

Spiritual Authority & Temporal Power

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Three authors considered as outstanding representatives of “traditionalist thought” turned their attention to the same doctrinal question. In 1929, René Guénon released a work entitled *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporal* published by J. Vrin.[1] That same year, Julius Evola answered him with an article bearing the same title that appeared in the Italian journal *Krur*. [2] Finally, in 1942, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy published an essay that took up the same issue, although he confined his remarks to its Indian context, entitled: *Spiritual Power and Temporal Authority in the Indian Theory of Government*. [3] It is worth comparing the three views because, although all three boast an identical source of inspiration, they come to tangibly different conclusions.

Guénon, in the footsteps of many others, observes that history, like myth, constantly stages an opposition or rivalry between temporal and spiritual powers. In ancient India, this opposition placed the Brahmins and Kshatriyas, i.e., the priests and warriors, at odds. This opposition appears again in Celtic society with the symbolic rivalry of the boar and the bear (Merlin and Arthur in the tales of the Round Table). In medieval Europe, it forms the framework for the struggle between the Priesthood and the Empire. This struggle, Guénon writes, “invariably takes place in the same fashion: we see the warriors, the holders of temporal power, after initially submitting to spiritual authority, rise up against it and declare themselves independent of any higher power, or even seek to subordinate this authority which it had originally recognized as the legitimate keeper of power and convert it into a tool that serves their domination.”

By the term “spiritual authority,” Guénon does not mean simple religious authority. With respect to the royal function, symbolized by the scales and the sword, which includes martial and military activity but also administrative, judicial, and governmental activity, spiritual authority can be defined as what appears first and foremost as “knowledge of principles, free of any contingent application.” This gives the priesthood the essential function of “the preservation and transmission of the traditional doctrine, in which all regular social organization finds its fundamental principles”—and it is this doctrine that possesses a literally sacred character. Between spiritual and temporal there is thus the same distance that separates *authority* and *power*; whereas the latter manifest externally, with recourse to external means, the former is by essence internal and only asserts itself on its own.

A similar distance separates knowledge and potency, or even thought and action. The Brahmin represents the contemplative path (*jnanamarga*). In the order of the *gunas*—the constitutive qualities of beings apprehended in their manifestations—he primarily possesses *sattva*, which is wisdom, intellectualism, and sovereignty coming from conformity to the pure essence. So the king represents the active path (*karmamarga*) and is characterized by *rajas*, which is the impulse of expansion and excess energies. The result of this distinction is that the royal-warrior function needs to be subordinate to the sacerdotal function, just as potency should be subordinate to

knowledge and action to thought.

Like the Pole star, knowledge represents a fixed point in the midst of movement. It corresponds to Aristotle's "unmoved mover." It is transcendence opposed not so much to immanence as to contingency and change. "Change," Guénon underscores, "would be impossible were there no principle from which it proceeds and which, by virtue of the fact that it is its principle, can not be under its control." Knowledge therefore has no need of action to attain possession of the *principles*, in other words, the truth, whereas action would be meaningless unless it is deployed as a result of principles that are necessarily external to it (if they were not and thus subject to contingencies, they would vary ceaselessly and no longer be principles). In other words, knowledge dominates action, because it provides action its *law*. And by the same token, temporal power, being completely subject to the vicissitudes of the contingent, can only be subordinate to spiritual authority, founded on the knowledge of the principles, that authority which in return confers upon it a *legitimacy* stemming from its conformity to the principles that reflect the "order of things."

The dependence of temporal power upon the priesthood is revealed, for example, in the coronation of kings. Kings are not fully legitimate until they have received sacerdotal investiture, which even confers supernatural powers upon them (such as the thaumaturgic powers of the French kings, which Guénon claims are conferred upon them not by inheriting the office but clearly from coronation).

The reversal of the relationship between knowledge and action, as is expressed mainly in all forms of activist volunteerism or "Prometheanism," or even in the belief that ideas are the reflection of socio-historical practices and not the other way round, is thus regarded by traditionalist thought as a complete aberration. This aberration is similar to "the usurpation of supremacy by temporal power," when it claims to emancipate itself from spiritual authority by declaring that there is no domain higher than its own. In so doing, temporal power unknowingly saps the foundations of its own potency. As it is incapable of finding a legitimizing principle in itself, it merely provides the example of an attitude of revolt that by contagion will inevitably lead, step by step, to its own downfall. Guénon cites here the case of the French kings, who, starting with Philip the Fair, ceaselessly sought to make themselves independent of spiritual authority, which led them to rely for support from the bourgeoisie and the newborn economic power, which in turn would eventually dethrone them. As Guénon explains:

It could be said that the Kshatriyas, once they have entered a state of revolt, degrade in some way and lose their specific character to take on that of a lower caste. It could even be added that this degradation must inevitably be accompanied by the loss of legitimacy (...). If the king is no longer satisfied with being the first of the Kshatriyas, in other words the leader of the nobles, and to play the role of "regulator" that belongs to this title, he loses his reason to exist and, at the same time, he places himself in a position of opposition to that nobility of which he was only the emanation and the most complete expression. This is how we can see the monarchy, in order to "centralize" and absorb into itself the powers that belong collectively to the entire nobility, enter battle with the noble class and relentlessly toil to destroy feudalism, from which, however, it emerged. Furthermore, it can only do this by relying on the third estate, which corresponds to the Vaishyas; and this is why we also see, starting with precisely Philip the Fair, the French kings almost constantly surrounding themselves with members of the bourgeoisie,

especially those who, like Louis XI and Louis XIV, pushed the work of “centralization” furthest, from which the bourgeoisie would necessarily harvest the benefits later when it assumed power with the Revolution.[4]

Guénon later goes on to say, “The revolution that toppled the monarchy is both its logical consequence and its punishment, meaning its reward for the revolt of this same monarchy against spiritual authority.”[5]

In the following stage, the temporal does not even claim to impose itself on the spiritual, but radically separates from it and even denies its very existence. The systematic dispossession of the higher by the lower, triggers a process that will lead ever lower. The lower castes get the upper hand over the Kshatriyas; economic activity trumps political authority; and personal advantages and profits prevail over the common good. The reign of bourgeois capitalism therefore corresponds to the era of the Vaishyas and that of Bolshevism to the era of the Shudras. In parallel to this, the initial usurpation brings about the process of social atomization that leads into modern individualism.[6] Of course, for Guénon, this involution is part of a traditional vision of cyclical history characterized by waning spirituality and waxing “materialization,” in which the darkest age (the Kali Yuga), which corresponds to the present era, is headed both towards the nihilism of chaos and the inevitable final regeneration—inevitable because every tendency pushed to its extreme will lead to its own reversal: “Like all that has only a negative existence, disorder destroys itself.” [7]

Therefore Guénon absolutely refused the idea of a *complementary* relationship between the spiritual and the temporal within one sovereign function. This point of view, which he called “insufficient,” masks the necessary *subordination* that should exist between the two domains. For example, he saw the fact that the Roman emperor was both *imperator* and *pontifex romanus* as an “anomaly” that smelled to him like an “usurpation.” This led him to finally acquire the conviction of a radical superiority of the East (which has always maintained the primacy of knowledge over action) over the West (which has held the opposite belief, at least since the time of the Renaissance).

Evola’s opinion is completely different. Evola in fact reacted violently against Guénon’s argument, saying that it only expressed “the Brahminical-sacerdotal point of view of an Oriental” and that, for that very reason, needed “to be rejected in whole.” This argument, it argued, was mistaken about the Western tradition. Furthermore it amounted to justification of the Guelph faction with respect to the Ghibellines, a theme on which Evola specifically declared himself the “avowed adversary” of Guénon.

Evola’s fundamental thesis is that action has a sacred nature and that there is “a *spiritual* meaning of royalty,” which Guénon intentionally fails to take into account, although the very notion of “king of the world” that he has studied on its own demonstrates that royal symbolism can be directly connected to the highest form of spiritual authority. The antagonism that has been visibly displayed since prehistoric times between a royal or warrior tradition and a sacerdotal tradition should therefore not be viewed as “a struggle between the spiritual authority and a rebellious temporal power,” but rather as “a struggle between two distinct forms of authority that are equally spiritual and yet insurmountable.” [8]

Evola further feels that Guénon falls into rationalism when he insists on the absolute value of the

“principles” (the *letter*) more than the “spiritual states to attain” (the *spirit*), and that the opposition he draws between knowledge and action is artificial to a large extent, as tradition (Eastern notably) has always taught that knowledge is a form of action and higher realization, and that an action, when it is just, *goes beyond the action* that manifests it. Additionally, wouldn’t the idea that thought is an “unmoved mover” make it a modality of action through the very notion of “motor?” And wouldn’t this be the reason for which the Roman Emperor, just like the Chinese Emperor or Egyptian Pharaoh, was invested with a “religious” as well as a “royal” responsibility? In fact, Evola believes Guénon confuses spiritual authority and sacerdotal authority. This is the reason why he refuses to accept that “the consecration of the king or chief does not have the sense of a subordination to the priestly caste” but that “through the consecration, the king *assumes* rather than receives power—a power of a higher kind that invests him with a spiritual influence.” Finally, Evola, who was strongly influenced by the theories of Bachofen on the “primitive matriarchy,” did not shy from seeing in the “Indian” opposition of king and Brahmin the trace of an ancient antagonism between the “Nordic-Iranian” male principle and a “Southern-Demetrio” female or gynocratic principle. This strengthens his idea that, in some way, the king should always have the last word:

The domination of the sacerdotal castes by a warrior tradition, the primacy of action over contemplation, do not on their own constitute any kind of lowering of the level; to the contrary it is the loss of contact with the metaphysical reality that constitutes this—whether it is manifested in the form of a materialization of the sacred concept of royalty, which has become simply “temporal power,” or whether it is manifested in the form of the decadence of the sacerdotal function that has degenerated into ecclesiastical survivals, dogmatic oversimplifications, and into simple “religion.”

Evola goes on to conclude: “It is not in the sacerdotal vision but in the imperial and warrior vision—and by reclaiming the occult sapience that, in the form of *Ars Regia*, is tied to it and is perpetuated within the very heart of the West—where it is appropriate to seek out the symbols of our affirmation and our liberation.”

Based on a remarkable knowledge of ancient India, Coomaraswamy’s[9] point of view finds accord, in a more academic and perhaps more erudite way, with that of Guénon on a number of essential points. Coomaraswamy, in particular, emphasizes the blatant superiority of the Brahmin over the king that exists in India. Symbolically, the Brahmin is the womb that gives birth to the Kshatriya. The Kshatriya can offer sacrifice, but only the Brahmin can both offer and perform sacrifice. Indian texts also stress that monarchy has no principle in and of itself, but is governed by the eternal law of *dharma*, which is action conforming to the norm as opposed to *artha*, action conforming to vested or contingent interests). In passing, Coomaraswamy also criticized the position of Evola, in which he sees a concession to that same “modern world” that the Italian author so often attacked.[10]

But at the same time, Coomaraswamy stressed, from the beginning of his book to the end, the importance of the “marriage” between monarchy and the priesthood. The entire Indian political doctrine can be summed up, he claimed, in the “nuptial” speech addressed by the Brahmin to the king in the *Aitareya Brâhmana* (VIII.27). “I am That, you are This, I am the Heavens, you are the Earth.” This phrase is in fact an essential one. On the one hand, it confirms that the king, who is “male” in relation to his kingdom (for the prosperity of his people and the fertility of the earth depend upon him), is with respect to his “chaplain,” his *purohita*, [11] “on the side of the earth,”

which symbolically means on the “natural” and “female” side. On the other hand it indicates that the relationship between the priesthood (Brahma) and the royalty is as strict as a marriage, it makes this hierarchy relative by placing it in the perspective of a “hierogamy.” The union of the Brahmin and the king in fact takes place in the celebration of the sacrifice in the same way Earth and Heaven unite on the Cosmic plane,[12] or, in a traditional society, the man and woman on the sexual plane. Their relationship is therefore based on a reciprocal asymmetrical dependency, symbolized by the fact that the *purohita* sometimes walks in front of the king, to clearly show he is not his subject, and sometimes behind him to indicate that he nonetheless is dependent upon him. “Whereas, spiritually or absolutely, the priest is superior,” writes Louis Dumont on this subject, “at the same time from the temporal or material point of view he is subjugated and dependent. Conversely the spiritually subordinate figure of the king is the master on the material plane.” [13]

The *Satapatha Brâhmana* (IV.1.4) specifies on the other hand that the *purohita* is to the king what thought is to action, and Mitra to Varuna. In the Vedic religion, Mitra (but also Krishna, Agni, and Brihaspati) in fact represents the archetype of spiritual authority just as Varuna (but also Arjuna and Indra) represents temporal power. For example, in the *Satapatha Brâhmana* (IV.1.4), it is said that Varuna (the Monarchy) could not subsist apart from Mitra (the Priesthood) told him: “Turn thou unto me that we may unite; I assign to you the precedence; quickened by thee, I shall do deeds.” The same text also indicates that Mitra and Varuna are like male and female: “Mitra ejaculated his semen into Varuna” (S.B. II.4.4.19). This explains the apparent paradox that views the “masculine” element as being on the side of the Brahmin, despite his “passive” character, and the feminine element on the side of the king, despite his warrior nature. Mitra’s “passivity” is that of the unmoved mover that is the dominant law of all action. Hence the eloquent Sanskrit two-in-one *Mitravaruna*, “Mitra and Varuna combined as a couple,” as if one was in the presence of a “joint” person here.

The analogical correspondence is therefore complete between Mitra and Varuna, the Brahmin and the king, the day and the night, consciousness and action, Truth and the Word, the “knower” (*abhigantṛ*) and the “doer” (*kartr*), etc.[14] In each case, there is a clear hierarchy between two principles, but this hierarchy is inseparable from the “nuptial” union that reveals a transcendental unity and produces its own surpassing. Here, of course, we find another example of the theme of the identity of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*). In the ancient texts, the relationship of the Brahmin and the king is frequently depicted by the image of twins of the opposite sex or even spouses called upon to unite (*Aitareya Brâhmana* VIII.27). Equally revealing is the episode of the marriage of “Indraghni” recorded in the *Satapatha Brâhmana* (X.4.1.5), in which Agni (the Priest) and Indra (the King) tell one another: “So long as we are thus, we shall be unable to bring forth offspring. Let us twain become a single form.”[15] “That the Spiritual Authority, Plato’s *hieron*, etc,” Coomaraswamy concludes, “is also the Ruler, Plato’s *arkhon* just as the *brahma* ‘is both the *brahma* and *kshatra*,’ means indeed that the Supreme Power is a royal as well as a priestly power.” Necessary for the formation of the Perfect Sovereign, the union of the two principles is also the model for every human being of the conquest of his *autonomy*. It is in fact the equivalent of the merger of opposing complementarities, which corresponds to the surpassing of the human condition and the instauration of a new *Regnum*.

With respect to Mitra and Varuna, Georges Dumézil writes, “There is never a conflict between these two authentic beings, but, to the contrary, constant collaboration.[16] Elsewhere he

stipulates that “the Mitra and Varuna opposition is never nor can it ever be hostile or competitive; it can only be complimentary. [...] From the perspective of man as well as that of the cosmos, it is the common works of the god that matter first and foremost, the specificity of each one being of less interest than their complicity.”[17] Mircea Éliade meanwhile shows that the two Indian figures of sovereignty sketch a duality “that is not at all static, but rather is expressed in the rhythmic alternation of the contrary principles,” so that their “alternating rituals” primarily express the “obscure desire of reintegrating the two opposing principles and thereby winning back the primordial unity.”[18] All of these opinions are in agreement.[19]

As the traditional world was founded on the idea of an analogy between human society and the cosmic order, which was mediated by the society of the gods, in order to grasp the idea that the ancient Europeans had of political and social sovereignty, we should now study the way this sovereign role was articulated in the religious ideology of the Indo-Europeans. We are quite familiar with this ideology today, mainly thanks to the works of Georges Dumézil (who Guénon, Evola, and Coomaraswamy all seem to overlook, incidentally). Now Dumézil, who devoted particular attention to the first function, meaning the function of sovereignty,[20] shows that it is clearly distinguished from the warrior or second function, despite the privileged ties that connect these two by comparison to the third function. The king and the warrior, at least in theory, do not belong to the same functional level. Furthermore Dumézil, with respect to the first function, emphasizes, its *Janus Bifrons*-like, ambivalent nature, by indicating that it “is organized around the combination of a more cosmic god with a god displaying a greater concern for humanity’s welfare; a sovereign magician god, who is disturbing and creative with one rather a jurist, a pacifist, and an organizer.”[21] The first function therefore combines a king and a priest, a temporal power and a spiritual authority. This brings us to the very heart of our discussion.

In India, as we have seen, Mitra and Varuna represent the first function viewed in its two aspects. Mitra is the sovereign under his benevolent, clear, luminous, calm, orderly, male, and sacerdotal aspect; he is the patron god of oaths and contracts (the etymology of his name confirms that his is the Contract personified), and legal and religious activity. Varuna is the sovereign under its terrible, dark, nocturnal, disturbing, strict, violent, female, and bellicose aspect. In this aspect this god is the patron god of martial activities, he often punishes, and intervenes in human affairs through the use of “bonds” and “knots” that are characteristic of magic. Mitra is the god closest to man. He embodies this world and is therefore the god of the diurnal sky, day, life, and the Sun (with which he is frequently incorporated). Varuna is intimately connected to cosmic forces. He incarnates the “other world;” thus he is on the side of the nocturnal sky, shadows, death, and the Moon. Mitra is a god oriented toward reflection and wisdom. This is why he is incorporated into the Brahmin, the keeper of spiritual power. Varuna is an active god, incorporated into the kshatriya and temporal power, and sponsors the king in the ceremony of his consecration (*râjasûya*).

“Mitra and Varuna,” states Dumézil, “are the two terms for a large number of conceptual and antithetical couples, whose juxtaposition defines two planes. Each point of one of these planes, one could say, calls up another similar point on the other plane, and these couples, diverse as they may be, possess a certain kinship that is so clear that for every new couple added to the files, it is easy to safely foresee which would be given the term “mitrian” and which the term “varunian.” [22] As can be seen, both Mitra and Varuna are in fact equally necessary for the establishment of *rta*, the harmonious order of both human societies and the cosmos.

In Rome, Jupiter is first and foremost a king (*rex*). He controls lightning like Zeus for the Greeks (and like the gods of the second function, Indra and Thor among the Indians and Germans respectively). He is thus a counterpart of Varuna. The correspondence of Mitra would be Dius Fidius, a deity who was quickly supplanted by a personified abstraction, Fides. In the mythical history of the Roman people, this bipartition can also be found in the couple formed by the first two kings: Romulus (= Varuna) and Numa (= Mitra). For the Germans, Odin-Wotan is like Varuna the patron of war and the master of magic: it is he who welcomes to Valhalla the fighters he has chosen. Tyr, a “Mitrian” deity and who is the counterpart of the Vedic Dyaus and the Greek Zeus, is the god of contracts and the patron of the assembly, the *thing*. Taking under consideration the slipping of the first function toward the martial function, characteristic of the Germanic religion, he was distorted within the relatively recent past to the point of sometimes being incorporated into Mars, whereas the true “Germanic Mars,” Thor, has “slipped” into the third function.

In each great sector of the area covered by the Indo-European expansion, we thus find a clear bipartition of the sovereign function, a bipartition represented by two distinct deities who, by way of a certain number of symbolic analogies, more specifically sponsor as one god spiritual authority and as another temporal power. These two deities form a couple, and Dumézil is perfectly correct when describing the first function to speak of “two faces, two halves that are antithetical but complementary and equally necessary.” [23]

“Equally necessary” but not equal. The “Mitrian” deity is in fact normally perceived as relatively superior to the “Varunian” deity. On the other hand—and this is where we find again the trace of an opposition between spiritual authority and temporal power—one can detect, at a stage that seems later chronologically speaking and more or less marked in a way according to the Indo-European “provinces,” a kind of obliteration of the “Mitra side.” Just as among the Germans, Tyr was finally made subordinate to Odin-Wotan, [24] among the Romans, Dius Fidius suffered from the theological reform of Jupiter (which coincided with the promotion of this god and the creation of his Capitoline cult), to the point Jupiter entirely absorbed him. In India finally, Mitra attracted less attention from the poets than Varuna. This suppression needs to be understood in context of the “inevitable of the martial function” (as Dumézil describes it), which is naturally driven to contest for the primacy of the sovereign function. The hymns in which Indra defies Varuna and boasts of abolishing his potency, similar to the *Hårbardhsjodh* of the *Eddas*, which depict Thor insulting Odin, both bear testimony to this in their particular way—not to mention the Roman example concerning the impiety of the overly martial king Tullus Hostilius against whom Jupiter exacted his just revenge.

It is under the light emitted by these clues that we need to study the problem of royalty as conceived by the Indo-Europeans. As we know, this institution is quite ancient as is confirmed by the classic concordance of the Vedic **raj-* (rajah), the Celtic **rig* (*-rix*), and the Latin **-reg* (*rex*). [25] From the onset however, the “royal question” (the relationship of the three functions and the king) proves to be one of great complexity. Dumézil expressed it this way, “The king is sometimes superior, at least externally, to the trifunctional structure, in which the first function is then centered on the purest possible administration of the sacred by the priest, rather than on the power of the sovereign and his agents; sometimes the king—priest-king to an equal extent if not more than governing king—is to the contrary, the most eminent representative of this function; sometime he displays a varying blend of elements borrowed from the three functions, most

notably the second, and it is from this function and eventually the martial class from which he most often emerges.” [26]

That for “practical” reasons, the king is most often a product of the military class should be in no way surprising. In India, the word *rājanya*, derived from *rājan*, meaning “king” is a synonym for *kshatriya*. The first Indo-European kings were “elected,” that is to say chosen from among the royal family or the great feudal lords by an assembly of free men. In the case of incompetence such that they lost their legitimacy, which is to say they were not striving to realize “here below” the harmony that rules “on high,” they could be deposed (as the last Merovingian king was in 751) or even killed. This should not be taken to imply that the royal function was purely and simply military in essence. The *rex* cannot be summarized in the *dux*, and this is why Dumézil, in another passage in his work, writes that the king most often is “qualitatively extracted” from the second function, which amounts to saying that by acceding to the royal position he has passed into another function, that of sovereignty. Now, as we have already seen, this function is ideally perceived as one that includes two antithetical but complementary aspects, a temporal aspect and a spiritual aspect. Thus there is every reason to think that, among the Indo-Europeans, royalty originally had a sacral character, the king (as was the case in Sumer, Egypt, or even the Chinese Empire) being invested with “magical” or religious prerogatives in addition to those of a political nature.

Finally, we still need to take into consideration the fact that social distinctions in the ancient societies of Indo-European origin attested to historically do not always correspond to the ideal tripartition proposed by their religious ideology. Trifunctionality, we must remember, is first and foremost an idea. It is only potentially and secondarily a human social reality.[27] And its social transposition, when it occurs, is always subject to being distorted. Among the Germans, for example, the first function corresponds to the nobility, whereas among the Celts and Indo-Iranians, it corresponds exclusively to the priests (here the nobles occupy the second class). This obviously raises a question, as the choice of the king from the warrior class will change meaning depending on whether or not this class occupies the first place. But this then also raises the question of knowing whether the separation of the royal function and the sacerdotal function was originally Indo-European or whether, as Louis Dumont hypothesized about India, it resulted from a “process that would have transpired during the Vedic Era,” a process during which the king “would have lost in India his religious prerogatives.” It is difficult to take any kind of firm position on this point. The apparent absence of the priest class from the “central” Indo-European peoples like the Germans, which stands in contrast to the Brahman institution of India, the *flamines* of Rome, and the druids of the Celts, as it does to the incontestably “magical” nature of the political royalty of most of these peoples, seems nonetheless to argue in favor of Dumont’s hypothesis.[28] According to other authors, however, the sacerdotal class would only have appeared as a distinct class in tandem with the necessity of maintaining or preserving the tradition and the collective identity with a force that has increased in strength within a human environment grown increasingly heterogeneous (Jean Haudry). [29]

Among the Germans, where the priest class seems non-existent, the royal institution took on a sacral character once the “Wotanic” royalty definitively prevailed over the ancient “Vanic” institution (which persisted however in Scandinavia until the seventh century AD).[30] The royal function then became that of the “magician” and “warrior”; the god Wotan was installed as the ancestor of the dynastic line whereas the new name of the Germanic king, **kuningaz*, was

substituted for the former name.[31] This phenomenon seems to have taken place during the start of our historical era in connection with the rise and spread of warrior bands and the Germanic expression of the *Völkerwanderung*, which would successively give birth to the Franks, Lombards, Visigoths, Vandals, Ostrogoths, Burgundians, Saxons, and other peoples. [32] Thence forward the Germanic king was both first of warriors and lords (*jarls*) and a “magician” who acted as the intermediary between his people and the gods from whom he descended. He possessed the science of the runes and guaranteed the prosperity of all his people. “A religious and institutional revolution,” writes Jean-Paul Allard, “the emergence of “Wotanic” royalty definitively exalted the king, raising him above the contingencies of the second function, but not detaching him from that class. It conferred upon him a sacred nature he had not held formerly. He henceforth possessed an essentially magical charisma of divine origin through which the royalty reinforced its Indo-European nature.” [33]

The monarchical institution of Western Europe was directly inherited from these Germanic migrations of the fifth century AD. “Royalty,” writes Georges Dumézil, “comes out of the Germanic past, carried by people that Rome, for good or ill, had welcomed into its midst, without subtracting anything from the power of their leaders.”[34] Behind the superficial coloring that Christian tradition had given in reference to the “kings” of the Old Testament, medieval royalty continues, in many respects, whether through symbolic insignia (torques, scepters, spears, cloak, and so on), or the thaumaturgic powers attributed to “healing” kings (the *scrofula*), the ancient sacral royalty whose titleholder’s powers were conferred by his possession of uncommon abilities. [35]

The problem of the relationship between spiritual authority and temporal power is posed in a parallel and acute way with the famous quarrel between the Priesthood and Empire that has left its imprint on centuries of the history of Western Europe. We have an extremely interesting text in this regard at our disposal. It is a letter addressed to the Emperor by Pope Gelasius I, in which the sovereign pontiff—who ruled during the final years of the fifth century, the era of Theodoric—set out a fairly remarkable theory of the relations between the papacy and the emperor. Gelasius wrote, “There are two powers, august Emperor, by which this world is chiefly ruled, namely, the sacred authority of the priests and the royal power. [...] Yet in things divine you [must] bow your head humbly before the leaders of the clergy and await from their hands the means of your salvation. [...] The ministers of religion, recognizing the supremacy granted you from heaven in matters affecting the public order, obey your laws”[36]

Louis Dumont, who included a copy of the text of this letter in his book, analyzed it as follows: “The priest is therefore subordinate to the king in worldly affairs that concern public order. [...] The priests are superior, for it is only at a lower level that they are inferior. We are not dealing with a mere “correlation” (Morrison) or the simple submission of kings to priests (Ullmann), but with a *hierarchical complementarity*.” Dumont then goes on to say, “It so happens that I found the same configuration in ancient Vedic India. There, the priests viewed themselves as religiously or absolutely superior to the kings, but materially subject to him. While the phrasing is different, the arrangement exactly mirrors the arrangement described by Gelasius.” [37] In fact what we find here is the outline mentioned earlier: higher than the king in spiritual matters, the priest is beneath him when it comes to public affairs, which themselves are of lesser importance than the first. “We should understand Gelasius,” adds Dumont, “as saying that, while the Church is *in* the Empire for the affairs of the world, the Empire is *in* the Church when it

comes to divine matters.”[38] In certain respects, this orientation is a kind of Ghibeline position before the fact. If it had in fact been instituted, Europe would have been spared the painful quarrel of the Investitures born out of the rivalry between the Priesthood and the Empire.

This was not the case. Starting in the middle of the eighth century, the papacy adopted an attitude that was radically different from the one suggested by Gelasius. It strove to gain control of imperial authority, including that over worldly matters. The hierarchical diarchy was replaced by a “spiritual monarchy” in which the spiritual was viewed as superior to the temporal *even for temporal matters*. The Pope, from that time, holds all powers, which raises the question of the limits of imperial authority. The quarrel of the Guelphs and Ghibelines that took place four centuries later, would allow this question to be raised publicly.

Alluding to the partisans of the Empire (the twelfth century Ghibelines, William of Occam, and Marsilius of Padua in the fourteenth century), Louis Dumont observes: “The partisans of the Empire did not deny the essential superiority of the Church, nor its independence or right to sovereignty within its domain, but they extolled the doctrine from the early days of the Church and its recognition of the *sacerdotium* and *imperium* as two independent spheres instituted by God himself, two powers to coordinate [...]. They sometimes proposed a relationship suggestive of that in Hinduism: the State must be subordinate to the Church in spiritual matters, the Church to the State in temporal matters.”[39] In a more general manner, the Ghibelines asserted the sacral character of temporal authority in continuity with the heritage of ancient Rome and the purest European tradition.[40] But in the final analysis neither the Pope or the Ghibelines prevailed. The quarrel of the Investitures would lead into, through the route of the birth of secularization, the *separation* of temporal and spiritual powers, a modality that is far removed from the unidimensional hierarchy advocated by some and the hierarchical complementarity and reciprocity sought by others.

The light shed by the preceding material makes it easier to see how we should evaluate the respective positions of Evola, Coomaraswamy, and Guénon. Guénon is correct to emphasize the superiority of spiritual authority, but he is incorrect when assigning it an absolute primacy, which leads him to interpret the Brahmin/Kshatriya opposition from the angle of a fight for the top rank, in other words a power struggle.[41] He does not see that spiritual authority is only superior when in its own domain, whereas it is inferior in those “inferior things” known as public affairs. Nor does he see that temporal power in traditional societies also possesses an intrinsically sacred nature. Finally, he does not appear to realize that the Brahmin and the king form an inseparable couple, characteristic of the two complementary aspects that are a feature of sovereignty. Similarly, his linear non-dialectical interpretation of the relationship of thought and action, contemplation and realization, knowledge and power, beyond the fact it is insufficient to exhaust the analysis of the sovereign function in ancient European societies, leads him to adopt an overly one-dimensional, hierarchical perspective, which does not give enough weight to the principle of the conciliation of opposites.[42] Although he only brings up the case of India, with respect to the subject at hand, Coomaraswamy sees truer when he emphasizes the fact that the primacy of the Priesthood is not exclusive of its structural complementarity with Royalty, and stresses the importance of the “marriage” of the two principles.

For his part, Evola rightly underscores the intrinsically sacred character of royal or imperial power. On the other hand, he is wrong, falling into the opposite error of Guénon, when he claims spiritual authority was entirely submissive to temporal power. Concerning his interpretation of

sacerdotal power as being essentially “feminine,” right spiritual authority being in some way a kind of relic of “gynecocratic” influence, there is no way this can be given any serious consideration both because of the dubious nature of the hypothesis of a primitive matriarchy as well as the clearly “masculine” symbolism constantly attributed to the Brahmin by Indian texts. For Guénon, the king is nothing but the highest individual among nobles and warriors; he is characterized by strength alone, just as wisdom is the chief characteristic of the priest function. Now, while it is true as we have seen that the king often is a product of the military class and maintains privileged relations with this class, his function also gives him access to a qualitatively different level. So it is not possible to simply reduce the royal function to that of the warrior.

It is also easy to see that Guénon and Evola both tend to systematically confuse the royal function and the martial function, one to proclaim it intrinsically inferior to the sacerdotal function, the other to proclaim it superior or at least equal.

Temporal power should not be imposed over spiritual authority, but the latter does not hold absolute superiority either. The two principles are inseparably bound inside the same sovereign function, without this bond serving to form any kind of theocracy. The couple formed this way should be interpreted from the angle of reciprocal dependency and the conflict of opposites. Spiritual authority and temporal power correspond to differential orientations inside a hierarchical complementarity of a unidimensional tendency.

Notes

[1]. René Guénon, *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel* (Paris: Vrin, 1929). The most recent edition of this work was published by Guy Tredaniel, 1984.

[2]. The French translation of this appears as “Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir” in “*Ur*” & “*Krur*,” *Introduction à la magie*, Vol. 3 (Milano: Arché, 1985), 171–89, trans. Gérard Boulanger. This text was reprinted in the revue *Totalité*, 27 (Winter 1986–87). A revised Italian version appears in Julius Evola, ed., *Introduzione alla magia. A cura del “Gruppo di Ur,”* vol. 3 (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee), pp. 354–63.

[3]. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Power and Temporal Authority in the Indian Theory of Government* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1942).

[4]. Guénon, 85–86.

[5]. Guénon, 113.

[6]. Guénon states in passing that individualism and “naturalism” are closely aligned. This statement appears debatable to me, to say the least.

[7]. For Guénon, unity corresponds to spiritual harmony, whereas “matter is multiplicity and division.” Hence his condemnation of the principle of nationalities: the formation of the modern nations accelerated the subjugation of spiritual authority by temporal national powers.

[8]. See also Julius Evola, *Le mystère du Graal et l'idée impériale gibeline* (Ed. Traditionnelles, 1972). In his review of *Revolt Against the Modern World*, Guénon himself confirmed his disagreement on this point. “So, when it concerns the unique original source of the two

sacerdotal and royal powers, the author has a very marked tendency to emphasize the royal aspect at the expense of the sacerdotal aspect” (*Comptes-rendus*, Ed. Traditionnelles, 13). The Guénonian point of view is restated by Bruno Hapel in “Affrontements dantesques,” in *Vers la Tradition* (September-November 1995), 29–34.

[9]. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, born in Colombo, Ceylon on August 22, 1877, was the son of an English woman and an Indian lawyer of Tamil descent. He pursued his education in Great Britain and was given charge of mineral exploration on Ceylon in 1904, where he took part in the founding of the Society for the Social Reform of Ceylon, of which he was named president. Summoned to Boston in 1917 to head the Indian Art section of the Boston Fine Arts Museum, he spent the rest of his life in the United States. He died in 1947. See also Roger Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy: His Life and Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); and Giovanni Monastra, “Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, de l’idéalisme à la tradition,” *Nouvelle École*, 47 (1995), 25–42. Starting in 1936, Coomaraswamy became a regular contributor to the review *Études traditionnelles*, then directed by Guénon. His work, written in English, focuses primarily on the sacred art and traditional thought of ancient India. Some of his additional works are: *What Is Civilization? and Other Essays* (Lindisfarne Books, 1989); *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (Kessinger Publications, 2003); *Dance of Shiva* (South-East Asia Books, 1997), and *The Door in the Sky* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[10]. *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government*, 10.

[11]. This literally means “[he who is] placed in front. Its translation by “chaplain,” although traditional, is simply an approximation.

[12]. The analogical Christian expression: “Thy Will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven,” probably retains the trace of much older formulations.

[13]. *Homo hierarchicus. Le système des castes et ses implications*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), 354.

[14]. Subsequently Indian literature will interpret even the opposition between the Self (*purusha*) and the Nature (*prakriti*) as an illustration of the Mitra-Varuna antithesis.

[15]. The *Hieros gamos* is again realized in the *Taittirîya Samhitâ* (V.2.4) with the union of the two Agni. The Rig Veda (V.3.1) states explicitly in this regard that Agni is born as the chthonian figure of Varuna and is set ablaze in the celestial form of Mitra. Further one, one can read again that “Agni is both Mitra and Varuna” (Rig Veda, VII.12.3).

[16]. *L’idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens* (Brussels: Latmous, 1958), 64.

[17]. *Les dieux souverains des Indo-Européens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), 59-60.

[18]. *Briser le toit de la maison. La créativité et ses symbols* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 303–4.

[19]. René Prévost also describes the couple formed by the Brahmin and the king as a unit for which neither half forms a complete entity by itself, and which consists of two inseparable elements, which are complimentary but unequal. “None of the elements is complete without the other. Their connection is that of the part to the whole where the whole is the source of the part

and its fertilizing element” (“Le brâhmane et le roi,” in *Georges Dumézil, In memoriam*, vol. 2, special issue of *Études indo-européennes* (1988), 61–62). A complete theology can be seen outlined here, in which man’s relationship to God is comparable to that of the king and the Brahmin. Man is incomplete without God, but God is also incomplete without man, although he is superior to him.

[20]. See notably his book, *Mitra-Varuna. Essai sur les deux représentations indo-européennes de la souveraineté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948); and *Les dieux souverains des Indo-Européens*, op. cit.

[21]. “Le messager des dieux,” interview with Françoise Ewald in *Le Magazine littéraire* (April 1986).

[22]. *L’idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens*, 63.

[23]. In many respects the origin of this bipartition remains a mystery. A particularly interesting hypothesis advanced by Jean Haudry connects it with the Indo-European theory of the three heavens (“The heavens are three in number,” *Rig Veda*, I. 35. 6). The dual nature of the first function would stem from an older opposition that combined the heavens and the colors of the cosmos. Tyr and Mitra in fact seem first to have been gods of the day sky and Varuna and Odin, gods of the night sky. “Mitra is the day and Varuna the night,” the Brahmanas says. The former name of Tyr, **Tiwas*, a derivative moreover of **deywos*, “one of the daytime sky” (a term that is also the source of the French word for god, “*Dieu*”). The “marriage” of these gods would give us the “third heaven” personified by the goddesses of the daily or annual Dawn: Athena, Aphrodite, Ourania, **Austro*, Mater Matuta, the Minerva of the Capitoline triad, Helen in the Trojan cycle, and so forth. For more see Jean Haudry, “La tradition indo-européen au regard de la linguistique,” in *L’Information grammaticale* (March 1986), 3–11 (reprinted in *Nouvelle École*, 45 [Winter 1988-1989], 116–29); and *La religion cosmique des Indo-Européens* (Milan: Arche and Belles lettres), 1987.

[24]. Hence the idea maintained by some authors, which is almost certainly wrong, that Odin would be a more “recent” God.

[25]. This same root became **rik-* in the ancient Germanic language, which gives us the modern German name for Realm or Empire (*Reich*).

[26]. *L’idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens*, 32–33.

[27]. Dumézil, who for some time believed that he had detected traces of an ancient social tripartition conforming to the ideological model in all Indo-European societies, later backed away from this point of view.

[28]. For his part, Christophe Levalois writes that “in the entirely traditional societies, there was no distinction [...] thus separation made between spiritual authority and temporal power” (*Principes immémoriaux de la royauté* [Léopard d’or, 1989], 54), but this formulation appears flawed to me. Distinction and separation are not in fact synonyms. Temporal power and spiritual authority can be distinguished within a traditional society even if they are not separate. The sacred, likewise, can only be truly expressed and grasped if it is accompanied by a profane zone that is simultaneously distinct from it and connected with it.

[29]. For his part, Guénon feels that “the two powers originally did not exist with the status of separate duties exercised by different individuals,” and that, “to the contrary, they should both have been held within the common principle that gave them birth and of which they merely represented two indivisible aspects.” These remarks makes his subsequent reasoning somewhat paradoxical.

[30]. For more see Jean-Paul Allard, “La royauté wotanique des Germains,” in *Études indo-européennes* (January 1982), 66–83, and (April 1982), 31–57. Also see Otto Höffler, *Germanisches Sakralkönigtum, I: Der Runenstein von Rök und die germanische Individualweihe* (Tubingen, 1952).

[31]. The oldest name for king among the German peoples, corroborated by the old Anglo-Saxon *thiodan*, contains the same root as the word defining the “people” (*thiot-*, *thiud-*). This term was subsequently replaced by *kuningaz*, which gave birth to the modern Germanic and English names (*König*, *king*, *koning*, *konge*, and so forth). The Germanic root *kun-* is connected to the Indo-Europeean root *gen-*, that can be seen in the Latin *genus* and the Greek *genos*. Etymologically speaking, *kuningaz* therefore means “one belonging to the lineage” (**kunja-* meaning “race” or “lineage”).

[32]. “Wotanic” royalty therefore seems to be directly connected to the migrations characteristic of the Great Invasions. The Saxons, as long as they remained inhabitants of the continent, did not have a king.

[33]. Art. Cit., I, p 77.

[34]. *Le temps des cathedrales. L’art et la société, 980-1420* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 21–22.

[35]. I should also mention here the famous doctrine of “the king’s two bodies,” to which Ernst Kantorowicz devoted a large book translated into French thirty years later (*Les deux corps du roi* [Paris: Gallimard, 1989]). First set forth in Elizabethan England, then in that of the Stuarts, during the sixteenth century by the legists of the Crown, this doctrine makes the sovereign a “Gemini” individual. “The king consists of two bodies, that is to say a natural body and a political body. His natural body, considered by itself, is a mortal body subject to all the infirmities it is heir to by nature or by accident. [...] But his political body is a body that cannot be seen or touched, consisting of one political society and one government, and formed for the guidance of the people and the administration of the public body, and this body is entirely free of childhood and old age, and all other natural defects and weaknesses to which the natural body is exposed, and for this reason, what the king does in his political body cannot be made invalid or annulled by any failing of his natural body.” The two bodies, one temporal, the other spiritual, are indivisibly united and can only be parted by death, which only affects one of them. Here can be seen a new formulation of the old dual formula: one whole comprised of two unequal halves. Kantorowicz shows that this doctrine is the culmination of an entire line of thought, first formulated in a purely theological manner (the duality of the royal body reflects the duality of Christ’s nature, who was both a real man and a real God, the sovereign being then considered as the “vicar of God”), and then introduced into law in the twelfth century. The law itself became increasingly sacralized in which the king became a sacred figure no longer because of his similarity to Christ but because he represented “living justice” and the “animation of the law.” In its final stage, the political and moral body of the sovereign—the “corporation” that he forms

with his kingdom, of which he is the leader and his subjects the members—becomes the equivalent of the spiritual and mystical body of the Church, thereby transforming itself into a secular *corpus mysticum*. The doctrine of the “two bodies of the king” denotes in this sense the beginning of the secularization of the political theology of the Middle Ages.

[36] Epistle 12, translated in J. H. Robinson, *Readings in European History* (Boston: Ginn, 1905), 72–73.

[37]. *Essais sur l'individualisme. Une perspective anthropologique sur l'idéologie moderne* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1983), 52–53.

[38]. *Ibid.*, 54.

[39]. *Ibid.*, 76–7.

[40]. Or as it is now commonly stated: “What God is to Heaven, the Emperor is to the Earth.” Through his mystical union with God, the emperor is creator (and not merely the preserver) of law on the earth, which makes him both the father and son of justice. Frederick II of Hohenstaufen resorted to the doctrine known as that of the “two luminaries,” which incorporates respectively the papacy and the Empire to the moon and Sun, planetary bodies which being created by God, are not totally independent of each other but whose orbits do not interfere with one another.

[41]. In the majority of Indian tales recounting the struggles of Brahmins versus Kshatriyas, the motive of the fight is never to gain possession of the other's function. For example, in the famous legend that depicts the extermination of the Kshatriya by the Brahmin Paracurâma, the victor makes no attempt to replace his adversaries or rule in their stead.

[42]. The triad “thought-word-action” is constantly mentioned in the Vedas as well as in the Avesta, which confirms that this enumeration comes from times of the greatest antiquity. It is expressed in a hierarchical perspective with no break of continuity.

Source: *TYR: Myth, Culture, Tradition*, vol. 3 (Atlanta: Ultra, 2007–2008).