



The Center of the World (II)

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All the traditional doctrines agree on this. In the Islamic tradition, the Throne (*El-Arsh*) is all together center and circumference; and Angelus Silesius stated: "God is my circle and my center-point." In the Hindu tradition, "Âtmâ is smaller than a grain of paddy, than a barley corn, than a mustard seed, than a grain of millet or than the kernel of a grain of millet. Âtmâ is greater than Earth, greater than Atmosphere, greater than Heaven, greater than all Three Worlds" (**Chândogya Upanishad**, 3.14.3); "Those who know beyond this the supreme Brahma, the vast, hidden in the bodies of all creatures [the center], and alone enveloping everything [the circumference], as the Lord, they become immortal" (**Svetâshvâtara Up.**, 3.7). In the Christian tradition, "the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field; which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" (**Matthew**, 13:31-32). Thus, God is the "minimum" – the center, the *principal* point that does not take any space, since it is the space's principle, the hidden point that is nowhere, but which is everywhere by means of the "knots" it illuminates with its primordial vibration, and the "maximum" – the circumference that encompasses everything and is reflected everywhere as manifestation and multiplicity, but since it is beyond our touch, it is nowhere. Zhuang Zi said: "The Principle is in all the beings [as "minimum"]. Therefore it is called great, supreme, universal, complete, all [as "maximum"]."¹

It is most interesting to see the great spiritual master Ibn Arabî applying this formula to Abraham, when he says "the bosom friend (*al khalîl*) was designated by this name because he penetrates² and encompasses everything that qualifies the divine Essence,"³ which indicates the special function of Abraham, not only for the three religions but also from an esoteric point of view (René Guénon said: "For those who know the Islamic tradition, it is easy to understand the relation between Abraham and Masonry"⁴).

Nicholas of Cusa's formula tries to surpass the "machine" as world, rising to the *principal* level, as another text confirms it: "God is within everything, because He is an

¹ Tchoang-tzeu, chap. 13, G, Wieger, **Les pères**, p. 315.

² *Takhallala*, "to penetrate," derives from the same verbal root as *khalîl*.

³ Ibn Arabî, **Le livre des chatons des sagesse**s, Les Éditions Al-Bouraq, Beirut, 1997, p. 167, tr. Charles-André Gilis.

⁴ René Guénon, **Études sur la Franc-Maçonnerie et le Compagnonnage**, Éditions Traditionnelles, Paris, 1980, II, p. 165.

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infinite center; without everything, because He is an infinite circle; penetrating everything, because He is of an infinite diameter, the principle of everything being the center, the end of everything being the circumference, the middle of everything being the diameter, efficient cause being the center, formal cause being the diameter, the terminal cause being the circle, the center producing the being, the diameter ruling, and the circle keeping.”⁵ But Cusanus does not forget the symbolism of the center: “the center of the maximum sphere is equal to the diameter and to the circumference. The infinite sphere⁶ is equal to its center, but even more, the center is all this: length, width, depth⁷; it is the maximum, simple and infinite. The center precedes all length, width and depth, and is also the end and the middle of all this.”⁸ “God is the Center of the World, and He is the center of the Earth and of all the other spheres, and of everything in this world, He who is at the same time infinite circumference of everything.”⁹

Ezekiel, whose vision of the Temple makes him a prophet of the center, had also a vision of God as universal vortex, a “world machine” of fire and lightning: “And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it (...) Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. (...) And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. (...) Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. (...) And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning. Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. (...) their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. (...) As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up” (**Ezekiel 1:4-19**).

We must admit that Ezekiel’s description is impressive, this “cosmic chariot” stimulating the modern minds into suggesting all kinds of fantasist hypotheses. We notice the vehicle’s harmony, its perfect isotropy due to the spherical wheels, while the four creatures with their four identical faces appear united in a complete wholeness, enveloped by fire and light. Ezekiel’s vision represents, we may say, the primordial luminous sphere with its length, width, and depth delineating the three-dimensional cross, yet it also suggests a spatial *swastika* – symbol of the Pole, which has on a horizontal plane (as it is usually drawn) four branches associated with the four creatures. In the Christian tradition, a similar figure is the *gammadia* or “the cross voided throughout,” composed of four Greek letters *gamma*, where the inner void in the shape of a cross symbolizes Jesus Christ

⁵ Cusa, **De la docte Ignorance**, p. 84. For Cusa, Jesus Christ, “the maximum man,” is the intellectual nature’s center and circumference (pp. 184, 202).

⁶ The infinite sphere should be compared to Guénon’s “universal vortex.”

⁷ The three-dimensional cross.

⁸ Cusa, **De la docte Ignorance**, p. 88.

⁹ Cusa, **De la docte Ignorance**, p. 152.

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and the four *gamm*as designate the four Evangelists.¹⁰ Christ and the four creatures or the four Evangelists, the Prophet Muhammad and the four Kolaphâ, Horus and his four sons correspond either to the center and the four corners or to the center and the four cardinal points, in this last case, like in the case of the *swastika*, the circumference being replaced by the two perpendicular diameters that underline “the orientation” and define the whole manifestation; the center and the four corners correspond to the “five points” that traditionally determine the location of a temple.¹¹ These “five points” are not only the essential summary of the circle (center and circumference), but they define an intersection of the universal vortex with a plane as a degree of the universal Existence, with the center as an image of the supreme and absolute Center.

The Center sends its reflections into the various worlds and into the various cosmic cycles, including our world, each reflection or image, for a cycle (major or minor) or a world, standing for the essential kernel (*luz*), the spiritual marrow where the divine presence finds a dwelling, where the Heavenly Activity operates, producing and supporting that particular state of existence, world or cycle, “here” and “now.” This spiritual center is the keeper of the sum of all sacred knowledge needed to govern that world, it is the residence of the primordial Tradition revealed through sound and light to the Lord of the World, a revelation understood as an active participation of the Lord of the World to the Heavenly Mysteries. From this primordial and supreme center of a world, the Tradition overflows, like the paradisiacal rivers, irrigating the whole world, generating secondary centers and traditions, which can exist simultaneously or in a sequence.

The Center of the World – we have to understand that – is invisible, inaccessible, untouchable, belonging to the sacred geography, without a specific “localization” (as the temple of the Rose-Cross is) and only by particularization to a world or a specific civilization it becomes “materialized,” but, since the whole nature is a symbol of the supernatural,¹² this “materialization” encompasses an extremely rich symbolism, which means that any spiritual center could be a temple, a palace, a monastery, a garden, a forest, a city, a mountain, an island, a cavern, a fountain, a tree, or a hearth.¹³ For the terrestrial humanity, the spiritual center or the world’s heart was at the beginning of the Golden Age identical to the Earthly Paradise, and at the end of the Iron Age, the Heavenly Jerusalem will descend and mark it again.

However, this rich symbolism does not imply that a temple, a sacred stone or any other “central” mark are just symbols with merely virtual or theoretical authority, which would infer that our world could exist by itself – a pure impossibility, but they are, each of them, the “house of God,” the well-lit and well-regulated location¹⁴ where the divine presence operates, a location that has to have special attributes or, in a deeper sense, no attributes at all, a location that, consequently, has to be ritually prepared to give God a home, and so, we are not talking here about any pantheism, this absurd modern invention.

¹⁰ Guénon, **Le symbolisme de la croix**, p. 71.

¹¹ Guénon, **Symboles fondamentaux**, pp. 299-300.

¹² Guénon, **Écrits**, p. 57.

¹³ See Guénon, **Symboles fondamentaux**, p. 109.

¹⁴ Guénon, **Le Roi**, p. 23, **La Grande Triade**, p. 139.

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Traditional symbolism compares the Center with the human heart – the center of the being and “divine residence” (the Hindu *Brahma-pura*).¹⁵ In the Hindu tradition, Âtmâ dwells in the heart; in the Islamic tradition, the heart is Allâh’s throne; in fact, all the genuine traditions consider the heart as a “house of God.” Yet only virtually each heart is a divine residence, since the soul has to be prepared to receive God’s presence, and for Meister Eckhart that is the meaning of the merchants’ expulsion from the Temple. In his sermon, *Intravit Iesus in templum et coepit eicere vendentes et ementes* (**Matthew**, 21:12), Meister Eckhart regards the Temple as the human soul, and God, Who created and formed the soul after His resemblance, wants this temple to be empty, that is, only when this temple is liberated of all obstacles, God will come and reside in it. Al-Hallâj stated the same thing: “When Allâh chooses a heart, He empties it of all that is not Him.”

In a similar way, a temple, a tree, or a stone must be prepared and emptied of all the obstacles and “bad” influences, must be purified in an effective manner to become the house of God. In addition, since the Center is “non-located,” the location¹⁶ for the spiritual centers established in the world is an imperative element connected to the sacred geography and the science of orientation, all these centers, which are images of the Center, showing similar topographic characteristics and obeying the laws that govern the activity of the spiritual influences.¹⁷ Directly or indirectly, God indicates where the location should be, as God indicates the architectural plans for the center, given that a spiritual center has nothing to do with the individual order and everything with the divine order, because the house of God must be sacred within and without. Therefore, in various traditions, a divine animal guides the founder of a center, like in the case of Thebes, when Cadmus (that is, “the primordial,” an image of Adam Kadmon) listened to the Delphi oracle and followed a sacred cow (with a half moon on her flank). Thebes – Guénon stressed – is a name designating the spiritual centers, in view of the fact that *Thebah* is the Hebrew name of Noah’s Ark, which is as well a representation of the supreme center¹⁸; also, Guénon added, the foundation of a city could symbolize the institution of a doctrine or of a traditional form, and Thebes is a good example, since Amphion built it using the music of his lyre, an important instrument in Orphism and Pythagorism (related to the science of rhythm).¹⁹

¹⁵ Guénon, **Le Roi**, p. 25.

¹⁶ We prefer the word “location,” bearing in mind its relation to Sanskrit *loka*.

¹⁷ Guénon, **Le Roi**, p. 37.

¹⁸ Guénon, **Le Roi**, p. 91.

¹⁹ Guénon, **Le Roi**, pp. 89-90.