeing that this reality is not easily accessible, nor of an always glowing demonstration, and that of such difficulties are proved even by people of an initiatic mentality or membership, because it is thus the one explains certain splits and opposition in the esoteric order itself, the others, of the exoteric order, being themselves, when it concerns things of primary importance and that shows of the rest the dependence of things of the exoteric order in relationship to things of the esoteric order.<sup>1</sup>

We were saying that the difficulties encountered in accepting the doctrine of the universal Self and multiple states of being are much less in the revealed Texts than in the doctrines that interpret them. Basically, even the recognized doctors of the Church or the masters of the spiritual life in Christendom are in no way contrary to this doctrine, and if they do not all profess it openly, at least they do not exclude it. There are only certain dominant meanings on the plane of common consciousness that go in the opposite direction. Here is a first specific point, but of fundamental importance, where we can see this situation.

Psalm 82:6 says: "I say you are gods. You are the sons of the Most High!"<sup>2</sup> For the New Testament, to the Jews who wanted to stone him "because being man he is made God", Jesus responds: "Isn't it written in your Law, I said You are gods!" If the Law calls gods those to whom the Word of God was addressed, and if Scripture cannot be annulled, how do you say to him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world: "You blaspheme!" because I said: "I am the Son of God?"<sup>3</sup> Thus, from the Old Testament to the New, we have the same principal definition of beings. What one does on the plane of ordinary theological consciousness, or one is pleased to speak always of the "nothingness of the creature", although this expression itself does not touch basically to question of the uncreated aspect of the being.

However, this uncreated aspect of the being is the immutable doctrinal foundation of all theologians and true masters of Christian spirituality. Thus, Saint Dionysius the Areopagite teaches that "we are types or examples of the *creative reasons* of things, which preexist in the simplicity of the divine Essence".<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in Saint Augustine: "it is therefore in the eternal Truth of which were made all things which are in time that we see with the eye of the soul the form according to which we are and according to which we do all that we do in ourselves or in bodies with right and true reason".<sup>5</sup> As for Saint Thomas Aquinas<sup>6</sup>, he affirms that "God is the first exemplary cause of all things ... it must be said

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<sup>1</sup> Luther had been first of all a Rosicrucian instrument in view of a spiritual reform more truly traditional than one might think of it, but, very soon, some influences of another order took and led elsewhere. The Church of Rome realized later certain of the reforms formulated initially by Luther, or rather by his intermediaries, but much later, and would correspond then to a certain equilibrium found again by the forces of action of the esoteric domain, that which is the exact position that is assigned to the center from which he arose.

<sup>2</sup> Actually Psalm 81 in the Catholic enumeration.

<sup>3</sup> John 10:31-39

<sup>4</sup> *On the Divine Names*, 5:9

<sup>5</sup> *The Trinity*, IX, 7, 12

<sup>6</sup> *Summa theologica* I. 1. 44, a.3.

that in divine Wisdom are contained the reasons (*rationes*) of all things that we have called ideas above. (*ideas*), by which we mean the exemplary forms (*formas exemplares*) existing in divine intelligence (in *Mente divina existentes*).

Moreover, these ideas, although they are multiple in so far as they refer to things, are really nothing other than the Divine Essence, as its similitude may be participated in various ways by the various beings. So it is God Himself who is the Primum Exemplar of all things". The immediate continuation of this text even makes it possible to consider a hierarchy of things manifested according to this exemplary mode of participation: "after that nothing prevents certain things in creation from being exemplars in relation to others, for this reason such things are in the likeness to those others, whether they belong to the same species, or they are analogous by mode of imitation. The two applications considered here are related, one might say, the former to the correspondence on the horizontal, the latter to that on the vertical, because the analogy in the Thomistic sense makes it possible to go back from the knowledge of creatures to that of God. And Saint Thomas concludes: "It is not by a resemblance of species that creatures arrive at the fact that they are similar to God according to their nature, like man begotten with man who begets him, but they attain the resemblance in that they represent the "reason" which is found in the Intelligence of God, as the material house represents the house conceived in the intelligence of the architect."

What St. Thomas says might perhaps give the impression to some that the presence of things in the Principle is in some sense "abstract", only in intention and without reality. It is not so. We will see this better in the interpretation at the beginning of the Gospel of Saint John: "all things were made by Him (the Word of God) and without Him nothing was made. What was made was Life in Him and (this) Life was the Light of men"<sup>7</sup>. With Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas, as with the majority of Greek and Latin fathers, we therefore link, and we read: quod factum est in Ipso Vita erat and Vita (illa) erat Lux hominum.<sup>8</sup> Now, more and more, it is now being translated: "All things were made by Him, and nothing

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<sup>7</sup> John 1:3-4

<sup>8</sup> For Saint Augustine, cf. *The Trinity*, book 13, chap. 1, and the *Confessions*, book 7, chap. 9; for Saint Thomas, we will refer to his *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint John*, chap. 1, lesson 2, 3rd part: the Angelic Doctor addresses the issue of punctuation, and therefore of the various possible meanings of these verses, starting from Augustine (On John, book 1, chap. 17), of Hilaire de Poitiers (*The Trinity*, book 2, chap. 20) and, on the Greek side, from Origen (*Commentary on Saint John*, book 2, chap. 16) and John Chrysostom (*Homily on John*, book 5, chap. 2).

For the Greek Fathers, cf. also Clement of Alexandria, *The Pedagogue*, book 1, chap. 6. In this passage, Clement quotes the verse as follows: "What was made in Him is Life", which he will quote later (book 2, chap. 9) in this form: "This which was made in Him made Life ", On the other hand, we will also notice the note from Marrou accompanying the translation of the first quote: "interesting testimony for the punctuation of this verse of the *Prologue*" (Ed. Cerf, Paris, 1983, p. 160).

Without wishing to be exhaustive on this question, we will again mention this late text by Bossuet (17th century): "there is, in this verse of Saint John, a variety of punctuation which is found, not only in our copies, but also in those of the Fathers. Many of them read: "What was made was Life in Him", quod factum est in Ipso Vita erat. Let us receive all the lights that the Gospel presents to us. We see here that everything, even inanimate things which have no life in themselves, were Life in the divine Word through his Idea and Eternal Thought. Let us learn to look at all things in this beautiful place, where "all is Life" (Complete Works, Paris, 1862, Tome 7, pp. 213-214)

Finally we will recall that the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament, the Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus, are not punctuated; on the other hand, neither the Hebrew Bible nor the Koran have punctuation marks.

(that was made) was made without Him." In Him was Life and the Life was the Light of men". It is punctuated as follows: "Omnia per ipsum facta sunt and sine Ipso factum est nihil *quod factum est* — Point. — *In ipso Vita erat*, and *Vita (illa) erat Lux hominum*". This cut of the phrase no longer immediately allows us to see that "*what was made was Life in Him*". This meaning is not denied, but made less obvious; common understanding will not see it any more. In the same way: "erat Lux vera quae illuminat omnem hominem venientem in (hunc) mundum" where therefore the "true Light illuminates *all men coming* into this world", we currently translate: "the Light, the true one, that which enlightens all man, came into the world."<sup>9</sup> Suddenly, the aspect of primordial illumination, at least virtual, of every human being, is obtained.



As for the doctrine of multiple states of being in Saint Thomas, we think that there is really no divergence in him in regards to the question of the *continuo-contiguo* in Dante<sup>10</sup>, nor with Guenon; to agree, it would at least be necessary to admit that the formulations in the doctrines of exoteric function must observe certain rules of wisdom, and wisdom requires that we put everything in its place and, indeed, the constitution of the exoteric doctrine itself can only be the work of wisdom, whether it is a question, moreover, of the inspirations given to the Church, first of all in the principle statements of the councils, or in the personal formulations of the doctors of the Church. But anyway, when Saint Thomas Aquinas says that created things have an "uncreated being" in the divine Intellect, and if we do not forget that divine Unity is an attribute of pure Being, that is a sufficient base for the first point of the doctrine of the universal Self and the multiplicity of states of being, the supreme Identity of the I and the Self.

Then, if we scrutinize carefully the doctrine of existential causality in traditional philosophy or in pure theology, and what the cause-and-effect relationship actually consists of as fact — we are only raising the question now — we would see that there is enough to admit the "continuity" of the states of being. In any case, the traditional notion of the heart, as the center and synthesis of all the reality of being, is a precise case, an illustration of this "continuity" seen under the mode of the essential unicity of manifested or created being. It does not suffice to restrict the intellectual scope of a notion like that of the Sacred Heart in this respect. Bossuet's testimony says that in the Heart of Christ "is the aggregation of all the wonders of Christianity ... the Heart of Jesus, that is the mystery of Christianity"<sup>11</sup> could itself be mentioned on the exoteric side.

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<sup>9</sup> Verse 9, trans. Crampon. After writing this verse in Latin, René Guenon remarks, in an unpublished note: "this implies the divine nature of the intellect, through which the participation of man in the universal takes place; it cannot therefore be a question here of individual reason, but rather of the faculty which transposes into the universal the data of sensation and the conceptions of reason (the latter being able to rise to general ideas, but not universal)". On the other hand, in the first verses of the Gospel of Saint John which have just been quoted, and the identification "between the terms Verbum, Lux and Vita", cf. *Perspectives on Initiation*, chap. 47.

<sup>10</sup> On the question of the "continuity" and "contiguity" of *The Banquet*, Book 3, chapter 7,6; Philippe Guiberteau wrote "that is one of the most typical passages of the *Convivio* where Dante presents a thought which corresponds to what Guenon described in *The Multiple States of the Being*", in a note accompanying his translation, p. 220

<sup>11</sup> *Panegyric of Saint John*, in the *Oeuvres oratoires*, tome II, p. 526, quoted by Bainvel, *The Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, Paris, 1931, p. 367. As for the quote from Bossuet according to which the Heart of Christ is "the

In the revelation of the Sacred Heart, the Heart of Christ becomes that of the worshiper; the symbolic data then speak of a “gift” of Christ made to his elect, but this “gift” is at the same time an element of an exchange, for Christ then takes the heart of the elect. All of this is naturally an expression of things on the intermediate plane, but these things can also be conceived as resting on a more interior foundation, on the invisible but intelligible axis of the total being. It is in the same way that the expression can be different, and apparently opposite, according to the perspective in which one places oneself, even when it comes to exposition of initiatory doctrine. This is what René Guenon himself teaches: “*in a sense*, the spiritual influence which is transmitted by [by initiation] will therefore be identified with the same principle it is about [the “spiritual principle”]; *in another sense*, and if we take into account the preexistence of this principle in being, we can say that it has the effect of “vivifying” it (not in itself, of course, but in relation to the being in which it resides) ...”<sup>12</sup>. If it is to be complete, the doctrinal expression or the interpretive conception must not be systematic; however, literalism and exoterism inevitably require options according to the dominant sense on the exterior plane.

[The conception of multiple states, in theology as well as in certain sciences or particular speculations] attests to the existence of Daimons, Genies, good or bad Jinns, which are situated between angel and man; likewise, beings “generated” between angel and man<sup>13</sup> or between jinn and man<sup>14</sup> can be taken into account here. As regards the degrees between man and animal, there are also beings participating from both the one and the other; we cannot insist, but we will recall the mythical beings like Centaurs, Sirens, etc., whose “faculties” can sometimes be similar to those of man: Chiron was the master of Achilles. One could naturally say that these are the fables of the ancients as if such a thing could not be said of everything that relates to Angels and Demons.

It is not to modernist interpreters of Saint Thomas or Dante that one could ask to admit them, but one can point out their grotesque contradiction to them when on the other hand they accept the “evolution of species”, because this is their recognition, although irregular, of a continuity of states of being through the continuity of forms of species! On the other hand, the “similitude” between angel and man, and between man and beast, of which Saint Thomas speaks while specifying it for “extreme cases”, can be well explained in the sense of the doctrine of the multiple states of the being, and for this it should be noted first of all that the side by which this question is approached by Saint Thomas is somewhat special: each of the beings endowed with this “similarity in extreme cases” comprises different envelopes corresponding to planes or modalities of existence included in its nature, and the “degrees” in this case are not mere “planes” of encounter; owing to the fact that the elements of which these “envelopes” are made are engaged in specific and individual syntheses, they do not therefore remain in the neutral and impersonal state of macrocosmic degrees, but are organized in such a way in each being that in fact, they have a particular physiognomy in each case.

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aggregation of all the mysteries of Christianity, a mystery of charity whose origin is in the heart”, it was retained by Father Anizan, in *Regnabit* (January 1926; cf. *Introduction to Fundamental Symbols*)

<sup>12</sup> *Perspectives on Initiation*, Chapter 48

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 6 of *Genesis*.

<sup>14</sup> According to some, that was the case of Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, it was also the case of Merlin the enchanter. But this form of birth exists in any fashion and remains always possible with this clarification: when the father is man and the mother is a Jinn, the birth takes place among the Jinns, and conversely, for it is the nature of the mother that assigns the specific place.

So, in relation to beings themselves, we can properly speak only of "similitude" and not of "unity" or "identity". Thus, fundamentally, the case where Saint Thomas speaks of "similitude" is not quite the same as that where Dante speaks of "continuity", and the opposition that we want to find there would rather appear, the first considering "beings" or "entities", the second speaking more of the corresponding general plans of existence: Dante says verbatim: "in the hierarchy that the degrees make"<sup>15</sup>.

In St. Thomas, despite his exoteric position, we find mentions that do not preclude, and even allow, the idea of continuity between the degrees of angel and man. It is understood that the composite nature of being to the degree of humanity means that the angelic (or even divine) element will be prevented and obscured there to a good extent, and that only in very exceptional cases could man be said to be "like" angels, which extends to the upper, intellectual part of the soul. This is how Saint Gregory was able to say that "a man has intelligence like angels."<sup>16</sup> This is how Saint Thomas also concludes on this same point: "We must therefore answer that man has in common with the angel the faculty of intelligence, but which nevertheless lacks their eminence ... the intellect of the angel is perfect by the intelligible species in accordance with its nature, but the human intellect is only in potency for the species of this mode."<sup>17</sup> We will also point out that from the fact that Saint Thomas speaks of "man" and of "angel", and not of the total being situated contingently in the respective existential degrees, his response is particularly valuable in the terms he had to observe, and, moreover, René Guenon himself, in analogous conditions would not express differently.<sup>18</sup>

There is another question which is in direct relation with the continuity of the states of being in Saint Thomas: it is that of his conception of the Active Intellect. The more restricted special definition that finally received the Active Intellect in Catholic theology was the culmination of a broad, long and heartbreaking debate, in which the foundations of the faith found themselves grappling with conceptions and formulations of foreign origin and of specifically divergent tendencies which, while being able to have their *raison d'être* and their legitimacy in a particular context elsewhere appeared to be less compatible with the dogmatic systematization of Catholicism. In a less simplified view of things, which also means more metaphysical, the different aspects of the human intellect could all subsist as we

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<sup>15</sup> Through the orders of the grades, *Convivio*, Book 3, Chapter 7,6

<sup>16</sup> *Homily for Ascension Day*. This is how St. Thomas quotes this extract from the 29th *Homily on the Gospel* in the *Summa Theologica*, T, q. 84, art. 3. In fact, he sums up the following passage from Saint Gregory: "Lapides itaque sunt, sed non vivunt. Arbusta autem sunt, et vivunt, sed non sentiunt. Bruta vero animalia sunt, vivunt, sentiunt, sed non discernunt. Angeli etenim sunt, vivunt, sentiunt, and discernunt. Omnis autem creaturæ aliquid habet homo. Habet namque commune esse cum lapidibus, vivere cum arboribus, sentire cum animalibus, intelligere cum angelis. If common ergo habet aliquid cum omni creatura homo, juxta aliquid omnis creatura is homo. »(Migne, Latin Patrology, volume 76, col. 1214; we have put in italics the terms taken up by the Angelic Doctor

<sup>17</sup> *Summa Theologica*, *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Here is an example. Speaking of symbolism as a means "specially adapted to the demands of human nature, which is not a purely intellectual nature, but which needs a sensitive basis in order to rise towards the higher spheres", Guenon adds: "for a pure intelligence, assuredly, no external form, no expression is required to understand the truth, nor even to communicate to other pure intelligences what it has understood to the extent that it is communicable; but it is not so for man "The Word and the Symbol", *Regnabit*, January 1926 and chapter 2 of the *Fundamental Symbols*. In the same article, he also said that "the symbolism properly speaking is essentially synthetic, and therefore "intuitive" in a way, which makes it more apt than language to serve as a fulcrum for the "intellectual intuition" which is above reason."

can see from the example of Buddhi in the Hindu doctrines<sup>19</sup>; but in an exoteric perspective and in an intellectuality of the scholastic type, an option had to be made in favor of a simple conception and a univocal formulation, this certainly in the sense of a lesser evil, but nevertheless not without some obturation of 'an aspect of total truth.

In the Thomist solution of the Active Intellect, where it was a question of ensuring the responsibility of the individual, this obturation took place at the expense of the transcendent aspect of the human intellect. This case of option is not unique in theological history, and we could cite options in the opposite direction — which are moreover related to that which concerns us here — such as that of the nature and function of the Holy Spirit in Christianity, or that of the nature of the Koran, created or uncreated, in Islam. Now, in all questions of this kind, it is obvious that it is basically always the continuity of the states of the total being that is at stake.

What is, moreover, particularly instructive in this order of things, is that in this question of the Active Intellect, Saint Thomas had at the outset a completely different conception from the one to which he had to eventually rally. "Certain Catholic doctors," he said then, "have affirmed with enough probability (*satis probabiliter*) that it is God himself who plays the role of active intelligence in us and they confirm their opinion by these words of Saint John relating to the Word: "He was the Light that illuminates every man coming into this world". However, he said next, it is hardly natural to believe that in the soul itself there is not an immediate and sufficient principle of its own operations. Now, this would be the case, if the power to understand, instead of belonging to each soul, were a common reality, whether it was God or, as some Arab philosophers believed, an Intelligence. For this reason, St. Thomas subsequently fixes himself clearly in the contrary opinion, and he calls for the power which allows in us the transformation of sensible experience into general ideas, the Active Intellect."<sup>20</sup>

However, in the same verse quoted by Saint Thomas, and which we thus find once again in relation to this question of the multiple states of being, we can discern the different aspects observed for Buddhi. As the *Lux vera* appears in the world — the words of the verse "coming into the world" can be related to the Light as well as to man — and enlightens every man, it is the ray of Atma which enlightens all individualities. As an image or imprint received by man, it is Buddhi considered as one of the 19 organs of individuality due to the manifestation of Atma in the condition of *Vaishwanara*.<sup>21</sup>

Besides, here is how Saint Thomas himself concludes with regard to the application of this verse of Saint John to the question of the human intellect: "this true Light illuminates like a universal cause from which the human soul receives a particular power (*virtus*)."<sup>22</sup> Before arriving at this solution, Saint Thomas' demonstration itself highlights the different degrees of this Light. Here are the essential propositions: "nothing being more perfect among the lower things than the human soul, it must be said that it must have a power derived from the higher Intellect, by means of which it can illuminate the images ... this is why Aristotle compared the Active Intellect to the light, (radiation) which is something received in the air, whereas Plato compared the separated Intellect to the sun which leaves imprints in our souls ... but the separated Intellect, according to the documents of our faith, is God Himself, who is the Creator of the Soul, only in whom is the soul beatified..... it is therefore from Him that the human soul participates

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Man and his becoming according to the Vedanta*, Chapter 7

<sup>20</sup> R.P. Sertillanges, *Les grandes thèses de la philosophie thomiste*, Paris, 1941, pp. 195-196

<sup>21</sup> *Man and his becoming according to the Vedanta*, Chapter 12

<sup>22</sup> *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 79, art. 4, ad. 1.

in the intellectual Light according to Psalm 4:7: "The light of thy face O Lord, is signed upon us: thou hast given gladness in my heart."

When, finally, further on, Saint Thomas resolves the question of knowing whether there is a single Active Intellect for all men, he declares: "all men must have in common the faculty (*virtus*) which is the principle of this action (to know the first intelligibles), and this faculty is the Active Intellect. But it doesn't have to be the same numerically for everyone. Nevertheless, it must all derive from the same Principle. Thus, this possession in common of the first intelligibles demonstrates the unity of the separate Intellect that Plato compares to the Sun, but not the unity of the Active Intellect that Aristotle compares to the light (which radiates from the Sun)."<sup>23</sup> Now this solution only distinguishes in the sense of univocity what is stated in the sense of equivocity in the following text of the *Matsya Purana* which speaks of *Mahat*, the great Principle, epithet of Buddhi: "in the universal, Mahat (or Buddhi) is Ishwara "(Divinity)," but, viewed distributively ... it belongs ... to individual beings."<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, we can see that, in his interpretation of the verse of Saint John, Saint Thomas cumulates on the supra-individual side two aspects of the Light which the Hindu texts situate at two different degrees. *Lux vera* is for him both the Sun and the ray which emanates from it, aspects which however already distinguished the conceptions of Plato and Aristotle, because, as Principle, this Light is the spiritual Principle and, as a manifestation of the Principle, it is the radiance of the Sun. But it is obvious that there is "continuity" between these two degrees of the Light, and this continuity must even be seen even in the image which the Light marks on the individual states and which could not subsist for a single moment without its radiation.

This is how we realize that between the separated Intellect, whether it is considered to be God Himself or a transcendent Intelligence (=Buddhi in itself), and the Active Intellect, there is ontologically continuity. This continuity allows us to affirm two quite different and even opposite things: on the one hand, the essential identity of the two Intellects; on the other hand, their distinction as to the degrees of manifestation. Here then is once again a conclusion which leads us to observe that we cannot dispense with the conception of multiple states of being when we want to account for the complexity of certain cosmological and theological problems, and see how it explains and reconciles the different partial views presented by the different philosophical systems. [The doctrinal questions which we have just dealt with present a real interest when] we go beyond the notions of current theological teaching, without obliging us to speak of heterodoxy, and one could say that between two interpretations, it is better to choose the one that gives the richest metaphysical meaning.



If we stick to Christian doctrines, we would find in the most metaphysical of them, like those of Meister Eckhart, Ruysbroeck and Nicolas de Cusa, something to more easily legitimize the aspect of the "continuity" of the multiple states of the being. Here again, it is essential to refuse to see in it positions and opinions of an individual and arbitrary character.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 79, art. 5

<sup>24</sup> *Man and his becoming according to the Vedanta*, Chapters 7 and 14

Here is a text from Ruysbroeck, the orthodoxy of which ultimately remains unassailable. Recall that this master said: "Know, truly, that I have never written a word in my books except under the direction of the Holy Spirit." In *The Spiritual Espousals*<sup>25</sup>, he writes: "in all men is found, *by the same nature, a triple unity which, among the righteous, is moreover supernatural.*



Figure 1 Ruysbroeck writing under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The first and highest unity of man is in God; for all creatures are attached to this divine unity as to essence, life, and preservation; and if, in this respect, they separated from God, they would fall to nothing and become nothing. The unity we are talking about is essentially *within us by nature*, whether we are good or bad. And without our cooperation it makes us neither saints nor blessed. We have this oneness *within ourselves, and yet above ourselves*, as the principle and support of our being and our life.

A second union, or, if you will, unity, *still exists in us by nature*. It is the unity of the higher powers constituted by the fact that they derive their natural origin, from the point of view of their activity, from the same unity of the spirit. It is always about the same unity that we possess in God; but we take it here *from the active point of view*, instead of considering it from the essential point of view. *And the spirit is whole in one and the other unity*, in the totality of its substance. We possess this second unity in

ourselves, above the sensitive part; and from it proceed memory, intelligence, will and all possibility of spiritual activity. Here the soul is called "spirit".

The third unity, which is in us by nature, is the domain of the lower powers, having their seat *in the heart* as the principle and source of animal life. It is *in the body*, and particularly *in the activity of the heart*, that the soul possesses this unity, from which all the operations of the body and the five senses take place. Strictly speaking, it then bears its name of "soul", because it is the form of the body that it animates, that is to say, makes it live and keeps alive.

*These three unities which are in man by nature constitute one life and one kingdom.* In the lower unity it is sensitive and animal; in the middle, it is rational and spiritual; in the highest, it is maintained in its essence. *And this is natural to all men.*

Now, these three unities, together with a kingdom and an eternal abode, are *supernaturally adorned and taken into possession by the moral virtues together with charity, in the active life.* They are even

<sup>25</sup> Book 2, chapter 2. We recall that it was Michel Valsan who emphasized the passages that we put in italics. The preceding quote is from Pomerius (1382-1469), *The life and miracles of John Ruysbroeck*. Denys le Chartreux (1403-1471) said of the man he nicknamed the "Admirable": "he had no other instructor than the Holy Spirit" ("instructorem non habuit nisi Spiritus Sanctus").



better adorned and more nobly taken into possession by interior exercises practiced for a spiritual life. But the most worthy and happiest ornament is given to them in a supernatural contemplative life.

The lower unity, which is in the body, is adorned and possessed supernaturally by outward practices performed perfectly according to moral virtues, following the example of Christ and his saints. One should carry the Cross with Christ there and keep nature under the yoke, according to the commandments of the Holy Church and the teachings of the saints, as much as one can discreetly.

The second unity, which resides in the spirit and is entirely spiritual, is adorned and possessed supernaturally by the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. The influx of grace and divine gifts spreads there, with a willingness to practice all the virtues, following the example of Christ and of holy Christendom.

The third unity, which is the highest and which is beyond our comprehension, *although essentially within us*, is possessed supernaturally, when in all our righteous works our intention follows the praise and honor of God, and when we take rest in Him, above all intention, above ourselves and above all things. This is the unity from which we started as created beings while remaining there by our essence, and we return to it in charity. These are the virtues which, in active life, form the adornment of the three unities of which we have spoken.

We must now tell how these three unities are more worthily adorned and possessed in a nobler way by means of intimate exercise added to the active life. When, out of charity and righteous intention, man dedicates himself, in all his acts and in all his life, to the honor and praise of God, and when above all he seeks his rest in God, he will be easily disposed to wait humbly, patiently, with self-abandonment and assured confidence, for new treasures and more abundant riches, without ever worrying whether God is pouring out His gifts or withholding them.

This aptitude and a capacity are created to receive the gift of the interior affective life. When the vessel is ready, precious liquor is poured into it, and there is no vessel nobler than the *loving soul*, nor liquor more precious than the *grace of God*. Here then is a soul who dedicates all his acts and all his life to God, with simple totally upright intention, and who, above all intention, above himself and all things, takes his rest in this high unity, where *God and the loving spirit are united without intermediary*.

This text is particularly precious since it shows at the same time the relationship between the integral *nature* of man and grace, and the latter basically only *revives the former*. We will add that in other traditional forms we find equivalents of the sacraments of works organized for the same final goal.

The three unities of man, discussed here, form a basic pattern of multiple states of the being fully comparable to that found in Hindu doctrine, for example. We can notice, on occasion, that this hierarchy of degrees is attributed to man in the most explicit way, which shows that we can, in spite of everything, speak of a trichotomy in Man, while understanding that it is also a question of what goes beyond human individuality — to which the term “man” literally applies. Only, in the present case, we see that the ternary indicated is not quite the same as that of Saint Paul<sup>26</sup>, the first being constituted in a way by the “summit” of the latter, if not by a difference.

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<sup>26</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:23 And may the God of peace himself sanctify you in all things; that your whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is a table of correspondences which can give a more precise overview. The matches on the horizontal lines are not always at the same level, and on the vertical direction the columns are not everywhere complete, for the points of view according to which the different classifications are made, are not absolutely the same.

## Multiple States Correspondences

Ruysbroeck	Paul	Hinduism Conditions of the Atma and corresponding symbols				
		Bodies	Sheaths	Person/I	States	Akshara
				Shiva- Advaita	Turiya	Om Om-kara
Spirit: 1. Unity of Essence (God) 2. Unity of Activity	Pneuma	Karana- sharira (causal body)	Anandamaya- kosha	Prajna	Sushupta- sthana	M
<i>(spirit = nous)</i>	→	→	<i>Buddhi</i>			
Animal Unity The Soul	Psyche	Sukshma- sharira (subtle body)	Vijnanamaya- kosha Manomaya- kosha Pranamaya- kosha	Taijasa	Swapna- sthana	U
	Soma	Sthula- sharira (gross body)	Annamaya- kosha	Vaishwanara	Jagarita- sthana	A