

René Guénon and the question of initiation

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Introduction

René Guénon is recognised, along with Ananda Coomaraswamy and Frithjof Schuon, as one of the founders of what is often referred to as the “Traditionalist School.” In fact, Guénon rejected the terms “traditionalist” and “traditionalism” preferring instead to be seen as an exponent of the *sophia perennis*.¹ In recent times some followers of Guénon have tried to specifically associate the terms “Traditionalism” and “Traditionalist School” with Schuon, although this often procrustean and loaded exercise is highly problematic in itself. In his landmark survey of “Traditionalism,” Kenneth Oldmeadow observes the political and sentimental accretions associated with the terms “tradition,” “traditionalism” and “traditionalist”; nevertheless, he concludes that ‘as these writers would concede the need for some kind of generic label for their thought most would find “traditionalism” the least unsatisfactory’.² This granted we must recognise that Guénon, Coomaraswamy and Schuon were not in harmony on all points. Still, it is safe to say that the essential elements of their combined *opus* present a united front against the understandings (or lack thereof) of the modern world. Nevertheless, certain followers of these luminaries are all too intent on engaging in polemic over elements that are often altogether peripheral, choosing to highlight the differences between these three thinkers, rather than recognise the benefits of their works taken as a whole. In saying this I do not wish to ignore differences, where they appear, for the sake of trying to maintain a false harmony, for in such

¹ On Guénon’s usage of these terms see *The Reign of Quantity & The Sign of the Times*, 1995, pp.251-52.

² Oldmeadow, *Traditionalism: Religion in the light of the Perennial Philosophy*, 2000, p.x.

cases we are entitled, if not obliged, to question and challenge the ideas of these thinkers; not to do so speaks of a lack of intellectual curiosity and discernment and risks sycophancy, traits which were deplored by all of these thinkers alike. It should be obvious that where one concludes error or weakness this is an altogether different matter from dismissing the worth of that thinker's essential message.

A key disagreement between Guénon and Schuon occurs with the question of initiation and, in particular, the status of the Christian sacraments. The debate has generated a sizable secondary literature.³ The primary sources, of course, are Guénon's various writings on initiation and Schuon's direct criticisms offered in *René Guénon: some observations*, a collection of critical comments based on personal notes not originally intended for publication but eventually published some thirty odd years after Guénon's death. In this work Schuon pays tribute and offers "unfailing gratitude" to Guénon for 'the presentation, both precise and profound, of crucial ideas, and thus indispensable truths';⁴ nevertheless, recognising that 'there is no right superior to truth,' he presents a criticism of some of Guénon's ideas and of certain elements of the man himself. On the whole these are not unjustified: one cannot in good faith deny, for example, that Guénon was in fact 'somewhat slipshod in scholarship,' as Whitall Perry once observed.⁵ A balanced study requires that we first attempt an analysis of Guénon's teaching on initiation, which is our current aim.⁶

Guénonian initiation

Generally speaking, Guénon approached the topic of initiation in two ways: in principle and specifically. In the first case he developed conclusions based on metaphysical principles, only drawing on specific traditions where apposite; in the second case he discussed specific

³ For example: Borella, *Guenonian Esoterism and Christian Mystery*, 2004; Lings, 'Answers to Questions About the Spiritual Master' (Appendix B) in *The Eleventh Hour*, 1987; Mihăescu, 'Christianity and initiation': *Oriens*, 1.1, 2004; Mihăescu, 'René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon, Vasile Lovinescu and initiation Parts I, II, & III': *Oriens*, 1.2-4, 2004; Tamas, 'Initiation and Spiritual Realization': *Oriens* 2.5-6, 2005; *et al.*

⁴ Schuon, René Guénon: some observations, 2004, p.49.

⁵ Perry, 'Coomaraswamy: the Man, Myth and History': *Studies in Comparative Religion* 11.3, 1977, p.p.160.

⁶ With this in hand I consider the implications of Guénon's argument for the Christian sacraments, see my, 'Guénon and the Christian sacraments' forthcoming.

traditions assessing their historical importance and validity, and explicating their particular symbolisms. The series of essays that make up his books *Perspectives on Initiation* and *Initiation & Spiritual Realisation* are primarily, but not exclusively, of the first type. Of his other works that treat of initiation we have *The Esoterism of Dante*, *Studies in Freemasonry and the Compagnonnage*, and the enigmatic *The King of the World*; these are primarily of the second type. The posthumous *Insights into Christian Esoterism* is comprised of two parts: Part Two is made up of essays on Dante, the *Fedeli d'Amore*, the Holy Grail, and the Holy Land: these are primarily essays focusing on specific “Christian” organisations and symbolisms. Part One comprises two essays, ‘On Sacred Languages’ and ‘Christianity and Initiation.’ The first is a short rumination on Christianity’s lack—in Guénon’s opinion—of a sacred language. Guénon’s argument and conclusions here are problematic of themselves; however while this topic is relevant this essay is not essential to understanding Guénon’s view of initiation. Those interested in the argument against Guénon’s view should see Schuon’s response in *René Guénon: some observations* and also Schuon’s essay, ‘Communion and Invocation.’⁷

In ‘Christianity and Initiation’ Guénon clarifies his position on Christian initiation and the status of the Christian sacraments, in light of ‘rather unwelcome confusions [that] had made their way into the mind of a sizable number of our readers.’⁸ He notes his surprise at learning that some of his readers considered *Perspectives on Initiation* to be more or less directly and extensively concerned with Christianity. As I have remarked, this work is essentially general and “theoretical.”⁹ Nevertheless certain ideas developed in *Perspectives on Initiation* do lead to conclusions on the status of Christianity and it is these that Guénon seeks to clarify in ‘Christianity and Initiation.’ In summary: Guénon claims that Christianity was originally esoteric and initiatic but that at some time before Constantine and the Council of Nicaea it became a purely exoteric—which for Guénon is synonymous with “religious”—organisation. He believes that this “descent” into the exoteric had a

⁷ Originally published in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, May 1940; recently republished in Patrick Laude, *Prayer without Ceasing: The Way of Invocation in World Religions*, 2006.

⁸ Guénon, ‘Christianity and Initiation’ in *Insights into Christian Esoterism* (tr.) Jacques Philippe, 1991, p.13.

⁹ From a position of principles, which is far from suggesting that Guénon’s conclusions were not rooted in actual spiritual experience.

“providential character” in being a “redressal” of the modern Occidental decline, in perfect agreement with cyclic laws.¹⁰ Guénon concludes that, due to this state of affairs ‘and even from a very remote time, one can no longer consider, in any way, the Christian rites as having an initiatic character,’ saying that ‘this is what we shall have to insist upon with greater precision’.¹¹ The sacraments are thus “reduced” to the purely exoteric domain, although he recognises that the sacraments can have an esoteric character or usage, but only for those who have already received initiation in another form, in which case the sacraments are for such people ‘transposed, as it were, onto a different level, in the sense that these initiates will use them as supports for the initiatic work itself’.¹² In saying that initiation was available in another form, Guénon felt that the possibility for initiation was only available to the Occident, at least at the time he was writing, through either of the “genuine western initiatic organisations,” which he takes to be the Compagnonnage and Masonry,¹³ or through the Eastern Churches, and more specifically, Hesychasm. However, he remarks, ‘the sacraments cannot produce such effects by themselves, their intrinsic efficacy being limited to the exoteric domain’.¹⁴

An obvious difficulty and source of confusion in all this arises in admitting that the word “initiation” has a breadth and depth of meaning that goes beyond Guénon’s specific usage. Guénon’s precision is, in general, a mark of his genius; however, he is occasionally guilty of monopolizing the “true meaning” of words where this is not necessarily justified, either etymologically or in terms of common usage.¹⁵ That said, Guénon offers sufficient definition to clarify his use of the word “initiation.” His definition is both *precising* and *stipulative*—which is not surprising given his mathematical background; it is this definition that we shall concern ourselves with here, only taking issue where his definition is guilty of squirreling the argument.

For Guénon, initiation is essentially a “transmission,” where this can be understood in two different senses: ‘on the one hand, transmission of

¹⁰ Guénon, ‘Christianity and Initiation’, 1991, pp.16-17.

¹¹ Guénon, ‘Christianity and Initiation’, 1991, p.15.

¹² Guénon, ‘Christianity and Initiation’, 1991, p.22.

¹³ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.34, n.6.

¹⁴ Guénon, ‘Christianity and Initiation’, 1991, p.22.

¹⁵ His procrustean criticism of “mysticism” (see *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.9) is a perfect example of this.

a spiritual influence, and on the other transmission of a traditional teaching.¹⁶ In talking of “traditional teachings” Guénon does not mean bookish learning or a didactic programme. Instead these teachings are methods aimed at the realisation of the “initiatic work,” which is itself the actualisation of “states of being” that are opened up to the qualified initiate via “spiritual influences”: ‘What can be taught are only the preparatory methods for obtaining these states; what can be furnished from the outside in this respect is only an aid, a support, that greatly facilitates the work to be accomplished, and also a control that dispels those obstacles and dangers that may present themselves.’¹⁷

At the outset we must ask: What does Guénon mean by “spiritual influences”? What are the “states” that these open the initiate to? What “qualification” does the initiate require? And, in turn, who is qualified to offer initiation? Finally: What is the process of the “initiatic work”?

Spiritual Influences

For Guénon initiation is the transmission of spiritual influences to a qualified initiate by means of filiation with a traditional organisation that is itself orthodox and regular; these spiritual influences give the initiate spiritual illumination sufficient to develop, in conjunction with the active efforts of the initiate’s interior work, the possibilities that precisely constitute their qualification. This initiatic process presents itself in three hierarchic conditions: potential, virtual, and actual. The final goal of the initiatic work is for the initiate to transcend individuality in achieving Deliverance, which is the state of Supreme Identity with the Reality. Guénon:

...initiation implies three conditions that present themselves successively and correspond respectively to the terms “potentiality,” “virtuality,” and “actuality”; (i) “qualification,” consisting in certain possibilities inherent in the nature of the individual ...; (ii) transmission, by means of filiation with a traditional organisation, of a spiritual influence giving to the individual the “illumination” that will allow him to order and develop those possibilities that he carries within himself; and (iii) interior work by which ... this development will be gradually realised as the individual passes stage

¹⁶ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.194.

¹⁷ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.26.

René Guénon and the question of initiation

by stage through the different degrees of the initiatic hierarchy and is led to the final goal of “Deliverance” or “Supreme Identity.”¹⁸

Guénon is quick to distinguish the transmission of “spiritual influences” from simple bookish learning and profane didactic teaching, and needless to say, he dismisses the idea of initiation on the “social” or “moral” order.¹⁹ It appears that what he has in mind when he refers to “spiritual influences” is what Islamic tradition calls *barakah* (بركة; “blessing”), although he does not specify this as such;²⁰ he does recognise that these spiritual influences are what Christian tradition designates by the power of the Holy Ghost.²¹ According to Guénon, a spiritual influence is ‘essentially transcendent and supra-individual,’ although this does not prevent it ‘from acting according to different modalities and in equally different domains,’ that is to say, to produce secondary effects that are themselves not necessarily of the same transcending order of the spiritual influences.²² What he is describing here is the concept of a mediating principle, both transcendent and immanent; in the Islamic tradition this has its source in the *barzakh*, the isthmus between the “two seas”: ‘It was He who sent the two seas rolling, the one sweet and fresh, and the other salty and bitter, and set a rampart between them as an insurmountable barrier.’²³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, discussing the *Hayy ibn Yaqzān* of Ibn Sina, says of the *barzakh* that it is ‘the *intellectus materialis*, or *al-‘aql al-hayūlānī*, which with respect to the intelligible forms acts as *materia prima*.’²⁴ This informs Guénon’s view of initiation as being a process of ‘bringing the being back to a state of undifferentiated simplicity comparable ... to that of *materia prima*’.²⁵ Thus the initiate requires the *barakah* to be reintegrated into the *barzakh*, where these are essentially of the same

¹⁸ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.27.

¹⁹ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.17.

²⁰ In *Initiation and Spiritual Realization* (2001, p.123, n.2) Guénon implicitly recognizes that this is what he intends.

²¹ Guénon, ‘Christianity and Initiation’, 1991, p.15.

²² Guénon, ‘Christianity and Initiation’, 1991, p.15.

²³ Sūrah 25, *al-furqan*.

²⁴ Nasr, *Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, 1978, p.269. Nasr observes that the use of the Aristotelian language of form and matter is here transposed into the spiritual domain to symbolize the inner experiences of the traveller.

²⁵ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.27.

ontological status. Now, this is again, *mutatis mundis*, the Christian doctrine of the Logos, both Uncreated and created.

Guénon further clarifies the idea of “superior states,” that is to say supra-individual states, saying that these must not be confused with that which is simply extraordinary, such as psychic states, ‘for the psychic states have nothing “superior” or “transcendent” about them’.²⁶ In comparison he observes that when it is a question of communication of superior states ‘what is involved ... is something that is in its very essence “incommunicable” since it concerns states that are realised inwardly.’²⁷ Moreover, ‘mere communication with superior states cannot be regarded as an end but only as a point of departure. If this communication must be established at the very start by the action of a spiritual influence, it is only to permit the prospective initiate effectively to take possession of these states and not simply, as in the order of religion, to have “grace” descend upon him, a “grace” that does link him to these states in a certain way but does not grant him entry to them.’²⁸ This last quote is somewhat problematic, for Guénon does not clarify why “grace” should not in fact grant entry into the superior states, in the sense that one might be “lifted” thence by God, so to speak. However, for Guénon the answer lays in the idea of the “active” nature of initiation, to which we will turn in due course.

The communication with superior states via the transmission of spiritual influences is experiential and unitive rather than dialectic. This experience constitutes what Guénon calls the “initiatic secret”: ‘the “initiatic secret” ... is such because it cannot but be so, since it consists exclusively of the “inexpressible,” which consequently is necessarily also the “incommunicable”’.²⁹ He is quick to distinguish this idea from mere profane secrets which are so by a matter of contrivance. Moreover, he recognises that properly speaking, ‘what is transmitted by initiation is not the secret itself, since this is incommunicable, but the spiritual influence that the rites vehicle and that makes possible the interior work by means of which, with the symbols as base and support, each one will attain that secret and penetrate it more or less completely, more or less profoundly, according to the measure of his own possibilities of

²⁶ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.18.

²⁷ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, pp.25-26.

²⁸ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.20.

²⁹ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.84.

comprehension and realisation.’³⁰ Similarly he says: ‘Obviously, a teaching that concerns the inexpressible can only suggest it with the help of appropriate images, which then become the supports for contemplation; ... This was always and among all peoples one of the essential characteristics of initiation into the mysteries, whatever name may have been given it, and we can therefore say that symbols, and particularly myths when the teaching is conveyed by words, truly constitute, according to their primary purpose, the very language of initiation.’³¹

The idea of the “incommunicable” leads Guénon to recognise the “most profound” meaning of the term “mystery” as being “silence” in the sense of that which is “strictly inexpressible.” In this context he recognises the initiatic quality of the ancient “Mysteries,” although when used in the context of “mysticism” he denies this most profound sense and allows only the most passive quietism. As I have alluded to earlier Guénon’s argument against mysticism is unsatisfactory, being for the most part *ad hoc* and based on a procrustean definition of this phenomenon. In effect there are two main reasons why he denies mysticism access to the superior states of the being. In the first place Guénon feels that mysticism is entirely passive, involving no interior spiritual work; “mysticism” is characterised by “passivity,” whereas, in contrast, he describes initiation as “precise” and “positive.”³² Guénon: ‘mysticism ... pertains exclusively to the religious or exoteric domain ... the mystical path differs from the initiatic path in all its essential characteristics, which difference is such as to render the two truly incompatible’.³³ This quote recognises a further problem arising from a question of definition, for Guénon’s use of the terms “religion” and “exoteric” are again *precising* and *stipulative*. Leaving this difficulty aside for the moment let us observe that the generalisation that mysticism is purely passive quite simply suggests that Guénon’s knowledge of mystical theology was severely limited.³⁴ Again, according to Guénon,

³⁰ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.85.

³¹ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.123.

³² Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.7.

³³ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.9.

³⁴ Schuon remarks that Guénon had a ‘curiously poor regard for Neoplatonism, and ... admitted that he had never read Meister Eckhart’ (*René Guénon: some observations*, 2004, p.49).

‘in mystical union individuality as such subsists’.³⁵ Meister Eckhart, who is often utilised to refute Guénon, says: ‘If we fail to find God it is because we seek in semblance what has no resemblance ... On merging into the Godhead all definition is lost’; again, ‘When I go back into the ground, into the depths, into the well-spring of the Godhead, no one will ask whence I came or whither I went.’ It is hard to see how these imply a state of being that maintains individuality; moreover, there are any number of references to “mystics” of various traditions that would suffice to refute Guénon’s opinion here.³⁶

Guénon’s second criticism is more potent, namely: mysticism lacks the transmission of spiritual influences that is guaranteed by filiation to an authentic initiatic organisation, therefore mysticism cannot access states that transcend individuality. We must recognise that much of what is labelled mysticism did in fact take place in the context of, or with some association to, organisations that Guénon would recognise as initiatic, albeit that these were also “religious”; in such cases he would argue it would not have been the mysticism but the initiation that allowed access to superior states. Here there is the problem of distinguishing between what constitutes mystical practice or activity, for whatever Guénon may say, this is an active path,³⁷ and what constitutes initiatic practice, and to what degree they coincide—which questions Guénon’s claim that these two are “truly incompatible.” Whether one wishes to defend Guénon, attempting thereby to maintain some idea of infallibility (which he himself never claimed), or whether one wishes to defend the complexity of mysticism, the question of mysticism and Guénon’s understanding thereof, is, in the end, peripheral to the issue of initiation and must await a detailed treatment of its own at some later time.

³⁵ Guénon, *Initiation and Spiritual Realization*, 2001, p.48.

³⁶ Guénon was influenced by both Shankara and Ibn al-‘Arabi and even recognized their writings to have a “properly initiatic character” (*Initiation and Spiritual Realization*, 2001, p.33) so it is highly informative to recognize the parallels of both thought and expression that exist between these two thinkers and Meister Eckhart, as demonstrated in Reza Shah-Kazemi’s excellent book, *Paths to Transcendence According to Shankara, Ibn Arabi, and Meister Eckhart*, 2006.

³⁷ I will not say “undeniably an active path” because obviously certain people do deny this, Guénon for one; nevertheless, one wonders how anyone with any knowledge of “mysticism” could maintain this denial.

Superior states of the being

The spiritual influences involved in initiation are supra-individual, that is to say they belong properly to the metaphysical domain. Nevertheless, Guénon says that they can enter into the individual state via initiatic transmission, thus opening these superior states up to the initiate. In his book, *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedānta*, Guénon offers the following summary of the states of the being:³⁸

Universal- The Unmanifested

-Formless Manifestation

Individual - Formal Manifestation

-Subtle state

-Gross state

He remarks that ‘religion considers the human being exclusively in his state of individuality and does not aim to bring him beyond it but rather to assure him of the most favourable conditions in this state, whereas the essential aim of initiation is to go beyond the possibilities of this state and to effect a passage to the superior states, and even finally to lead the being beyond every conditioned state of whatever kind.’³⁹ To this he adds the following note: ‘Here of course, it is a question of the human state envisaged in its [sic] integrality, including the indefinite extension of its extra-corporeal prolongations.’ A thorough consideration of Guénon’s theory of the “multiple states of the being,” valuable and highly interesting as it is, would nevertheless take us too far beyond the scope of the present study. This is not to say that a deeper understanding of this is not relevant to the topic of initiation, and the interested reader is encouraged to see Guénon’s, *The Multiple States of the Being* and also *Symbolism of the Cross*. Nevertheless, it suffices at the moment to appreciate two key points: firstly, that the spiritual influences are supra-individual but capable of effect in the individual domain; and secondly, that for Guénon it is only through initiation that

³⁸ Guénon, *Man and his becoming*, 1981, p.34.

³⁹ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.20.

the individual can take possession of these spiritual influences in a manner that will allow them to transcend the individual state.

When Guénon talks of the “most favourable condition” of individuality as opposed to the transcending of “every conditioned state of whatever kind,” he is alluding to the distinction between “salvation” and “Deliverance.” Guénon first explicated this distinction in *Man and his Becoming*,⁴⁰ he alludes to it in *Perspectives on Initiation*,⁴¹ and returns to it in more detail in chapter eight of *Initiation & Spiritual Realisation*.⁴² According to Guénon, salvation is the highest achievable condition of the individual state and constitutes “preservation” of the human state; thus one who gains salvation is ‘fixed ... in the prolongations of the human state as long as this state itself subsists in manifestation—which is equivalent to perpetuity or an indefinite time’.⁴³ The benefit of this is that the individual is thereby guaranteed ‘the central position occupied by man in the degree of existence to which he belongs’⁴⁴ and protected, thereby, against the “dangers” of a more peripheral condition ‘comparable in our world to those of animals or even vegetables,’ which would constitute a serious disadvantage from the point of view of spiritual development’.⁴⁵

To fully appreciate Guénon’s argument here requires a basic understanding of the multiplicity of the states of being: firstly one must distinguish between Non-Being and Being, then establish a clear distinction between Being and Existence: Being is the principle of manifestation, whereas, Universal Existence ‘will then be integral manifestation of the ensemble of possibilities of manifestation, implying the effective development of those possibilities in a conditioned mode.’⁴⁶ ‘A state of a being is then the development of a particular possibility contained in such a degree [of existence], that degree being defined by the conditions to which the possibility is subject insofar as it is envisaged as realising itself in the domain of manifestation.’⁴⁷ In *Symbolism of the Cross*

⁴⁰ Guénon, *Man and his becoming*, 1981, Chs.22-24.

⁴¹ See Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.107.

⁴² Chapter 18 of Guénon’s *The Great Triad* discusses the distinction between “True Man” and “Transcendent Man” which are not unrelated here.

⁴³ Guénon, *Initiation and Spiritual Realization*, 2001, p.47.

⁴⁴ Guénon, *Initiation and Spiritual Realization*, 2001, p.47.

⁴⁵ Guénon, *Initiation and Spiritual Realization*, 2001, p.47.

⁴⁶ Guénon, *The Multiple States of the Being*, 2001, p.27.

⁴⁷ Guénon, *The Multiple States of the Being*, 2001, p.28.

Guénon develops a brilliant and complex geometric representation of the states of the being and the degrees of existence; for our purposes it will do to offer a simplified explanation. Thus: the degree of existence to which human individuality belongs may be envisaged as a horizontal plane of existence; the centre of this plane of existence is occupied by the conditioning principle, which is in this case the principle of the human state; each individual is only human qua human inasmuch as they participate in the centre, just as by analogy radii of a circle participate in the geometric centre. The purpose of this degree of existence is to realise the centre, from whence the being can possibly “progress” vertically. It is only through being human that a state of being can “move” “inwards” along the horizontal radii that, in a sense, defines them; moving into the centre from which “the being” (for it is no longer proper to speak in terms of the individual) transcends to superior states. This vertical ascent is likewise envisaged as a movement back into the realm of pure Being, which would here be envisaged as the centre of a sphere, of which the plane of human existence is but one horizontal cross-section. Realisation of the centre of the plane of human existence constitutes the state of what the Chinese call True Man (*chen jen*) and what the Semitic traditions designate by Primordial Man; this is the state of being described by “salvation,” as Guénon envisages this term.⁴⁸ Realisation of the state of pure Being constitutes the state of Transcendent Man (*chün jen*), what Semitic traditions designate by Universal Man; this is the state indicated by Deliverance. Now this is of course a simplification, but one hopes that the basic distinctions are evident.

Salvation is the state of being “preserved,” although this begs the questions: preserved from what and for what? The simple religious answer would be: preserved from “sin” until the “End of Time” or “Final Judgement.” The “individual” who has achieved Deliverance has, in effect, transcended time and any concept of judgement. The question as to the difference between the being who has achieved Deliverance here and now, and the person who is judged “worthy” at the end of

⁴⁸ Marco Pallis questions this restriction of the word “salvation” to the individual domain noting that while it might be so restricted in the minds of the majority this does not mean that it is so in principle: ‘It must be remembered that “salvation” is the term Christians have always used: its authority goes back to Scriptures and to Christ Himself. It would be surprising indeed if it implied any restriction of finality in an absolute sense’ (‘The Veil of the Temple’ in *The Sword of Gnosis*, 1974, p.94).

time is not addressed by Guénon, who is primarily concerned with questions of initiation rather than eschatological considerations. For Guénon, Salvation preserves one from falling away from the human state. He does not explain why we should wish not to be human, that is to say, why we should not wish to belong to a condition ‘comparable ... to those of animals or even vegetables,’ except to say that this would be disadvantageous to spiritual development and alluding to “oriental texts” that say that ‘human birth is difficult to obtain.’⁴⁹ Of course Guénon is not alone in his emphasis on the favourability of the human condition for this is a universal maxim which can be recognised in the pericope: ‘God made man in His own image.’ The primacy of the human condition is a central theme of Schuon’s work, where man’s objectivity is the defining element: ‘When we speak of man, what we have in mind first of all is human nature as such, that is, inasmuch as it is distinguished from animal nature. Specifically human nature is made of centrality and totality, and hence of objectivity; objectivity being the capacity to step outside oneself, while centrality and totality are the capacity to conceive the Absolute.’⁵⁰ Centrality, totality, objectivity: these qualify the human condition. Here we must acknowledge two points. First: that Schuon took issue with Guénon’s account of the relationship between the Self and the ego, but a full consideration of this would take us beyond the boundaries of this essay.⁵¹ Second: in describing the transition through states of the being and degrees of existence, Guénon is considering the idea of transmigration, which raises numerous difficulties but principally the question of reincarnation. Again, a full consideration of this area lies beyond the scope of this essay, but I will note that Guénon talks of “states of the being” emphasising that what he intends is the idea of the “one and only transmigrant,” to use Coomaraswamy’s phrase.⁵²

Qualification

For Guénon, initiation is the transmission of spiritual influences to a qualified initiate by means of filiation with a traditional organisation that

⁴⁹ Guénon, *Initiation and Spiritual Realization*, 2001, p.47.

⁵⁰ Schuon, *To Have a Centre*, 1990, p.39.

⁵¹ See Schuon, *René Guénon: some observations*, 2004, pp.32-37.

⁵² The reader should see Coomaraswamy’s essay, ‘The One and Only Transmigrant’ in *Selected Papers Vol.2 ‘Metaphysics’* (ed.) Roger Lipsey, 1977.

is itself orthodox and regular. The question of qualifications is problematic because we are here in the realm of individuality and thus, subjectivity. As Guénon remarks, the first and primary condition of initiation is initiatic “qualifications”⁵³: ‘these qualifications belong exclusively to the individual domain ... the individual must necessarily be taken as a means and a support of initiatic realisation, and thus must possess the necessary aptitudes for this role, which is not always the case.’⁵⁴ The orthodoxy of the initiatic organisation is thus essential to provide an objective guarantee by which to measure the qualification of the prospective initiate. Still here there is the difficulty that arises with one orthodox initiatic organisation seemingly applying different criteria for qualification than another. In fact Guénon observed to a seeker that ‘an Islamic initiation is, broadly speaking, easier to get than a Hindu initiation’.⁵⁵ This, of course, is specifically connected to questions of caste; however, Guénon notes similar difficulties, *mutatis mundis*, in obtaining initiation in the Hesychast tradition,⁵⁶ which is not constrained by the question of caste. And in fact many Christian followers of Guénon took the “easy” (to use Guénon’s word) option of becoming Muslims, thus allowing them to seek initiation into a sufi *tariqa*.⁵⁷

The conditions that constitute initiatic qualifications, as Guénon describes them, may be summed up as: initiative, acceptance, receptivity, and discrimination. Initiative: ‘In the case of initiation ... the individual is the source of the initiative toward “realisation,” pursued methodically under rigorous and unremitting control, and normally reaching beyond the very possibilities of the individual as such. We must not fail to add that this initiative alone does not suffice, for it is quite evident that the individual cannot surpass himself through his own efforts’.⁵⁸ This last point highlights the need for acceptance: ‘the individual must not only have the intention of being initiated but he must be “accepted” by a regular traditional organisation that is qualified

⁵³ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.91.

⁵⁴ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.91.

⁵⁵ Guénon, Letter to Vasile Lovinescu, September 29, 1935.

⁵⁶ Guénon, *Le Dossier H*, 1997, p.283.

⁵⁷ One must be careful not to see Guénon’s description of this path as “easier” as being in anyway a dismissal or lessening of the path.

⁵⁸ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, pp.11-12.

to confer initiation on him ... it must be a strictly initiatic organisation, to the exclusion of any other kind of traditional organisation'.⁵⁹

Receptivity, can also be seen as “natural aptitude”: ‘this aptitude, forming what some call “initiability,” properly constitutes the requisite “qualification” demanded by all initiatic traditions.’⁶⁰ Guénon remarks that in order to be truly profitable, ‘initiatic teaching naturally requires a “receptive” mental attitude,’ while stressing that “receptivity” is not at all a synonym for “passivity”’.⁶¹ Any informed description of mysticism might well argue in exactly the same way, which shows the difficulty in guaranteeing an unequivocal argument here. In fact the receptivity of the potential initiate can only be assessed by the initiatic organisation, which returns us to the difficulties of assessing the orthodoxy of said organisation and, in turn, the difficulties of assessing the criteria they demand for qualifying to gain initiation. Of course here it will be argued that such assessments cannot be made in a manner that is dialectic and profane, that it is a matter of experience; in the final analysis I am in agreement, but if we were to leave things there the initiate would have no means by which to distinguish between psychological experience and pseudo-initiation, and what Guénon, on the other hand, takes to be authentic spiritual initiation. Therefore we arrive at the need for discrimination.

There are two areas wherein the initiate requires the capacity for discrimination. In the first place the potential initiate needs to be able to recognise the orthodox and regular nature of the initiatic organisation; we will consider this in more detail below. In the second place, observes Guénon, initiation requires doctrinal preparation necessary for discrimination among “influences,”⁶² indicating by this that along with spiritual influences the process of initiation and the initiatic work opens one to the dangers of psychic influences, which can be detrimental if not recognised as such. Of course, for Guénon, “doctrinal knowledge” is distinct from outward instruction or profane “knowledge,” as we have noted already.

The idea of “qualifications” raises the modern spectre of elitism. We need not here go into the denial of hierarchy envisaged by modern

⁵⁹ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.32 & n.5.

⁶⁰ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.22.

⁶¹ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.224.

⁶² Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.9.

egalitarianism. Let us just note Guénon: ‘It goes without saying that the essential qualification, which takes precedence over all the others, is that of a greater or lesser “intellectual horizon”’.⁶³ He envisages precisely an “intellectual elite”—a pleonasm, according to Guénon; however, here we must be aware that he is using the term “intellect” more in line with scholastic usage, and really as a cognomen for the *Logos* or, in the Hindu tradition with which he is more familiar, the *Buddhi*.⁶⁴ As such he observes that ‘the eminence that characterizes the elite by very definition can only be effected from “on high,” that is, in respect of the highest possibilities of the being’.⁶⁵ Guénon is also quick to point out that ‘initiation is not a sort of special religion reserved for a minority’.⁶⁶ Neither is the elite a matter of numbers: ‘number counts for little here ... It is evident that in all that relates to the elite, only “quality” must be envisaged, not “quantity.”’⁶⁷ ‘In the final analysis’ says Guénon, ‘the elite as we understand it represents the totality of those who possess the qualifications required for initiation, and who naturally are always a minority among men; all men are in a sense “called”⁶⁸ by reason of the “central” position the human being occupies among all the other beings founding this same state of existence’.⁶⁹

Initiatic organisations

In talking of qualifications we recognised the need for the ability to discriminate with respect to the orthodoxy of a particular initiatic organisation. By way of clearing the ground let us first note that affiliation must be “real” and “effective,” as opposed to “ideal.” Here Guénon wishes to guard against syncretic pseudo-initiatic organisations, the likes of which were evident in French occultist circles at Guénon’s time and which generally speaking present themselves as theophists today. A mark of such “ideal” organisations is their often spontaneous origin, frequently accompanied by “revealed” links with any number of fantastic traditions, of which they may claim to be a “reconstitution.”⁷⁰

⁶³ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.93.

⁶⁴ See Guénon, *Man and his becoming*, 1981, ch.7.

⁶⁵ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.270.

⁶⁶ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.20.

⁶⁷ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.271, n.7.

⁶⁸ Matt.22:14: ‘For many are called, but few are chosen’.

⁶⁹ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.271.

⁷⁰ See Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity* Ch.36, 1995, pp.291-304.

In contrast a “real” initiatic organisation must be “regular” and effected according to definite laws.⁷¹ These “definite laws” act as a measure of orthodoxy, where the “necessary and sufficient condition” of orthodoxy, as Guénon remarks, is the ‘concordance of a conception with the fundamental principle of the tradition’.⁷² This means that initiation must be regular: ‘initiation is essentially “regular,” having nothing to do with anomalies’;⁷³ this regularity, says Guénon, ‘excludes pseudo-initiatic organisations’.⁷⁴ For Guénon, “regularity” is defined by attachment to an orthodox traditional centre:⁷⁵ ‘the link to the supreme centre is clearly indispensable for the continuity of transmission of spiritual influences from the very origins of present humanity (or, rather, from beyond these origins, since what is involved is “non-human”) and throughout the entire duration of its cycle of existence.’⁷⁶

This last point recognises that the transmission of spiritual influences is transcendent in origin. Guénon: ‘it is necessary that an organisation truly be the repository of a spiritual influence if it is to be able to communicate this influence’.⁷⁷ Initiatic organisations are effectively the “chain” that binds one to the transcendent: ‘a succession that ensures the uninterrupted transmission [of spiritual influences]’.⁷⁸ ‘Outside of this succession,’ says Guénon, ‘even the observance of ritual forms is in vain’.⁷⁹ Guénon sees “succession” as the essential element in the efficacy of initiation. This “unbroken chain” is recognised variously as *shelsheleth* in Hebrew, *silsilah* in Arabic, *parampara* in Sanskrit.⁸⁰

When Guénon says that ‘outside of this succession even the observance of ritual forms is in vain’ the immediate implication is that this is by definition a question of human transmission—leaving aside the original “non-human” transmission; in fact this appears even more so to be the case when Guénon emphasises that this must be “oral”

⁷¹ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.28.

⁷² Guénon, *Man and his becoming*, 1981, p.15.

⁷³ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.25.

⁷⁴ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.48.

⁷⁵ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.65.

⁷⁶ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.60.

⁷⁷ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.32.

⁷⁸ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.48.

⁷⁹ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.48.

⁸⁰ It is worth noting the onomatopoeia of these names (*shelsheleth*, *silsilah*, *parampara*), which are themselves “chains” of sounds.

transmission.⁸¹ However, he also says that relics ‘are precisely vehicles of spiritual influences’;⁸² similarly temples, images, and ritual objects must be “vivified” by consecration.⁸³ In this last case we might suggest that these objects receive the spiritual influences, so as to vivify them, but do not then have the power to transmit them onwards; however, this seems to go against traditional teachings on the purpose of symbols as vehicles for spiritual influences. In fact Guénon remarks: ‘The true foundation of symbolism is the correspondence that exists among all orders of reality, that links one to another, and that therefore extends from the natural order taken in its entirety to the supernatural order itself. By virtue of this correspondence all of nature is itself only a symbol, that is to say it receives its true meaning only if seen as a support to raise us to the knowledge of supernatural or “metaphysical” (in its proper and etymological sense) truths, which is precisely the essential function of symbolism as well as the fundamental purpose of all traditional science.’⁸⁴ That is to say that the function of all symbols, as Guénon defines them, derives from their “linking” the hierarchy of states in a manner that allows them to “raise us” to superior states of the being. This in itself suggests that symbolic forms (both human and non-human) may act to transmit spiritual influences opening access to higher states of the being, and this would suggest that ritual forms, which are after all primarily symbolic, are anything but “in vain.” In the case of relics these are “vehicles” precisely, transmitting the spiritual influences. This, at least, would seem to allow for non-human transmission of spiritual influences, which, according to Guénon’s definition, allows for initiatic transmission through ritual forms, such as one might suggest is the case with the Christian sacraments. Thus the ritual form, given that it was orthodox and regular, would constitute the element of succession itself.

Certainly Guénon is not as dismissive of ritual as might appear from the above quote. ‘Ritual’ as Guénon remarks, ‘is not something to be played with; it is and always remains something serious and truly efficacious, even when those taking part in it are unaware of this.’⁸⁵

⁸¹ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.54, 75.

⁸² Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.53, n.11.

⁸³ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.54, n.12.

⁸⁴ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.127.

⁸⁵ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.105, n.2.

Moreover, he emphasizes that spiritual influences do in fact intervene in exoteric rites as well as initiatic rites.⁸⁶ However, ‘unlike initiatic rites, exoteric rites do not in fact have as their goal the opening of the being to certain possibilities of knowledge for which all cannot be qualified’.⁸⁷ The goal for exoteric rites, according to Guénon, must be restricted to the individual order, ‘having “salvation” as its finality’.⁸⁸ Still, granted that both ritual forms and initiation entail the transmission of spiritual influences, we are left to ask just how they differ.

In the first place we might suggest that these influences are simply of different orders. If this is the end of the explanation it does nothing but render the term “spiritual influences” meaningless. A stronger argument develops with the idea that the spiritual influences are hierarchic so that it makes sense to talk about spiritual influences of this or that order. However, the difference, as we have it with Guénon, between the spiritual influences that are transmitted by religious rites and the spiritual influences transmitted by initiation resides in his *a priori* definition of them as such. No explanation or argument is offered.

In the second place it might be suggested that these influences are of the same order but that only a qualified person can access the higher states. This would imply that the measure of “initiability” is the initiate’s receptivity, which is to say that the measure resides, in the first place, in the individual and not the initiatic organisation. Of course, as we have noted, the receptivity of the initiate, which constitutes the requisite “qualification,” can only be guaranteed by the authority of the initiatic organisation and then this receptivity can only be vivified by the initiatic transmission of the spiritual influences. If this were not the case then the influences vehicled by a specific ritual form might spontaneously vivify one’s receptivity, which Guénon denies can be the case. As an argument for the superiority of initiation—as Guénon envisages initiation—over religious rites this is flawed. It is a self-sealing augment. Put simply says it runs: spiritual influences transmitted by initiation in an initiatic organisation are greater than the spiritual influences transmitted by a religious rite because only a qualified person can access the influences transmitted by initiation and the only way to be qualified is to undergo initiation. Thus it seems that the role of the

⁸⁶ Guénon, ‘Christianity and Initiation’, 1991, p.14.

⁸⁷ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.106.

⁸⁸ Guénon, ‘Christianity and Initiation’, 1991, p.16.

guaranteeing organisation is not an argument *against* ritual forms vivifying receptivity *per se* but is rather a guarantee of the authenticity of this within initiation. The latter does not necessarily deny the former.

Guénon's argument—such as it is, for to do him justice he is not in fact concerned with semantics—rests upon the essential element of human transmission. This in itself is not contingent on the officiant having understanding of the rite of initiation: 'the necessary and sufficient condition is that the officiant should have regularly received the power to accomplish the rite, and it makes little difference if he does not truly understand its significance and even if he does not believe in its efficacy, for this cannot prevent the rite from being valid if all the prescribed rules have been properly observed.'⁸⁹ Again: 'the efficacy of the rite accomplished by an individual can be independent of the true merit of the individual as such, something that is equally true of religious rites. We do not intend this in any "moral" sense, which would clearly have no importance to an exclusively "technical" question, but in the sense that even if the individual lacks the degree of knowledge necessary to comprehend the profound meaning of the rite and the essential reason for its diverse elements, that the rite will nonetheless be fully effective if the individual is properly invested with the function of "transmitter" and accomplishes it while observing all the prescribed rules and with an intention that suffices to determine his consciousness of attachment to the traditional organisation.'⁹⁰ In contrast, 'a profane person who knew all the rites from having read their descriptions in books would still not be initiated in any way, for it is quite evident that the spiritual influence attached to these rites would in no way have been transmitted to him.'⁹¹

When Guénon emphasises "oral" transmission there are two fundamental aspects he has in mind. The first is the sound of the voice, which is linked to the existential nature, that is to say the primordial vibration field (*nāda*), the sound of the sacred monosyllable, *OM*.⁹² In

⁸⁹ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.105.

⁹⁰ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.53.

⁹¹ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.75.

⁹² According to the *Chāndogya Upanishad* 1.1.1-3: The essence of all beings is earth, the essence of earth is water, the essence of water is the plants, the essence of the plants is man, the essence of man is speech, the essence of speech is the *Rg Veda*, the essence of the *Rg Veda* is the *Sāmaveda*, the essence of the *Sāmaveda* is the *Udgīta* (which is *OM*).

nearly every mythology of the world the cosmogenesis is symbolised by either sound or light, or a combination of the two symbolismisms. Both describe the idea of vibration as the principle descriptor of creation. The second aspect is the *prana*, the “breath of life,” the Hebrew *nephesh*, that God blew into the nose of Adam to make him a living being (*Genesis* 2:7), which is also identified with the Spirit or *ruah* (*Genesis* 6:17).⁹³

A final point about initiatic organisations is that these are not necessarily “organisations” in the modern sense of the term; that is to say they are not defined by profane and formalistic structures, although they may have these. Rather they are “organisations” according to two senses: that they are “organic” from the Greek *organikos*, which in turn derives from *organon*, which means “instrument” revealing that these are instruments in the process of “Return to God”; and that they form an organic or unified whole, which refers to their link to the supra-human source, the Centre. This is enough to appreciate that, theoretically, a single living human could form the corporeal manifestation of an initiatic organisation; in fact we should say *the* initiatic Organisation, for in truth there is only one God, one Organism, one unified Whole, so that there can only really be one initiatic organisation, in this sense. Guénon explicitly recognises this when he says, ‘Since in principle there is but one unique Tradition from which every orthodox traditional form is derived, there can only be one initiation, equally unique in its essence although present under diverse forms and with multiple modalities’.⁹⁴ This shows that what he is referring to by initiation is an existential change that cannot be reversed or undone: ‘once one has been admitted into an initiatic organisation, whatever it may be, one can never by any means cease to be attached to it ... initiation is necessarily conferred once and for all and possess a strictly ineffaceable character.’⁹⁵ Again: ‘initiation of any degree represents for the being who receives it a permanent acquisition, a state that virtually or effectively it has reached once and for all and that nothing can ever take away.’⁹⁶ This type of

That *Udgīta* is the best of all essences, the highest, Deserving the highest place, the eighth.

⁹³ Guénon refers to both the sound and the *prana* in *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.54.

⁹⁴ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.65.

⁹⁵ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.76.

⁹⁶ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.107.

hypothesis is sometimes used to argue against the notion that repetitive rites, such as the Eucharist, can be initiatic. However, this is to be ignorant of what Guénon means by “multiple modalities” and of the truth that, in essence, there is only one unique Eucharist.

The initiatic work

The above distinction between “virtual” and “effective” initiation requires consideration. Guénon says that attachment to a regular initiatic organisation is sufficient for “virtual initiation.”⁹⁷ ‘Virtual initiation’ he says, is ‘initiation understood in the strictest possible sense of the word, that is, as an “entering” or a “beginning”’.⁹⁸ In contrast ‘the interior work that comes afterward properly pertains to effective initiation, which in the final analysis is, in all its degrees, the development “in act” of the possibilities to which virtual initiation gives access.’⁹⁹ Attachment to a traditional organisation ‘could of course never exempt one from the necessary inner work that each must accomplish for himself; it is, rather a preliminary condition for such work effectively to bear fruit.’¹⁰⁰ Again: ‘entering on the path is virtual initiation; following the path is effective initiation’.¹⁰¹ The aim is “Realisation.”

Guénon refers to virtual initiation as a “first initiation” saying that it is a passage from the profane to the initiatic order.¹⁰² This description might seem to contradict what he said concerning the idea of there only being “one initiation.” However, this “one initiation,” as he observes, while being unique in its essence, is ‘present under diverse forms and with multiple modalities.’¹⁰³ In fact the initiatic changes are, according to Guénon, “indefinite,”¹⁰⁴ inasmuch as they correspond to the indefinite states of the being that comprise a degree of existence. At the same time ‘the initiatic degrees ritually conferred, whatever the traditional form may be, can thus correspond only to a sort of general classification of the principal stages to be traversed’.¹⁰⁵ The idea that

⁹⁷ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.174.

⁹⁸ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.193.

⁹⁹ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.174.

¹⁰⁰ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.25.

¹⁰¹ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.193.

¹⁰² Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.173.

¹⁰³ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.65.

¹⁰⁴ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.173.

¹⁰⁵ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.173.

there is but one unique initiation present under diverse forms and multiple modalities mirrors the act of creation, which is entirely appropriate, for initiation is a “new creation” or a “re-creation.” The idea that creation is an eternal act is wonderfully expressed in the words of the *Srimad Bhagavatam* (11.10): ‘The atoms of the universe may be counted, but not so my manifestations; for eternally I create innumerable worlds.’ The phases of initiation, remarks Guénon, ‘reproduce those of the cosmogonic process ... the aptitudes or possibilities included in the individual nature are, in themselves, first of all only a *prima materia*, that is, a pure potentiality, where nothing is developed or differentiated. ... Thereafter, and by virtue of this [spiritual] influence, the spiritual possibilities of the being are no longer the simple potentiality they were before but have become a virtuality ready to be made actual with the various stages of initiatic realisation.’¹⁰⁶

Virtual initiation is symbolically a “second birth” or a “psychic birth”: ‘The “second birth,” understood as corresponding to the first initiation, is ... what can be properly called a psychic regeneration, that is to say in the order where the subtle elements of the human being are found ... But these phases do not constitute a goal in themselves, for they are still only preparatory to the realisation of possibilities of a higher order, by which is meant the spiritual order in the true sense’.¹⁰⁷ The first birth denotes physical birth into the corporeal state; the second birth, which is equally a “first death”—for as Guénon says, ‘new birth necessarily presupposes death to the former state’¹⁰⁸—denotes a “psychic birth”; the third birth—which is a “second death”—denotes a “spiritual birth,” which is represented by the idea of “resurrection.”¹⁰⁹

Summary

For Guénon, initiation is the transmission of spiritual influences to a qualified initiate by means of filiation with a traditional organisation that is itself orthodox and regular; these spiritual influences give the initiate spiritual illumination sufficient to develop, in conjunction with the active efforts of the initiate’s interior work, the possibilities that

¹⁰⁶ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, pp.26 & 27.

¹⁰⁷ Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.174.

¹⁰⁸ Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, p.110.

¹⁰⁹ See Guénon, *Perspectives on Initiation*, 2001, p.174.

precisely constitute their qualification. The initiatic transmission must be oral, thereby including the two cosmogonic elements: sound and breath. The initiatic process presents itself under three hierarchical conditions: potential, virtual, and actual. There is one unique initiation which is present and developed under diverse forms and with multiple modalities. What this means is that the transition from virtual to actual involves indefinite changes or “initiations.” At the same time these indefinite changes can only be ritually conferred according to a sort of general classification of the stages to be traversed. The final goal of the initiatic work is that the initiate transcend individuality in achieving Deliverance, which is the state of Supreme Identity with the Reality.