



Pantokrator: Universal Sovereignty & The Metaphysics of Actionless Activity

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Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.

Psalm 48

He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star which keeps its place and all the other stars turn toward it.

Confucius

Eastern Orthodox iconography customarily situates the image of Jesus Christ under his aspect of *Pantokrator* ('All-Ruler') at the central point or 'eye' of the dome in ecclesial architecture. This zenithal position aptly symbolizes Jesus Christ as both 'King of Kings' and 'Eternal High Priest' enthroned at the numinous Centre. From this motionless axial centre-point, where Contemplation/Knowledge and Action/Power, the functions of *Sacerdotum* and *Regnum* respectively, are conjoined in their original unity in the Principle, emanates the irresistible spiritual influence exerted upon the circumference. For Christian esoterism the iconology of Christ Pantokrator at the 'eye' of the dome resumes the mystery of the Divine Word for the very word basilica means a royal chamber (from *basilicus* - 'royal') and furthermore echoes the Kabbalistic symbolism of the Centre and the heart as the 'Holy Palace', the dome as *hieros domus*, the 'holy house' identified with Jerusalem, the *Domus Dei*, 'House of God'. In the Kabbalistic treatise 'Degel Machaneh Ephraim: Va-Etchanan' it is written: '*...the heart is called Jerusalem, for it is in the middle of the body just as Jerusalem is in the middle of the world...The heart was created to be the dwelling of the Holy One, blessed be He...it is referred to as Jerusalem, and is called the holy city with its King within it.*' In oriental metaphysics it is the locus of the *Chakravartin*, the 'wheel-turning monarch', the archetypal Priest-King. The Greek term *Pantokrator* as a title of Christ occurs within the text of the Septuagint as a translation of the Hebrew *El Shaddai* and this Divine Name in turn has the number 314 and is therefore equivalent by *gematria* calculation with that of the angel Metatron, the 'Angel of the Countenance' and the 'Prince of the World' (*Sar ha-Olam*). This supreme angel is, as Rene Guenon in chapter 3 of *Le Roi du Monde* tells us, the 'Great Prince' (*Sar ha-Gadol*) who personifies the function of the 'celestial pole'. Metatron under his solar aspect is esoterically assimilated to the Christ, affirming the identification with the Pantokrator.

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The original oneness and resolution of sacerdotal Contemplation and regal Power in the numinous unity of the Principle is embodied in the person of the Universal Sovereign, a spiritual influence characterised by Active Contemplation/Contemplative Action - more explicitly this may be defined as 'actionless activity', emanating from the empty space at the axle-hub of the wheel, the uncreated *Logos* existent at the supreme Centre. It is the concept denoted *Wei Wu Wei* in Taoist metaphysics, translated variously as 'action without action', 'doing by not doing' and 'effortless action' - in Chinese tradition this traceless omnipotence forms the basis of the theory of sacral kingship as embodied in the person of the 'Son of Heaven' enthroned at the centre of the empire. Lao Tzu says of this influence in chapter 2 of the Tao-Te-Ching:

'Therefore the sage manages affairs without doing anything, and conveys his instructions without the use of speech.'

The majesty of the Priest-King manifests the spiritual influence extended from the Centre to the circumference, entirely spontaneous, instantaneous and effortless in its nature - it is symbolised by the ram of Agni at the centre of the 'polar cross', the swastika, whom the Rig Veda terms 'the ruler of the heavenly realm'. It is the divine omnipotence exercised from that supreme Centre which Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi in 'The Book of the Journey by Night' lauds as '*the city of the Messenger...the Station of Radiance and the Red Sulphur.*'

Here we might recall the iconology of Christ the King, crowned and robed in red as depicted by Van Eyck in the Ghent altarpiece. A related symbol is the red carbuncle stone within the ciborium-vessel which forms the emblem-seal of the 15th century French guild or confrerie of *L'Estoile Internelle* upon the imagery of which Louis Charbonneau-Lassay comments '*the principal ensign of this institution is...a ciborium wherein a stone red is placed...a 'Ruby Carbuncle', one of the emblems of the Divine Blood*'. The Red Stone is the Holy Blood, sacramental mysterium of Christus Rex, Christ Pantokrator, exemplar of that kingship which is 'not of this world.' The Elixir or Lapis being a symbol of the Perfect Man whose spiritual station is the supreme Centre and whose tingent spiritual power of projection as Djalal-al-Din Rumi says 'turns all the six directions to gold'. This characterises the supernatural virtue of the Perfect Man and again Rumi asserts in the Divani Shamsi Tabriz:

'...O Friend, if you reach perfection in our assembly, your seat will be the throne, you will gain your desire in all things.'

When the Way of Heaven prevails Knowledge and Power are conjoined in their original principial oneness at the 'invariable middle' - but their rupture signals the loss of the Tao and the consequent disequilibrium and catastrophe in which, to employ the words of the poet, '*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold*': then there ensues a subversion of the spiritual hierarchy which from the viewpoint of Lao-Tzu results in the loss of the 'heavenly mandate' with which the divine Emperor or primaeval Priest-King is invested from above. (From the perspective of Indo-European and Indo-Iranian traditions this rupture of functions and subversion of hierarchy is analogous to the 'Fall of the Angels' and the 'Kshatriya revolt' in the divine and human domains respectively.) Lao Tzu summarises the primordial norm:

'Man takes his law from the Earth; the Earth takes its law from Heaven; Heaven takes its law from the Tao. The law of the Tao is its being what it is.'

(Lao-Tzu, Tao-Te-Ching chapter 25, v. 4)

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The empty void at the axial hub of the cosmic wheel is the locus of the uncreated Logos, the Divine Principle seated within the 'heart-space' - (in this context and as an indicator of that supra-formal dimension in which all spiritual forms ultimately converge, the underlying quintessential esoterism of the *Lex Aeterna*, it is significant that in Syriac Christian scriptures transmitted via the Silk Road into China in the 7th-8th century the Greek term *Logos* is translated as *Tao*). In Vedantic doctrine this is the 'City of Brahma' (Brahmapura), the dwelling place of the 'golden Person' (*Purusha*) the Light of the Supreme *Atman*.

Just so in the iconography of the Pantokrator, Christ the King, we see the Principle, the Logos, situated at the 'eye' of the dome in the Orthodox basilica and this point equates with the Sundoor, the aperture of the invisible 'solar ray', the *Sutratama*, which vertically transpierces the centre, passing through all the hierarchic states of the being - this architectural symbolism corresponds in a specific sense to the central position of the light-seed or 'kernel of immortality' *Luz* or in Tantrik terms the *Parabindu* situated at the axial summit or coronal artery - Kether on the sefirotic Tree of the Kabbalah or the 'thousand-petalled lotus' of Tantrik yoga within which 'shines the Great Void (*Shunya*)' as the yogic text 'Sat Chakra Nirupana' puts it. Here is '*the ineffable place of the knowledge of the Atma*' which equates with the Satya-Loka (cognate with the *latifa haqiqa* in Sufic subtle anatomy as the pure realm of Truth, *Al-Haqq*) : the one who attains via the *uttara-marga* (the 'northern' or 'highest path', the 'path of the gods' - *Devayana*) to this imperishable station is delivered from all cyclical becoming, decay and destruction - liberated from all conditional states of entity such a one thus '*possesses complete power to do all he wishes, and to prevent that which is contrary to his will.*' On the cosmological plane its astral reflection is the Pole-Star *Dhruva* and within the microcosm it is the 'Gate of Brahma' situated at the cranial suture, all these indications alluding to the transcendent nature of the station of the Universal Sovereign as the axial function within the primordial and human order, epitomised by the central throne of the one who is both *sacerdos* and *rex*, in whom Knowledge and Power, Contemplation and Action, are non-different and unified in their original Principle, realised via the grace-filled influence of 'actionless activity', emanating from the supreme Centre.

The Universal Sovereign in the Indo-Iranian tradition emanates a luminous aureole from his consecrated brow, the 'light of glory', the *xvarenah*, the light which radiates forth from the axial centre and which in a sense constitutes the hallmark of sacral monarchy in Persian lore: the aureole of brilliance, directly perceptible to the senses of primordial man, was confirmation and witness to the spiritual legitimacy of the rightful Shah and constitutes the basis of the symbolism of the crown and coronation. The word *xvarenah*, or *farr-i-yazdan* or Median *farnah*, as also of its derivatives including Khotanese *pharra* and Kushan-Bactrian *pharro*, is the Indo-Iranian *xvar/hwar* - 'sun' cognate with Old Indian *suvar* and *svar* - '*to shine*' and with Sanskrit *Surya*. It is the veritable radiance of paradise, the effulgence of solarly that pours forth from the *pairidaeza* of light, which illuminates the 'Land of the Sun', the 'primaeval Syria' the sacred realm of solar illumination or 'heart of the world' which is the 'holy land' of the Pontiff-King. This is emphasized in the symbolism of the Centre as the 'City of the Sun' (*Civitas Solis*) as also the *Surya-vansha*, the 'solar dynasty' founded by Brahma whose seat was at Ayodhya and which includes Vaivasvata Manu as the 4th in the royal solar lineage as recounted in the *Vishnu Purana*.

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As the brilliance of the 'Light of Glory' emanates and rays forth from *Eran Vej* so the Chinese tradition shows the emperor, the 'Son of Heaven' enthroned at the image of the 'Invariable Middle' (*Ching-Ying*), the 'Throne of Heaven' from which proceed the straight pathways which convey the divine benediction to the four regions of the empire, supernatural irradiations of luminous virtue from the person of the sacral monarch (*Wang*) stationed at the Centre of the world. In the Celtic sphere we likewise see the High King (*Ard Ri*) enthroned at the numinous centre (Gaelic *Mide* - 'middle') surrounded by the four kingdoms to the cardinal directions as we may note in the topography of ancient Ireland.

Regarding the mystery of universal sovereignty from the viewpoint of tradition reflecting the principles underlying the Akbarian teaching concerning the 'divine governance of the human kingdom' Ananda K. Coomaraswamy states: *'The only royal road to power is to become one's own master; the mastery of whatever else follows. This is the traditional "secret of government", Chinese and Platonic as much as it is Indian.'* ('Spiritual Authority & Temporal Power.') For from the traditional perspective the spiritual station of the Perfect Man, exemplified in Vedic lore by Manu, is the veritable exemplar of spiritual kingship and the universal order (Latin *Ordo* and Sanskrit *Rta* deriving from the same root).

The terms for king in Indo-European languages from Latin *rex* to Celtic *rig/rix* and Sanskrit *raj* all derive from Proto-Indo European **reg* which pertains (as does the ancient Egyptian *Maat* - from *maa* - 'to make straight' - the Truth which sustains the solar pharaonic theocracy) to the concept of straightness (Latin *rectus* - 'straight', *regalis* - 'royal' and *regere* - 'to rule') and hence of rectitude, regularity, rightness, regality as ontological qualities of the divine order and of metaphysical orthodoxy, predicated upon the supreme truth of the eternal Principle, which the Priest-King upholds and embodies as the personification of the function of universal sovereignty and the straight initiatic path (*al-sirat al-mustaqim*).