



The Battle for the Center

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“Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.”¹

Even though these words of Christ are apparently “unchristian,” they were targeting in fact the end of times. If we take a moment to look around, we will see the division between Christians and Muslims, and between Muslims and Jews, and between Christian and Jews, and between Christians, and between Muslims, an overall division, which makes the three religions, the only ones that can be named religions – as René Guénon has stated –, to be, at the end of times, not only a factor for world’s straightening, but also a cause for accelerating the world’s dissolution. All three religions should be essentially interested in the visible spiritual center, which is Jerusalem, but we must ask: is Jerusalem still a center?

Charles-André Gilis, in his recent work, **La papauté contre l’islam**,² draws the conclusion, by comparing Vatican’s architecture with that of Hagia Sophia basilica, that the Renaissance style and Michelangelo’s frescos are not trustful supports for spiritual influences, while Hagia Sophia is the only Christian edifice that deserves the name of “basilica.” “Hagia Sophia, which the Turks tried in vain to imitate – Gilis also says – was the object of all degradations, humiliations and profanations, without forgetting the outrage of a hooliganic «islamization».” Gilis concludes: “if Europe had kept a minimum of traditional sense, it would have asked Turkey to give back Hagia Sophia (geographically located in Europe) to the Orthodox Church.” Gilis’ position is also ours, and it has been

¹ Luke 12:51-3.

² Le Turban Noir, 2007, p. 27. Gilis defines his position from the beginning, which is that of esotericism (*tasawwuf*), and not of the Islamic religion (exotericism) (p. 21), yet the book will surely generate confusion, because it appears like an eso-exoterical application, something similar with what some Christian “guénonists” tried to do, when they wanted to accord Guénon’s sayings about initiation with their own religion and beliefs. Therefore, statements like “the Islam is much more than a monotheist religion, because it expresses the unity of primordial and universal Tradition,” or “the Islam presents itself not as a monotheist religion, but as the supreme and ultimate manifestation of the universal *tawhîd*” (pp. 59, 90), even though true in their essence, produce more confusion than clarification, not to say that it is always unproductive to start weighing and building a hierarchy of the various traditional forms, which is actually exactly the opposite of René Guénon’s position. At last, if this work is directed at the outside world, an esoterical position does not help much, because it will persuade nobody, on the contrary, it will create only animosities; if the book aims at a special category of readers (the way Guénon wrote his works), then it will appear somehow too involved with the external world, and the essential elements that are presented are already well known by this category.

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for many years; his position though is more understandable if we say that he is Michel Vâlsan's disciple (and Vâlsan wrote in the West about Hesychasm, advancing the idea that it has an initiatory kernel), and that Turkey, as René Guénon wrote, became, when Atatürk's reforms occurred, a modern state, which had divorced the traditional life, even though there is today a "religious" reaction, facilitated by the confused and bloody movements we have witnessed for some time. Moreover, Gilis' position is part of a strong campaign started by the author against the Pope and Catholicism, and to support Islam. For this reason, Gilis accuses the Papacy of failing in asking Turkey to return Hagia Sophia to Christianity, the basilica being the adequate architectural image of the divine wisdom and power, since Orthodoxy remained under the protection of the Christian initiatory organizations derived from Hesychasm, while the San Pietro basilica bears the stigma of a pretentious and profane grandeur.

It is, of course, flattering what Charles-André Gilis says about the Orthodox Church, which cannot stand the Papacy either, yet, we have our doubts that we can talk so lightly about Hesychastic "initiatory organizations." With regard to "handing back" the Hagia Sophia basilica, normally, that is, traditionally, this cannot happen at the profane level of modern politics, since a divine mandate is needed, which means that there should be an army of genuine crusaders to conquer Constantinople, but, as we saw in a previous article,³ the crusaders are long gone⁴. We are convinced that Gilis knows this very well, since he considers the Jewish state illegitimate because it was created by political power and not by divine mandate.⁵

The idea we advanced with regard to the "conquest of Constantinople" belongs to the traditional concept of "the battle for the Center," found in all the sacred texts; therefore, it has nothing to do with the present situation, when due to the world's decadence such a battle is out of the question, taking into account that its profound significance is not the external war, but the spiritual realization, the initiatory journey aimed at reaching the Center, which was occupied by forces of the inferior psychism, by the devils (like the city of Dis in the **Divine Comedy**), such a significance being also hidden in the story regarding "the conquest of Troy."

A similar hidden symbolism is to be found in "the conquest of Jerusalem" by the Western crusaders. It is interesting that the conquest of Constantinople was equally important for

³ **The Today Crusaders**, *Oriens*, III, 9.

⁴ And so are the Hesychastic "initiatory organizations." Charles-André Gilis rightly accuses the Catholic Church of being hostile to any esotericism (**La papauté**, pp. 23, 33); yet, concomitantly, the Orthodox Church has the same unwise attitude and also the Islam is not very indulgent with its own esotericism. Gilis points out the hate of some Muslim exoterists against Ibn Arabî's work, and gives by way of example the Wahhabites. In Arabia, René Guénon's work is almost unknown, but also the Maghrebis do not accept Guénon's work and are hostile to the "guénonists" converted to Islam. These exoterists are surprised to see that in René Guénon's writings the Islamic tradition has the same rank as the Hindu and Chinese traditions (Abd Ar-Razzâq Yahyâ (Charles-André Gilis), **Tawhîd et Ikhlâs**, Le Turban Noir, 2006, pp. 65-66, 68).

⁵ **La papauté contre l'islam**, pp. 41, 124. Gilis condemns the Vatican for recognizing the state of Israel on December 30, 1993 (**La papauté**, p. 11). Jean Robin stated that the creation of the Zionist state does not mean the fulfillment of the prophecy regarding the return of the Jews, because it was done by force and with the help of the Western modern world; for this reason, the Orthodox Jews were against this creation (Jean Robin, **René Guénon, La dernière chance de l'Occident**, Guy Trédaniel, 1983, p. 165) (we must say that Robin's work is of very poor quality and often dubious; Gilis considers that Jean Robin is today totally discredited, **La papauté**, p. 160).

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the crusaders' journey, since the Byzantine capital represented the legitimate and true abode of the Emperor, a fabulous city, with mythical riches, another world, the center that, in comparison to Rome or any other Western city, was a legendary place. We should not be surprised that the Turks had the same desire to conquer Constantinople,⁶ and we should mention that the crusaders, at one moment, forgetting Jerusalem, have occupied the Byzantine capital. On the other hand, we could ask ourselves why the Orthodox Christians did not try to conquer Jerusalem, not in a superficial way, but energized by an immense desire for the Center, as the Catholic crusaders did, and one of the reasons is precisely the existence of Hagia Sophia and of Constantinople itself, which had all the characteristics of a spiritual center.

But is Constantinople even now a spiritual center? The answer cannot be but negative, because as the crusaders have disappeared, this center has gradually dried out, beginning with its change into Istanbul, albeit, despite the Christian historians' opinion, we could not blame the Turks entirely for its profanation. During the Ottoman occupation, the Patriarch of Constantinople remained the absolute head of the Christians living in the Turkish Empire,⁷ the Turks having no desire to intervene into the Christians' affairs, as long as these continued to pay their taxes promptly.⁸ So, the Greek influence that started during the Byzantine Empire persisted, which means that as the "classical" Greeks were, in some respect, the ancestors of the modern and antitraditional Western society, so the Greeks contributed later, under the Turks, to spread the germs of antitradition.⁹

However, we must not diminish the genuine spiritual aspect kept by the Orthodox Church, a fact illustrated by its anti-Western attitude and the rejection of the Renaissance messengers, the Orthodox Church being appalled by the "exaltation of reason in place of dogma, the turn to Greek antiquity."¹⁰ The Orthodoxy repelled the West, not so much because it was heretical, but because it became modern, and the Turks were the handy shield to keep the Westerners far from the Christian Orthodox tradition. Thus, another modern "myth" was born in the 19th century, that is, the dark and oppressive Ottoman domination.¹¹

⁶ Mehmet redefined himself as the inheritor of Byzantium (André Gerolymatos, **The Balkan Wars**, Stoddart, 2001, p. 76).

⁷ Mehmet, following the Roman emperors' ritual, invested the Patriarch with the staff and the cross, granting the Orthodox Church greater powers and privileges than it had had under the Byzantine rule. Obviously, Mehmet granted also religious freedom to the Orthodox Christians and guaranteed that the Patriarch is untaxable and irremovable. The Patriarch became not only the head of the Church, but also of the Christian society in general. Thus, the Serbian and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches, which previously were independent, became the Patriarch of Constantinople's vassals, in the end, a united Orthodox society developing, under the Ottoman protection, where the Orthodox Church not only maintained a distinct position regarding its control over the Orthodox world, but it extended its authority over all Christians of the Ottoman Empire.

⁸ Somehow, as the Papacy accepted the temporal protection of the Romano-German Empire, the Orthodox Church was under the Ottoman protection (see Gerolymatos, p. 75); though the Christians had an inferior status compared to the Muslims.

⁹ It is enough to mention the Phanariotes. In Bosnia, for example, the people converted to Islam, because they were fed up with the competition between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches.

¹⁰ Gerolymatos, p. 77.

¹¹ Gerolymatos, p. 78.

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If Hagia Sophia and Constantinople are most probably completely lost for the Orthodox Church, has Jerusalem still remained a valid and efficient spiritual center? Why did Jerusalem attract the Muslims, when they had Mecca? Of course, the importance of Jerusalem is well known, since the Prophet Muhammad was brought by the archangel Gabriel from Mecca to Jerusalem, where the “nocturnal voyage” (*miraj*) took place, but, in fact, all the terrestrial stations of the Prophet are sacred, and so are for Christians all the places that Jesus Christ visited. Without any doubt, Jerusalem, from this perspective, has equally concentrated the spiritual attention of the Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Charles-André Gilis is of the opinion that Jesus’ mission was “a failure,” which means, if we accept his hypothesis, that the crusaders’ immense desire to conquer Jerusalem was an inept endeavour, since who would want to fight for “the place of defeat,” a place where existed a “Palestinian Christianity,” different from the triumphant Western Christianity.

Christ’s “failure”¹² is a question of perspective. From the point of view of the Judaic tradition, we could imagine a “failure,” but likewise we could talk about Judas’ failure as an apostle. In fact, Christ revealed well in advance that Judas will betray Him and that He will be crucified,¹³ in other words He revealed (and not only once) the divine plan, which was not the salvation of the Jewish people, but of the West,¹⁴ because, even though at that specific moment of the cycle the Jewish society was in a process of hardening and shutting out the spiritual influences from above,¹⁵ the Jews were the keepers of a genuine tradition and Christ used from this tradition the needed seeds to generate an orthodox and true tradition for the West, which was on the threshold of dissolution.

¹² Gilis, **La papauté**, p. 93.

¹³ With respect to Judas, we note that there is a remarkable difference between the Gospel of John (St. John, we know, represents the esoterical and spiritual Church) and those of Luke and Matthew. “And he took the cup and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!” (**Luke** 22:17-22); “And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me” (**Matthew** 26:23). Yet in the Gospel of John, it is not the St. Eucharist that is described, but the traitor’s exposure: “When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus’ breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly” (**John** 13:21-27). We note in this latter case how the “Eucharist” is given only to Judas, a gesture that shows Satan obeying Jesus and contributing to the completion of the divine plan; yet, at the same time, Judas was by his nature predisposed to evil, like the ones who crucified Christ. Therefore, in the Orthodox Church the Eucharist is given only after confession and absolution of sins, otherwise the devil will sneak into the soul.

¹⁴ And it is Gilis himself who says a little bit further: “the divine plan targeted the straightening of the Western world” (**La papauté**, p. 111).

¹⁵ The “jurists” that today are to be found in Islam.

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Gilis thinks that, if Christ's divine mission had been accepted by the Jews, the Christian religion would have not existed,¹⁶ which is similar to saying, *in extremis*, that if Vâlsan had been born a flower, Gilis as disciple would have not existed; obviously, it is completely futile to imagine such hypotheses.¹⁷ It did not happen because Christ's mission was something else, and His birth in Israel was not fortuitous, since only there He could be crucified, due to the cyclical moment reached by the Jewish people¹⁸; also, Judaism was in a better position to be accepted by the West than the Chinese tradition for example.¹⁹

What appears as even more disturbing is the fact that Gilis, in his zeal to defend Islam, brings back, probably unwittingly, Arius' heresy, participating in this way to the great division of the end of times. He imagines that Christ ended entirely his mission inside Israel with His crucifixion, and the foundation of Christianity as a distinct religion different from Judaism was the work of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ which would imply that the Holy Spirit has nothing in common with the Son, and Christ after crucifixion lost all His power and simply disappeared.²¹ Gilis again gives the impression that for him Christ is a common man and appears to understand the Holy Trinity like Arius did.²²

¹⁶ Gilis, **La papauté**, p. 97.

¹⁷ We always respected Gilis' wisdom, so it is hard to understand why, in his fight against the Papacy, he strives to bring down the Christian tradition itself, using sometimes methods particularly dear to the profane historians who, when they do not possess firm data, employ arbitrary extrapolations and individual opinions; in a previous work (**Introduction à l'enseignement et mystère de René Guénon**, Les Editions de l'Oeuvre, 1985; we will quote the new edition published at Editions Traditionnelles, in 2001), Gilis equalizes Christianity with Buddhism (indeed, there are some concordances related to the cyclical moment, like, for example, the fact that both Christ and Buddha belong to the royal caste), which seems for him an enough reason to justify the transfer of a quote from René Guénon with regard to Buddhism ("a formal heresy from the traditional viewpoint") to Christianity (**Introduction**, p. 103), yet René Guénon would have never said something like that about the Christian tradition.

¹⁸ It is impossible to endorse the idea that an *avatâra*'s mission is governed by the human factor or that an *avatâra* descends arbitrarily into the world and sometimes succeeds and sometimes fails. Gilis gives here the impression that he considers Jesus Christ a common man, yet Christ stated openly that he has to be crucified, and therefore, it was necessary to be rejected by the Jews, the so-called "failure," which Gilis dramatically mentions, being heralded by Jesus. Gilis suggested already this "failure" in **Introduction**, p. 110.

¹⁹ With regard to those who criticize St. Paul's role, assuming that he "detoured" Christianity somehow from its original idea (converting the Palestinian Christianity into a Greek one), they reach an invisible and impenetrable domain. The only thing that, we, the common people, can observe is that, in spite of disarray and divisions of the early years, the mission of Christianity was not to remain a small sect, which would have been pulverized when the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed, in year 70 A.D., but to become an orthodox tradition, which made it possible for the Occident to continue to exist. That is the lesson for modern people (see our work, **The Wrath of Gods**, Rose-Cross Books, 2004, p. 20).

²⁰ **Introduction**, pp. 111, 113, 115.

²¹ From his Islamic perspective, Gilis neglects the initiatory archetypal aspect of Jesus' life, since, from an initiatory point of view, the crucifixion and the rising are fundamental elements of the spiritual realization, and, from a cosmogonic viewpoint, they illustrate the renewal of the universal manifestation by way of sacrifice (the doctrine of the sacrifice, developed by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, is well known in all the genuine traditions). "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (**Matthew** 10:39, 16:25, **Luke** 9:24, 17:33, **Mark** 8:35, **John** 12:25) (this teaching is so important that it was repeated seven times).

²² We should mention that St. Nicholas, at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, in 325, outraged by Arius' heresy, struck him with his hand. And the great Gregory Nazianzen said: "The Old Testament proclaimed the Father openly, and the Son more obscurely. The New Testament manifested the Son, and

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Charles-André Gilis believes that the Jews brought the divine wrath upon themselves because they could not recognize Christ as *avatâra* and for this reason they were scattered.²³ For the same reason, their return and the creation of the modern state of Israel, with the support of the Western world, is illegitimate²⁴; only the divine pardon, which the Jews must patiently wait for, could give them back the divine grace.²⁵ It is difficult to believe that today the divine sign that will give permission to legitimately reestablish Israel would be recognized, the same way the Jews did not recognize Christ two thousand years ago; similarly, it is difficult to believe that somebody in this modern world would recognize Christ today.

Gilis' eso-exoterical position, and also his desire to support his point of view at any price, leads him to the strange situation of being in accord precisely with those he battles most. About the same topic of Christ's "failure" wrote for 1035 pages (!) Robert Eisenman,²⁶ who strives ineffectively and with lamentable arguments to rewrite the sacred history, declaring St. Paul an anti-semitic,²⁷ the Gospels some Greek anti-semitic writings,²⁸ and Christianity a "Paulician" or Greek Christianity,²⁹ a counterfeit in comparison with the real Judaic Christianity, of James, the brother of Jesus.³⁰

Despite the various profane and political polemics, which, by the way, Gilis criticized also, the question previously asked, "is still Jerusalem a valid and efficient spiritual center?," does not want to stir other similar polemics, but to draw attention to the cyclical moment we live now, which imposes the importance of regarding Jerusalem from the perspective of the end of times.

suggested the deity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit himself dwells among us, and supplies us with a clearer demonstration of himself. For it was not safe, when the Godhead of the Father was not yet acknowledged, plainly to proclaim the Son; nor when that of the Son was not yet received to burden us further" and "I did not start yet to think about Unity when the Trinity bathed me in its splendour. I did not start yet to think about Trinity when the Unity embraced me again." The divine Dionysius the Areopagite also stated: "we understand the unity into the trinity without dividing it and then we recapitulate the trinity into the unity without diminishing it" (see Vladimir Lossky, **Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient**, Aubier, 1944).

²³ Actually, the Jews' role, positive (the apostles and Christ's disciples) and negative (the "jurists" and the people who wanted Him dead), was part of the divine plan. Guénon said the same thing about the counter-initiatory forces: these forces believe that they can oppose the Spiritual, when in fact they obey to It, without knowing it, because everything must obey the divine will (which is the meaning of "islam"); the counter-initiatory forces are used, after all, even if against their will, and even if they think otherwise, to the realization of "the divine plan into the human domain," in accord with their nature (the same way Judas was used, for example), they being the "providential" tools for the world's development (**Le règne**, pp. 259-260).

²⁴ **La papauté**, pp. 97-100; from a traditional point of view, the state of Israel could be compared to Turkey of Atatürk.

²⁵ **La papauté**, p. 124.

²⁶ Robert Eisenman, **James the Brother of Jesus**, Penguin Books, 1997.

²⁷ The author thinks little of St. Paul because he did not know Jesus physically, the idea of a direct illumination being, obviously, unscientific and so, impossible to accept; for Eisenman, St. Paul only "felt" that he was in touch with Jesus (p. 51), which illustrates the profane, antitraditional and materialistic mentality of this author.

²⁸ See pp. 55, 58.

²⁹ See also Gilis, **Introduction**, p. 114.

³⁰ See pp. 6, 59.

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In the Middle Ages, when the Christian society was a traditional one, the Templars had the advantage, St. Bernard de Clairvaux underlined, that, even though they did not have a profound theoretical knowledge, they were living in the Holy Land, the land where Jesus walked and talked, and so they could contemplate directly the Christic landscape, this landscape being an immense support (especially for the novices) in the process of spiritual realization. Obviously, this support without a “wounded heart,” that is, without initiation, and without the activity of the “divine presence,” was almost worthless. Today, those who visit Jerusalem feel a strong emotion and religiosity, but is it enough this random psychical exaltation (and mostly confused and contradictory) to maintain the “divine presence” in Jerusalem?

Apparently, there are other causes why Jerusalem remained important. The Orthodox Christians and the Muslims both know one of the main signs regarding the end of times, a sign representing the Mosque of Omar’s destruction and the reconstruction of the Jerusalem Temple.³¹ Therefore, there is a reaction, mostly theoretical, aiming at the protection of Jerusalem, because, despite of so many alarming signs, many people regard the end of times as something virtual or, in the best case, as something that will happen only to my neighbour, who is a sinner, and not to myself, since I belong to the only rightful religion, which does not mean that “the battle for Jerusalem” is not in full development: this battle is, in fact, the battle of the counter-initiatory forces, which try to conquer the center, because every time when the “divine presence” withdraws from a spiritual center the Adversary’s army moves in, taking possession and using the psychical elements that remained in place.

“And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”³² The world’s “solidification,” René Guénon said, is the end of the cycle’s decay, when the substantial pole is nearby, but, at the same time, it means the ultimate “fixation” of the cycle’s results under the form of the Celestial Jerusalem, and these results will become the seeds of the new cycle’s possibilities, of course, under the condition that the “poles’ reversal” to be operated by the immediate intervention of the transcendental principle.³³ In other words, the law of the cosmic cycles imposes the falling of the present Jerusalem, which has to become “solid” and “frozen,” and has to die and dry out, and only then the Celestial Jerusalem will descend from Heaven. Yet only God knows when this Hour will come.

³¹ See also Gilis, **La papauté**, pp. 41, 127.

³² **Revelation** 21:2-3.

³³ Guénon, **Le règne**, p. 140.