

*Meditation on the
Fourth Major Arcanum of the Tarot*

THE EMPEROR

L'EMPEREUR

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Blessed is he who comes in the name
of the Lord.

(Luke xiii, 35)

LETTER IV



THE EMPEROR

Dear Unknown Friend,

The less superficial a person is — and the more he knows and is capable of— the greater is his authority. *To be something, to know something and to be capable of something* is what endows a person with authority. One can also say that a person has authority in proportion to what he unites within himself of the profundity of mysticism, the direct wisdom of gnosis and the productive power of magic. Whosoever has this to a certain degree can found a "school". Whosoever has this to a still higher degree can "lay down the law".

It is authority alone which is the true and unique power of law. Compulsion is only an expedient to which one takes recourse in order to remedy a lack of

authority. Where there is authority, i.e. where there is present the breath of sacred magic filled by the rays of light of gnosis emanated from the profound fire of mysticism, there compulsion is superfluous.

Now, the Emperor of the fourth Arcanum of the Tarot does not have a sword or any other weapon. He rules by means of the *sceptre*, and by the sceptre alone. This is why the first idea that the Card naturally evokes is that of the *authority* underlying *law*. The thesis which proceeds from meditation on the three preceding Arcana is that all authority has its source in the ineffable divine name YHVH and that all law derives from this.

The implication here is that the human bearer of true authority does not replace divine authority but, on the contrary, cedes his place to it. He has to renounce something to this end.

The Card teaches us in the first instance that the Emperor has renounced compulsion and violence. He has no weapons. His right hand holds the sceptre forward, on which his gaze is fixed, and his left hand holds his tightly-fastened belt. He is neither standing nor sitting. He is simply leaning back against a lowered throne and has only one foot placed on the ground. His legs are crossed. The shield adorned with an eagle rests on the ground at his side. Lastly, he is wearing a large and heavy crown.

The context of the Card expresses active renunciation rather than the renunciation of constraint alone. The Emperor has renounced ease, being not seated. He has renounced walking, being in a leaning position and having his legs crossed. He may neither advance in order to take the offensive, nor move back in order to retreat. His station is by his seat and his coat-of-arms. He is on sentry-duty and as such he does not have freedom of movement. He is a guardian bound to his post.

What he guards is fundamentally the sceptre. Now the sceptre is not an implement with which one is empowered to do something or other. It is, from a practical point of view, a symbol serving nothing. The Emperor has therefore renounced all action having pledged his right hand to the sceptre that he holds before him, whereas his left hand holds his fastened belt. It is no longer free, because the Emperor restrains himself with it. It serves the function of holding the impulsive and instinctive nature of the Emperor in check, so that it does not intervene and divert him from his post as guardian.

The Emperor has therefore renounced *movement* by means of his legs and *action* by means of his arms. At the same time, he wears a large and heavy crown — and we have already meditated on the meaning of the crown with regard to that of the Empress, which has a double meaning. It is the sign of legitimacy, on the one hand, but it is also the sign of a task or a mission by which the crown is charged from above. Thus every crown is essentially a crown of thorns. Not only is it heavy, but also it calls for a painful restraint with regard to the thought and free or arbitrary imagination of the personality. It certainly emits rays outwards, but these same rays become thorns for the personality within. They play the role of nails piercing and crucifying each thought or image of the personal imagination.

Here true thought receives confirmation and subsequent illumination; false or irrelevant thought is riveted and reduced to impotence. The crown of the Emperor signifies the renunciation of freedom of intellectual movement, just as his arms and legs signify his renunciation of freedom of action and movement. He is deprived of the three so-called "natural" liberties of the human being—those of opinion, word and movement. Authority demands this.

But this is not all. The shield bearing an eagle rests on the ground at his side. The Emperor does not hold it with his hand, as the Empress does. The shield is certainly there, but it belongs rather to the *throne* than to the person of the Emperor. This means to say that the *purpose* for which the Emperor is on sentry-duty is not his but that of the throne. The Emperor does not have a personal mission; he has renounced this in favour of the throne. Or, in esoteric terms, he has no *name*; he is anonymous, because the name—the mission—belongs to the throne. He is not there in his own name but rather in the name of the throne. This is the fourth renunciation of the emperor—the renunciation of a personal mission or a *name*, in the esoteric meaning of the word.

It is said that, "Nature has a horror of emptiness" (*horror vacui*). The spiritual counter-truth here is that, "the Spirit has a horror of fullness". It is necessary to create a natural emptiness—and this is what renunciation achieves—in order for the spiritual to manifest itself. The beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew v, 3-12) state this fundamental truth. The first beatitude—"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"—means to say that those who are rich in spirit, who are filled with the "spiritual kingdom of *man*", have no room for the "kingdom of heaven". Revelation presupposes emptiness—space put at its disposal—in order to manifest itself. This is why it is necessary to renounce personal opinion in order to receive the revelation of the truth, personal action in order to become an agent for sacred magic, the way (or method) of personal development in order to be guided by the Master of ways, and one's personally chosen mission in order to be charged with a mission from above.

The Emperor has established in himself this fourfold emptiness. This is why he is "Emperor"; this is why he is *authority*. He has made a place in himself for the divine name YHVH, which is the source of authority. He has renounced personal intellectual initiative—and the emptiness which results is filled by divine initiative or the YOD of the sacred name. He has renounced action and movement—and the void which results is filled by revelatory action and magical movement from above, i.e. by the HE and VAU of the divine name. Finally, he has renounced his personal mission, he has become anonymous—and the emptiness which results is filled with authority (or the second HE of the divine name), i.e. he becomes the source of *law and order*.

Lao Tzu reveals the arcanum of *authority* in his *Tao Te Ching*. He says:

Thirty spokes unite in one nave, and because of the part where nothing exists we have the use of a carriage wheel. Clay is mould-

ed into vessels, and because of the space where nothing exists we are able to use them as vessels. Doors and windows are cut out in the walls of a house, and because they are empty spaces, we are able to use them. Therefore, on the one hand we have the benefit of existence, and on the other, we make use of non-existence . . . [and again: j Be humble, and you will remain entire. Be bent, and you will remain straight. Be vacant, and you will remain full. Be worn, and you will remain new. He who has little will receive. He who has much will be embarrassed. Therefore the sage keeps to One and becomes the standard for the world. He does not display himself; therefore he shines. He does not approve himself; therefore he is noted. He does not praise himself; therefore he has merit. He does not glory in himself; therefore he excels. And because he does not compete; therefore no one in the world can compete with him. . . (Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* xi and xxii; trsl. Ch'u Ta-Kao, London, 1953, p. 23 and p. 34)

. . . because he has authority.

God governs the world by authority, and not by force. If this were not so, there would be neither freedom nor law in the world; and the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer (*Pater Noster*): "*Sanctificetur nomen tuum. Adveniat regnum tuum. Fiat voluntas tua sicut in caelo et in terra*", would lose all meaning. He who prays these petitions does so solely with the purpose of affirming and increasing divine *authority* and not divine power. The God who is almighty— not virtually but actually—has no need at all to be petitioned that his reign may come and that his will may be done. The meaning of this prayer is that God is powerful only in so far as his authority is freely recognised and accepted. Prayer is the act of such recognition and acceptance. One is free to be believing or unbelieving. Nothing and no one can compel us to have faith — no scientific discovery, no logical argument, no physical torture can force us to believe, i.e. to freely recognise and accept the *authority* of God. But on the other hand, once this authority is recognised and accepted, the powerless becomes powerful. Then divine power *can* manifest itself—and this is why it is said that a grain of faith is sufficient to move mountains.

Now, the problem of authority is at the same time of mystical, gnostic, magical and Hermetic significance. It comprises the Christian mystery of crucifixion and the "mystery of withdrawal" (*sod hatsimsum*) of the Lurianic Cabbala. Here are some considerations which can help us to arrive at a most profound meditation upon this mystery.

The Christian world worships the Crucifix, i.e. the image expressing the paradox of almighty God reduced to a state of extreme powerlessness. And it is in this paradox that one sees the highest revelation of the Divine in the whole history

of mankind. One sees there the most perfect revelation of the God of love. The Christian Creed says:

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato, passus et sepultus est. (For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.)

The only Son of the eternal Father nailed to the *cross for our sake* — this is what is divinely impressed upon all open souls, including the robber crucified to the right. This impression is unforgettable and inexpressible. It is the immediate breath of God which has inspired and still inspires thousands of martyrs, confessors of the faith, virgins and recluses.

But it is not so that every human being finding himself facing the Crucifix may be thus divinely moved. There are those who react in the opposite way. It was so at the time of Calvary; it is so today.

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying: . . . If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross. (Matthew xxvii, 39-40)

The chief sacrificers, with the scribes and elders, also mocked him, saying:

He saved others; he cannot save himself! If he is the king of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now. if he loves him! (Matthew xxvii, 42-43)

This is the other reaction. Nowadays we encounter exactly the same, for example, in Soviet radio broadcasts from Moscow. The argument from Moscow is always the same: if God exists, he must know that we, the communists, dethrone him. Why does he not give a visible sign, if not of his power, at least of his existence? why does he not defend his own intetests!? This is in other words the old argument: Come down from the cross, and we will believe in you.

I cite these well-known things because they reveal a certain dogma underlying them. It is the dogma or philosophical principle which states that *truth and power are* According to this dogma or philosophical principle (which has become that of modern technological science) power is the absolute criterium and supreme ideal of truth. Only that which is powerful is of the Divine.

Now there are open and secret worshippers of the idol of power (for it *is* an idol and the source of all idolatry) — also in Christian factions or in religious and spiritual circles in general. I am not speaking about Christian or spiritually-minded

princes or politicians who cover power, but rather about the adherents to doctrines advancing the primacy of power. Here there are two categories: those who aspire to the ideal of the "superman", and those who believe in a God that is *actually* almighty and therefore responsible for all that happens.

Amongst esotericists, occultists and magicians there are many—be it openly or secretly—who aspire to the ideal of the superman. In the meantime, they often pose as masters or high-priests worthy of the acclaim of the future superman. They are, at the same time, singularly in agreement in that they raise God far, very far, to the heights of Absolute Abstraction so that he does not discomfort them by his too-concrete presence, and in order that they have room for themselves to be able to develop their own greatness without the rival grandeur of the Divine to discomfort them. They build their individual towers of Babel which fall, as a rule, according to the law of all towers of Babel, and experience, sooner or later, a salutary fall, as is the teaching of the sixteenth Card of the Tarot. They do not fall from a *real* height into a *real* abyss; it is only from an *imaginary*- height that they fall and they fall only to the ground, i.e. they learn the lesson that we human beings of today have all learned of have still to learn.

The worship of the idol of power conceived of as the superman, above all when one identifies oneself with it, is relatively inoffensive—being, fundamentally, infantile. But this is not so with the other category of power worshippers, namely those who project this ideal onto God himself. Their faith in God depends only on the *power* of God; if God was powerless, they would not believe in him. It is they who teach that God has created souls predestined to eternal damnation and others predestined to salvation; it is they who make God responsible for the entire history of the human race, including all its atrocities. God, they say, "chastises" his disobedient children by means of wars, revolutions, tyrannies and other similar things. How could it be otherwise? God is almighty, therefore all that happens is only able to happen through his action or with his consent.

The idol of power has such a hold on some human minds that they prefer a God who is a mixture of good and evil, provided that he is powerful, to a God of love who governs only by the intrinsic authority of the Divine—by truth, beauty and goodness—i.e. they prefer a God who is actually almighty to the *crucified God*.

However the father in the parable of the prodigal child had neither sent his son far from his paternal home in order to lead a life of debauchery, nor had he prevented him from leaving and forced him to lead a life which was pleasing to him (the father). All he did was to await his return and to go and meet him when the prodigal son was approaching his father's home. Everything which took place in the story of the prodigal son, save for his return to the father, was clearly *contrary* to the will of the father.

Now the history of the human race since the Fall is that of the prodigal son. It is not a matter of "the law of involution and evolution according to the divine plan" of modern Theosophists, but rather of an abuse of freedom similar to that of the prodigal son. And the key formula of the history of humanity is to be found

neither in the progress of civilisation nor in the process of evolution or in any other "process", but rather in the parable of the prodigal son, in the words:

Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants. (Luke xv, 18-19)

Is mankind therefore solely responsible for its history? Without a doubt — because it is not God who has willed it to be as such. God is crucified in it.

One understands this when one takes account of the significance of the fact of human freedom, and likewise the freedom of the beings of the spiritual hierarchies—the Angels, Archangels, Principalities, Powers, Virtues, Dominions, Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim. All these beings—including man (the *Ischim*) — have an existence that is either real or illusionary. If they have a *real* existence, if they are not a mirage, they are independent entities endowed not only with a *phenomenal* independence but also a *noumenal* independence. Now, noumenal independence is what we understand by *freedom*. Freedom, in fact, is nothing other than the real and complete existence of a being created by God. To be free and to exist are synonymous from a moral and spiritual point of view. Just as morality would not exist without freedom, so would an unfree spiritual entity—soul or spirit — not exist for itself, but would be part of another spiritual entity which is free, i.e. which really exists. Freedom is the spiritual existence of beings.

When we read in the Scripture that God created all beings, the essential meaning here is that God has given freedom—or existence—to all beings. Freedom once having been given, God does not take it back. This is why the beings of the ten hierarchies mentioned above are *immortal*. Death — not separation from the body, but *real* death — would be the *absolute* deprivation of liberty, i.e. complete destruction of the existence given by God. But who or what can take the divine gift of freedom, the divine gift of existence, from a being? Freedom, existence, is *inalienable*, and the beings of the ten hierarchies *are* immortal. The statement: freedom or existence is inalienable, can be understood as the highest *gift*, the very greatest value imaginable — then this would be a foretaste of paradise; or as *condemnation* to "perpetual existence"—then this would be a foretaste of hell, because no one "sends" us anywhere — freedom not being a theatre. It is we ourselves who make the choice. Love existence, and you have chosen heaven; hate it, and there you have chosen hell.

Now, God is with respect to free beings either the ruling King (in the sense of authority such as that taught by the fourth Arcanum of the Tarot) or the Crucified. He is King with regard to those of his beings who voluntarily accept (who "believe") his authority; he is Crucified with respect to those beings who abuse their freedom and "worship idols", i.e. who replace divine authority by a substitute. King and Crucified at one and the same time — this is the mystery of Pilate's

inscription on the cross of Calvary: *Iesus Nazarenus Rex judaeorum* (cf. John xix, 19: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews"). Almighty and powerless, both at once—this is why miracles of healing in human history were able to be accomplished by saints whilst bloody wars and disasters raged around them!

Freedom — freedom is the true throne of God and is his cross at the same time. Freedom is the key to comprehension of the role of God in history— to comprehension of the God of love and the God-King, without the sacrilege of making him a tyrant and without the blasphemy of doubting his power or of doubting his very existence. . . God is all-powerful in history in as much as there is faith; and he is crucified in so far as one turns away from him.

Thus, divine crucifixion follows from the fact of freedom or the fact of the real existence of the beings of the ten hierarchies, when it is a matter of a world governed by divine authority and not by compulsion.

Let us turn now to the idea of *tsimtsum* — the "withdrawal of God"—of the Lurianic school of the Cabbala. The doctrine of *tsimtsum* reveals one of the "three mysteries" in the Cabbala: *sod hajichud*, the mystery of union; *sod hatsimtsum*, the mystery of concentration or divine withdrawal; *sod hagilgul*, the mystery of reincarnation or the "revolution of souls". The two other "mysteries"— the mystery of union and that of the revolution of souls —will be treated later, in other Letters (Letter X, for example). Concerning the "mystery of the divine withdrawal (or concentration)" which interests us here, it is a question of the thesis that the existence of the universe is rendered possible by the act of contraction of God within himself. God made a "place" for the world in abandoning a region interior to himself.

The first act of *En-Soph*, the Infinite Being, is therefore not a step outside but a step inside, a movement of recoil, of falling back upon oneself, of withdrawing into oneself. Instead of emanation we have the opposite, contraction. . . The first act of all is not an act of revelation but one of limitation. Only in the second act does God send out a ray of His light and begin His revelation, or rather His unfolding as God the Creator, in the primordial space of His own creation. More than that, every new act of emanation and manifestation is preceded by one of concentration and retraction. (Gershom G Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, London, 1955, p. 261)

In other words, in order to create the world *ex nihilo*, God had first to bring the void itself into existence. He had to withdraw within in order to create a mystical space, a space without his presence — the void. And it is in thinking this thought that we assist at the birth of *freedom*. For, as Berdyaev has formulated it:

Freedom is not determined by God; it is part of the nothing out of which God created the world. (Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man*, London, 1937, p. 33)

The void—the mystical space from which God withdrew himself through his act of *tsimtsum*—is the place of origin of freedom, i.e. the place of the origin of an "ex-istence" which is absolute potentiality, not in any way determined. And all of the beings of the ten created hierarchies are the children of God and freedom—born of divine plenitude and the void. They carry within themselves a "drop" of the void and a "spark" of God. Their *existence*, their freedom, is the void within them. Their *essence*, their spark of love, is the divine "blood" within them. They are immortal, because the void is indestructible, and the monad proceeding from God is also indestructible. Further, these two indestructible elements—the *meonic* element (uiv 6v—void) and the *pleromic* element (rUr|ptoua —plenitude)—are indissolubly bound to one another.

The idea of *tsimtsum*, the withdrawal of God in order to create freedom, and that of divine crucifixion on account of freedom, are in complete accordance. For the withdrawal of God in order to make a space for freedom and his renunciation of the use of his power against the abuse of freedom (within determined *limits*) are only two aspects of the same idea.

It goes without saying that the idea of *tsimtsum* (and that of divine crucifixion) is inapplicable when God is conceived of in the sense of pantheism. Pantheism, like materialism, does not admit the *real* existence of individual beings. Therefore the fact of freedom—not merely apparent freedom—is excluded. For pantheism and for materialism there is no question—and cannot be—of a divine withdrawal or a divine crucifixion. On the other hand, the Cabbalistic doctrine of *tsimtsum* is the only serious explanation that I know of concerning creation *exnihilo* which is of a kind to act as a counterbalance to pure and simple pantheism. Moreover, it constitutes a deep link between the Old and New Testament, in bringing to light the cosmic significance of the idea of *sacrifice*.

Now, the reflection of the idea of divine withdrawal and divine crucifixion is found to be indicated, as we have seen, in the fourth Arcanum of the Tarot, the Emperor. The Emperor reigns by pure *authority*; he reigns *awetfree* beings, i.e. not by means of the *sword*, but by means of the *sceptre*. The sceptre itself bears a globe with a cross above. The sceptre therefore expresses in as clear as possible a manner the central idea of the Arcanum: just as the world (the globe) is ruled by the cross, so is the power of the Emperor over the terrestrial globe subject to the sign of the cross. The power of the Emperor reflects divine power. And just as the latter is effected by divine contraction (*tsimtsum*) and by voluntary divine Powerlessness (crucifixion), so the power of the Emperor is effected by the contraction of his personal forces (the belt drawn tight by the Emperor) and by voluntary immobility (the crossed legs of the Emperor) at his post (the seat or throne of the Emperor).

The *post* of the Emperor. . . what an abundance of ideas concerning the post—its historical mission, its functions in the light of natural right, and its role in the light of divine right—of the Emperor of Christendom are to be found amongst mediaeval authors!

As it is suitable that the institution of a city or a kingdom be made according to the model of the institution of the world, similarly it is necessary to draw from divine government the order (*ratio*) of the government of a city— this is the fundamental thesis advanced on this subject by St. Thomas Aquinas (*De regno* xiv, 1). This is why authors of the Middle Ages could not imagine Christianity without an Emperor, just as they could not imagine the Universal Church without a pope. Because if the world is governed hierarchically, Christianity or the *Sanctum Imperium* cannot be otherwise. Hierarchy is a pyramid which exists only when it is complete. And it is the Emperor who is at its summit. Then come the kings, dukes, noblemen, citizens and peasants. But it is the crown of the Emperor which confers royalty to the royal crowns from which the ducal crowns and all the other crowns in turn derive their authority.

The *post* of the Emperor is nevertheless not only that of the last (or, rather, the first) instance of sole legitimacy. It was also *magical*, if we understand by magic the action of correspondences between that which is below and that which is above. It was the principle itself of authority from which all lesser authorities derived not only their legitimacy but also their hold over the consciousness of the people. This is why royal crowns one after another lost their lustre and were eclipsed after the imperial crown was eclipsed. Monarchies are unable to exist for long without the Monarchy; kings cannot apportion the crown and sceptre of the Emperor among themselves and pose as emperors in their particular countries, because the shadow of the Emperor is always present. And if in the past it was the Emperor who gave lustre to the royal crowns, it was later the shadow of the absent Emperor which obscured the royal crowns and, consequently, all the other crowns—those of dukes, princes, counts, etc. A pyramid is not complete without its summit; hierarchy *does not exist* when it is incomplete. Without an Emperor, there will be, sooner or later, no more kings. When there are no kings, there will be, sooner or later, no more nobility. When there is no more nobility, there will be, sooner or later, no more bourgeoisie or peasants. This is how one arrives at the dictatorship of the *proletariat*, the class hostile to the hierarchical principle, which latter, however, is the reflection of divine order. This is why the proletariat professes atheism.

Europe is haunted by the shadow of the Emperor. One senses his absence just as vividly as in former times one sensed his presence. Because the emptiness of the wound *speaks*, that which we miss knows how to make us sense it.

Napoleon, eye-witness to the French Revolution, understood the direction which Europe had taken— the direction towards the complete destruction of hierarchy. And he sensed the shadow of the Emperor. He knew what had to be restored in Europe, which was not the royal throne of France— because kings cannot exist for long without the Emperor— but rather the imperial throne of Europe. So he decided to fill the gap himself. He made himself Emperor and he made his brothers kings. But it was to the sword that he took recourse. Instead of ruling by the *sceptre*— the globe bearing the cross— he made the decision to rule by the sword.

But. "all who take up the sword perish by the sword" (Matthew xxvi, 52). Hitler also had the delirium of desire to occupy the empty place of the Emperor. He believed he could establish the "thousand-year empire" of tyranny by means of *the sword*. But again—"all those who take up the sword will perish by the sword".

No, the post of the Emperor does not belong any longer either to those who desire it or to the choice of the people. It is reserved to the choice of heaven alone. It has become occult. And the crown, the sceptre, the throne, the coat-of-arms of the Emperor are to be found in the *catacombs*... in the catacombs — this means to say: under absolute protection.

Now, the Emperor on the fourth Card is alone, without a court or retinue. His throne is in no way to be found in a room of the imperial palace, but rather in the open—in the open in an uncultivated field, not located in a town. A meagre clump of grass by his foot is there as the whole imperial court — as all the witnesses of his imperial splendour. But the clear sky is spread above him. He is a silhouette on the background of the sky. Alone in the presence of the sky—this is how the Emperor is.

One could ask: Why is the astonishing fact that the Emperor is found with his throne in the open air (under the starry sky, if you wish) overlooked by so many authors on the Tarot? Why have they not stated the fact that the Emperor is alone, without a court or retinue? I believe that it is because it is rarely that one lets the symbol, the image of the symbol as such, say all that it has to say through its unique context. One lets it say a little, and one is suddenly more interested in one's own thoughts, i.e. in what one has to say oneself, rather than what the symbol has to say.

Yet the Card is specific: the Emperor is alone in open air in an uncultivated field and with a tuft of grass as his only company—save for the sky and the earth. The Card teaches us the arcanum of the *authority* of the Emperor, although it may be unrecognised, occult, unknown and unappreciated. It is a matter of the crown, the sceptre, the throne and the coat-of-arms being guarded, without any witnesses other than the sky and the earth, by a solitary man leaning against the throne, with his legs crossed, wearing a crown, holding the sceptre and clasping his belt. It is *authority* as such and it is the *post* of authority as such which is expressed here.

Authority is the magic of spiritual profundity filled with wisdom. Or, in other words, it is the result of magic based on gnosis due to mystical experience. Authority is the second HE of the divine name YHVH. But it is not the second HE taken separately; it is only when the *whole* divine name manifests itself. For this reason it is more correct to say that *authority is the completely-manifested divine name*. The completely-manifested divine name signifies at the same time a *post*, the post of the Emperor, or the state of consciousness of the complete synthesis of mysticism, gnosis and sacred magic. And it is this state of consciousness of complete synthesis which is *initiation*. . initiation understood not in the sense of ritual nor in the sense of the possession of information held to be secret, but rather in the sense of *the state of consciousness where eternity and the present moment*

are one. It is the simultaneous vision of the temporal and the eternal, of that which is below and that which is above.

The formula of initiation remains always the same:

Verum sine mendacio, certum et verissimum: Quod est inferius, est sicut quod est superius; et quod est superius, est sicut quod est inferius, ad perpetranda miracula rei unius. (Tabula Smaragdina, 1-2)

This unity actualised, contemplated, practised and understood is initiation or "the sanctification of the divine name in man", which is the deeper meaning of the first petition of the *Pater Noster*: SANCTIFICETUR NOMEN TUUM.

The Emperor signifies the authority of initiation or of the initiate. It is due to the complete divine name, from the Cabbalistic viewpoint—to the "magical great arcanum", from the point of view of magic—and to the "philosopher's stone", from the standpoint of alchemy. It is, in other words, the unity and synthesis of mysticism, gnosis and magic. This unity or synthesis we have designated in the second Letter as "Hermetic philosophy", bound up with the Hermetic-philosophical sense. This Hermetic philosophy—it is necessary to repeat—does not signify a philosophy *derived* or disengaged from the organism of the unity of mysticism, gnosis and sacred magic. It is this very unity in manifestation. Hermetic philosophy is as inseparable from the unity, mysticism-gnosis-magic, as is the second HE from the divine name. It is *authority* or the manifestation of the unity, mysticism-gnosis-magic.

Hermetic philosophy corresponds to the stage of *verissimum* ("most true") in that which is *verum, sine mendacio, et certum* ("true it is, without falsehood, and certain") in the epistemological formula of the *Emerald Table*. For it is this which is the *summary* of all mystical experience, gnostic revelation and practical magic. It is spontaneous mystical experience which becomes "true" (*verum*), or reflected in consciousness (gnosis), and then becomes "certain" (*certum*) through its magical realisation—and which is then reflected a second time (the second HE, or the "second gnosis", of the divine name) in the domain of pure thought based on pure experience, where it is examined and finally summarised, and thus becomes "most true" (*verissimum*).

The formula: *verum, sine mendacio, certum et verissimum* therefore states the principle of epistemology (or "gnoseology") of Hermetic philosophy, with its triple touchstone. This principle can be formulated in several ways. Here is one: "That which is absolutely subjective (pure mystical experience) must objectivise itself in consciousness and be accepted there as *true* (gnostic revelation), then prove to be *certain* by its objective fruits (sacred magic) and, lastly, prove to be *absolutely true* in the light of pure thought based on pure subjective and objective experience (Hermetic philosophy)." It is a matter, therefore, of the four different senses; the mystical sense or spiritual touch, the gnostic sense or spiritual hearing, the magical

sense or sense of spiritual vision and, lastly, the Hermetic-philosophical sense or sense of spiritual comprehension. The triple touchstone of Hermetic philosophy is therefore the *intrinsic value* of a revelation (*verum, sine mendacio*), its *constructive fruitfulness* (*certum*) and its *concordance* with earlier revelations, with the laws of thought and with all available experience (*verissimum*). In Hermetic philosophy something is absolutely true, therefore, only when it is of divine origin and bears fruit in conformity with its origin, and is in accordance with the categorical exigencies of thought and experience.

The Hermeticist is therefore a person who is at one and the same time a mystic, a gnostic, a magician and a "realist-idealist" philosopher. He is a *realist-idealist* philosopher because he relies as much on experience as on speculative thought, as much on facts as on ideas, because facts and ideas are for him only two aspects of the same reality-ideality, i.e. the same *truth*.

Hermetic philosophy, being the summary and synthesis of mysticism, gnosis and sacred magic, is not a philosophy among other philosophies, or a particular philosophical system amongst other particular philosophical systems. Just as the Catholic Church, being catholic or universal, cannot consider itself as a particular church among other particular churches, nor consider its dogmas as religious opinions among other religious opinions or confessions, so Hermetic philosophy, being the synthesis of all that which is essential in the spiritual life of humanity, *cannot* consider itself as a philosophy amongst many others. Presumption? It would be, without any doubt, a monstrous presumption if it were a matter of human invention instead of revelation from above. In fact, if you have a truth revealed from above, if the acceptance of this truth brings miracles of healing, peace and vivification with it, and if, lastly, it explains to you a thousand unexplained things — that are inexplicable without it — can you then consider it as an opinion among other opinions?

Dogmatism? Yes, if one understands by "dogma" the certainty due to revelations of divine worth which prove fruitful and constructive, and due to the confirmation that they receive from reason and experience together. When one has certainty based on the concordance of divine revelation, divine-human operation, and human understanding, how can one act as if one did not have it? Is it truly necessary "to deny three times before the cock crows" in order to be accepted into the good company of "free spirits" and "non-dogmatics", and to be chauffeured along with them by the fire of things relating to human creation? Heresy? Yes, if by "heresy" one understands the primacy of universal revelation, of good works universally recognised as such, and of the ideal of universality amongst philosophies.

Hermetic philosophy is not a particular philosophy amongst particular existing Philosophies. It is not so already for the sole reason that it does not operate with univocal *concepts* and their verbal definitions, as do philosophies, but rather with *arcana* and their *symbolic* expressions. Compare the *Emerald Table* with *The Critique of Pure Reason* by Kant and you will see the difference. The *Emerald*

Table states the fundamental arcana of mystical-gnostic-magical-philosophical work; *The Critique of Pure Reason* elaborates an edifice composed of univocal concepts (such as the categories of quantity, quality, relation and modality) which, all together, portray the *transcendental method* of Kant. i.e. the method of "thinking about the act of thought" or "reflection about reflection". This method, however, is an aspect of the eighteenth Arcanum of the Tarot (The Moon), as we shall see, and this Arcanum, expressed by the symbol of the Card "The Moon", teaches in the *Hermetic way* the essence of what Kant taught in the *philosophical way* about the transcendental method.

So, is Hermetic philosophy only symbolism pure and simple, and has it nothing to do with the methods of philosophical and scientific reasoning?

Yes and no. Yes, in so far as Hermetic philosophy is of an esoteric nature, i.e. it consists of *arcana* orientated towards the *mystery* and expressed in *symbols*. No, in so far as it exercises a stimulating effect on the philosophical and scientific reasoning of its adherents. It is wrapped, so to say, in a philosophical and scientific intellectual penumbra, which is due to the activity of its adherents pursuing the aim of translating, in so far as it is possible to do so, the arcana and the symbols of Hermetic philosophy into univocal concepts and verbal definitions. It is a process of crystallisation, because the translation of multivocal concepts or arcana into univocal concepts is comparable to the transition from the state of organic life to the mineral state. It is thus that the occult sciences—such as the Cabbala, astrology and alchemy—are derived from Hermetic philosophy. These sciences are able to have their own *secrets*, but the *arcana* which are reflected in them belong to the domain of Hermetic philosophy. In so far as the intellectualisation of Hermetic philosophy is of the nature of *commentary* and *corollary*, it is legitimate and even indispensable. For then one will translate each arcanum into many univocal concepts—three for example—and, by this very fact, one will help the intellect to habituate itself to think Hermetically, i.e. in multi-vocal concepts or arcana. But when the intellectualisation of Hermetic philosophy pursues the aim of creating an *autonomous system* of univocal concepts *without formal* contradiction between them, it commits an abuse. For instead of helping human reason to raise itself above itself, it would set up a greater obstacle for it. It would captivate it instead of freeing it.

The occult sciences are therefore derived from Hermetic philosophy by way of intellectualisation. This is why one should not consider symbols—the Major Arcana of the Tarot, for example—as allegorical expressions of theories or concepts of these sciences. For it is the opposite which is true: it is the doctrines of the occult sciences which are derived from symbols—of the Tarot or other symbols—and it is they which are to be considered as intellectually "allegorical" expressions of the symbols and arcana of Hermetic esotericism. Thus, it would not do to say: the fourth Card "The Emperor" is the symbol of the astrological doctrine concerning Jupiter. One would rather say: the Arcanum of the fourth Card "The Emperor" is also revealed in the astrological doctrine concerning Jupiter. The correspondence as such remains intact, but there is a world of difference between

these two statements here. Because in the case of the first statement, one remains an "astrologer" and nothing but an astrologer; whilst in the case of the second statement, one is thinking as a Hermeticist, although remaining an astrologer if one is one.

Hermetic philosophy is not composed of the Cabbala, astrology, magic and alchemy. These four branches sprouting from the trunk do not make the trunk, rather they live from the trunk. The trunk is the manifested unity of mysticism, gnosis and sacred magic. There are no theories; there is only experience, including here the intellectual experience of arcana and symbols. Mystical experience is the root, the gnostic experience of revelation is its sap and the experience or practice of sacred magic is its wood. For this reason its teaching—or the "body" of its tradition—consists of *spiritual exercises* and all its arcana (including the Arcana of the Tarot) are practical spiritual exercises, whose aim is to awaken from sleep ever-deeper layers of consciousness. Necessary commentaries and corollaries accompany this practice and constitute the "bark" of the trunk. Thus, the "key" to the Apocalypse of St. John is nowhere to be found... for it is not at all a matter of interpreting it with a view to extracting a philosophical, metaphysical or historical system. The key to the Apocalypse is to *practise* it, i.e. to make use of it as a book of spiritual exercises which awaken from sleep ever-deeper layers of consciousness. The seven letters to the churches, the seven seals of the sealed book, the seven trumpets and the seven vials signify, all together, a course of spiritual exercises composed of twenty-eight exercises. For as the Apocalypse is a revelation put into writing, it is necessary, in order to understand it, to establish in oneself a state of consciousness which is suited to receive revelations. It is the state of concentration without effort (taught by the first Arcanum), followed by a vigilant inner silence (taught by the second Arcanum), which becomes an inspired activity of imagination and thought, where the conscious self acts together with super-consciousness (teaching of the third Arcanum). Lastly, the conscious self halts its creative activity and contemplates—in letting pass in review—everything which preceded, with a view to summarising it (practical teaching of the fourth Arcanum).

The mastery of these four psychurgical operations, symbolised by "The Magician", "The High Priestess", "The Empress" and "The Emperor", is the key to the Apocalypse. One will search in vain for another.

The Gospels, likewise, are spiritual exercises, i.e. one has not only to read and re-read them, but also to plunge entirely into their element, to breathe their air, to Participate as an eye-witness, as it were, in the events described there—and all this not in a scrutinising way, but as an "admirer", with ever-growing admiration,

The Old Testament also contains parts which are spiritual exercises. The Jewish Cabbalists—the author or authors of the *Zohar*, for example—made such use of it, and it is thus that the Cabbala originated and that it *lives*. The difference between Cabbalists and the other faithful depends only on the fact that the former drew spiritual exercises from the Scripture whilst the latter studied it and believed it.

The aim of spiritual exercises is *depth*. It is necessary to become deep in order

to be able to attain experience and knowledge of profound things. And it is symbolism which is the language of depth—thus arcana, expressed by symbols, are both the means and the aim of the spiritual exercises of which the living tradition of Hermetic philosophy is composed.

Spiritual exercises in common form the common link that unites Hermeticists. It is not knowledge in common which unites them, but rather the spiritual exercises and the experience which goes hand in hand with them. If three people from different countries were to meet each other, having made the book of Genesis by Moses, the Gospel of St. John, and the vision of Ezekiel, the subject of spiritual exercises for many years, they would do so in brotherhood, although the one would know the history of humanity, the other would have the science of healing and the third would make a profound Cabbalist. That which one *knows* is the result of *personal* experience and orientation, whilst *depth*, the *niveau* to which one attains—disregarding the aspect and extent of knowledge that one has gained—is what one has *in common*. Hermeticism, the Hermetic tradition, is in the first place and above all a certain degree of depth, a certain *niveau* of consciousness. And it is the practice of spiritual exercises which safeguards this.

With respect to the knowledge of individual Hermeticists—and this is applicable to initiates also—it depends upon the individual vocation of each one of them. The task that one pursues determines the nature and the extent not only of knowledge but also of the personal experience upon which this knowledge is based. One has the experience and gains knowledge of that which is necessary for the accomplishment of the task which proceeds from one's individual vocation. In other words, one knows that which is necessary in order to be informed and to be able to orientate oneself in the domain relevant to one's individual vocation. Thus a Hermeticist whose vocation is healing would know things about the relationships existing between consciousness, the system of the "lotus flowers" or *chakras*, the nervous system and the system of endocrine glands, that another Hermeticist, whose vocation is the spiritual history of humanity, would not know. But this latter, in his turn, would know things ignored by the healer—facts of the past and of the present concerning relationships between the spiritual hierarchies and humanity, between that which took place or is taking place above and that which took place or is taking place below.

But this knowing, in so far as it is not a matter of *arcana*, consists of *facts*—though often of a purely spiritual nature—and not *theories*. Thus, for example, reincarnation is in no way a theory which one has to believe or not believe. In Hermeticism no one would dream of putting forward a case in order to persuade, or even to dissuade, people of the truth of the "reincarnationist theory". For the Hermeticist it is a fact which is either known through experience or ignored. Just as one does not make propaganda for or against the fact that we sleep at night and wake up anew each morning—for this is a matter of experience—so is the fact that we die and are born anew a matter of experience, i.e. either one has certainty about it or else one does not. But those who are certain should know that

ignorance of reincarnation often has very profound and even sublime reasons associated with the vocation of the person in question. When, for example, a person has a vocation which demands a maximum of concentration *in the present*, he may renounce all spiritual memories of the past. Because the awakened memory is not always beneficial; it is often a burden. It is so, above all, when it is a matter of a vocation which demands an attitude entirely free of all prejudice, as is the case with the vocations of priest, doctor and judge. The priest, doctor and judge have to concentrate themselves in such a way on the tasks of the present that they must not be distracted by memories of former existences.

One can perform miracles without the memory of former lives, as was the case with the holy vicar of Ars —and one can also perform miracles, wholly in possession of this memory, as was the case with Monsieur Philip of Lyons. For reincarnation is neither a dogma, i.e. a truth necessary for salvation, nor a heresy, i.e. contrary to a truth necessary for salvation. It is simply a fact of experience, just as sleep and heredity are. As such, it is neutral. Everything depends on its interpretation. One can interpret it in such a manner as to make it a hymn to the glory of God — and one can interpret it in such a way as to make it a blasphemy. When one says: to forgive is to grant the opportunity to begin again; God forgives more than seventy-times-seven times, always granting us opportunities anew—what infinite goodness of God! Here is an interpretation to the glory of God.

But when one says: there is a mechanism of infinite evolution and one is morally *determined by* previous lives; there is no grace, there is only the law of cause and effect—then this is a blasphemous interpretation. It reduces God to the function of the engineer of a moral machine.

Reincarnation is in no way an exception in what is liable to a double interpretation. In fact, every pertinent fact is liable to it. Thus, for example, heredity can be interpreted in the sense of complete determinism, therefore excluding freedom, and thus also morality. Or rather it can be interpreted as a possibility for gradual improvement of the organism in order to render it a more perfect instrument to "vocations for posterity". Didn't Abraham receive the promise that the Messiah would come in his lineage? Wasn't this same promise given to David?

Nevertheless, whatever the personal interpretation of a fact may be, a fact remains a fact and it is necessary to know it when one wants to orientate oneself in the domain to which it belongs. Thus, Hermeticists have knowledge of diverse facts, according to their personal vocations, but Hermetic philosophy is nevertheless not the sum-total of knowledge acquired by individuals. It is an organism of arcanum expressed in symbols which are at the same time both spiritual exercises and their resulting aptitudes. An arcanum practised as a spiritual exercise for a sufficient length of time becomes an aptitude. It does not give the pupil knowledge of new facts, but makes him suited to acquire such knowledge when he has need of it. Initiation is the capacity of orientating oneself in every domain and of acquiring there knowledge of relevant facts — the "key facts". The initiate is one who knows how to attain knowledge, i.e. who knows how to *ask, seek and put into*

practice the appropriate means in order to succeed. Spiritual exercises alone have taught him — no theory or doctrine, however luminous, may in any way have rendered him capable of "knowing how to know". Spiritual exercises have taught him *practical sense* (and in Hermetic philosophy there is no other sense than the practical) and the infallible effectiveness of *the arcanum of the three united endeavours* which is the basis of every spiritual exercise and every arcanum, namely:

Ask, and it will be given you;
 seek, and you will find;
 knock, and it will be opened to you.
 (Luke xi, 9)

Thus, Hermetic philosophy does not teach what one ought to believe concerning God, man and Nature, but it teaches rather how *to ask, seek and knock* in order to arrive at mystical experience, gnostic illumination and the magical effect of that which one seeks to know about God, man and Nature. And it is after having asked, sought and knocked — and after one has received, found and gained access — that one *knows*. This kind of knowing — the certainty of the synthetic comprehension of mystical experience, gnostic revelation and magical effect — is the *Emperor*, this is the practical teaching of the fourth Card of the Tarot.

It is a matter here of the development and usage of the fourth spiritual sense, i.e. the Hermetic-philosophical sense, following the development and usage of the mystical, gnostic and magical senses. The aptitude for "knowing how to know" is the characteristic trait essential to this sense. We have defined it above (second Letter) as the "sense of synthesis". Now we are able to advance and to do so in a much more profound way in defining it as the "initiate sense" or the sense of orientation and acquisition of knowledge of essential facts in every domain.

How does this sense function? There is reason to indicate in the first instance that it is not identical with what one customarily designates as "metaphysical sense", since the metaphysical sense of metaphysicians is the taste and capacity for living in abstract theories, the liking for the abstract, whilst the Hermetic-philosophical sense is on the contrary due to the orientation towards the *concrete* — spiritual, psychic and physical. Whilst the metaphysical sense operates with the "concept of God", the Hermetic-philosophical sense is orientated towards the *living God* — the spiritual, concrete fact of God. The Christian Celestial Father and the Ancient of Days of the Cabbalists is not an abstract concept; it is not a notion, but rather a *being*.

The metaphysical sense works in such a manner as to deduce — by way of abstraction — the *laws* of facts and *the principles* of laws. The Hermetic-philosophical sense (or initiate sense), in contrast, perceives through the facts the *entities* of the spiritual hierarchies, and through them the living God. For the initiate sense the space between the "supreme Principle" and the domain of facts is not peopled with "laws" and "principles", but rather with living spiritual beings, each endowed with a manner, look, voice, way of speaking and name. For the initiate sense the

Archangel Michael is not a law or principle. He is a living being whose face is invisible because it has given place to the face of God. This is why he has the name MI-KHA-EL, i.e. "He who (MI) is as (KHA) God (EL)". No one could endure the vision of the face of Michael, because he is KHA-EL, i.e. "like unto God".

The Hermetic-philosophical sense (or initiate sense) is that of concrete spiritual realities. The Hermeticist explains facts not by laws obtained by abstraction nor, much less still, by principles obtained by active abstraction, but rather by proceeding from abstract facts to more concrete beings in order to arrive at that which is the most concrete, that alone in existence which is absolutely concrete, i.e. God. Because for the initiate sense God is that which is most real, and therefore most concrete. In fact, amongst all that exists, God is that alone which is absolutely real and concrete, whilst created beings are only relatively real and concrete; and what we designate as "concrete fact" is in reality only an abstraction from divine reality.

This does not mean to say that the Hermeticist is incapable of abstraction and that he necessarily neglects laws and principles. He is a human being and therefore also possesses the metaphysical sense. In possessing it he makes use of it like everyone, but what makes him a *Hermeticist* — in the sense of the Emperor of the Tarot — is the Hermetic-philosophical sense. He is as much a Hermeticist as he is endowed with the Hermetic-philosophical sense and makes use of it, whilst the metaphysical sense alone would never make a Hermeticist, in the proper sense of the word.

Is this not the tragedy of Rene Guenon who, being gifted with a developed metaphysical sense and yet lacking the Hermetic-philosophical sense, sought, always and everywhere, the *concrete* spiritual. And finally, tired of the world of abstractions, he hoped to find liberation from intellectualism by plunging himself into the element of fervour of the Moslem masses at prayer in a Cairo mosque. The last hope of a soul thirsty for mystical experience and languishing in the captivity of the intellect? If so, may divine mercy grant him what he sought so much.

There is room to remark here that the last orientation of Rene Guenon, i.e. towards the faith of simpler people adhering to a more simple religion, is not without reason. For the Hermetic-philosophical sense has more in common with the plain and sincere faith of simple people than abstract metaphysics has. For the common believer, God lives; likewise for the Hermeticist. The believer addresses himself to saints and Angels; for the Hermeticist they are real. The believer believes in miracles; the Hermeticist lives in the presence of miracles. The believer prays for the living and the dead; the Hermeticist dedicates all his efforts in the domain of sacred magic to the good of the living and the dead. The believer esteems all that which is traditional; the Hermeticist does likewise. What more is there to say? . . . perhaps that the Emperor owes his *authority* not to his power — visible or invisible — over human beings, but rather because he *represents* them before God. He has *authority* not because he is superhuman, but rather because he is *very human*, because he represents all that which is human. King David

was more human than all men of his time. This is why he was anointed by divine order by the prophet Samuel, and for this reason the Eternal gave him the solemn promise that his throne would be established for ever. The throne, the post of the representative of humanity, will therefore never perish. And it is this which is the post of the Emperor; it is this which is *true authority*.

Hermetic philosophy also has a human ideal to which it aspires. Its spiritual exercises, its arcana, follow the practical aim of realising the *man of authority*, the "father-man". This is the man who is more human than all others. . . the man worthy of "the throne of David".

The human ideal of practical Hermeticism is not the superman of Nietzsche, nor the superman of India plunged in contemplation of eternity, nor the superman-hierophant of Gurdjieff, nor the superman-philosopher of the Stoic and Vedanta philosophies—no, its human ideal is the man who is human to such a degree that he contains and bears in himself all that which is human, that he may be the guardian of the throne of David.

And the Divine? How is it here in that which concerns the manifestation of the Divine?

Practical Hermeticism is *alchemy*. The ideal of Hermeticism is essentially and fundamentally the alchemical ideal. This means to say: the more one becomes truly human, the more one manifests the divine element underlying human nature, which is the "image and likeness of God" (Genesis i, 26). The ideal of *abstraction* invites human beings to do away with human nature, to dehumanise. In contrast, the ideal of alchemical *transformation* of Hermeticism offers to human beings the way to the realisation of true human nature, which is the image and likeness of God. Hermeticism is the re-humanisation of all elements of human nature; it is their return to their true essence. Just as all base metal can be transformed into silver and into gold, so are all the forces of human nature susceptible to transformation into "silver" or "gold", i.e. into what they *are* when they share in the image and likeness of God.

But in order to re-become what they are in their essence, they must be submitted to the operation of *sublimation*. Now, this operation is crucifying for that which is base amongst them and, at the same time, it is the blossoming of that which is their true essence. The *cross* and the *rose*, the ROSE-CROSS, is the symbol of this operation of the realisation of the truly human man. Thus, the Emperor of the Tarot renounces *the four* arbitrary liberties of human nature. He is, in this sense, crucified. And as the *real* symbol of the emptiness which is established because of renunciation is the *wound*—one could say that the Emperor is he who has four wounds. It is by these four wounds that the manifestation of the divine image and likeness of human nature is accomplished in him.

The divine in human nature. . . and what of the Divine which transcends it?

In order for the latter to manifest, it is necessary to have one wound more. It is necessary to *have five* wounds. Now, it is the following Card "The Pope" which will teach us the Arcanum of the manifestation of the Divine transcending human nature by means of the five wounds.