



TRADITIONAL MARTINIST ORDER

ORATORY SECTION

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LESSON SEVEN

"It is not the head which is necessary to advance in Truth; it is the heart."



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CONCURRENCE

In her book entitled *Medieval Initiation – Philosophy in the XII century*, Marie-Madeleine Davy, describes the theory of Joachim of Fiore, according to whom the history of the world is founded on three characteristic Eras. Since this theme is part of the study of the day, we offer to you a quotation extracted from this book.

According to Joachim, the three great epochs of history correspond to the Trinity. The age of the Father and of the Son precedes that of the Holy Spirit, which coincides with the new times. What are the particular features of this time inspired by Spirit? The Church will experience terror, a kind of panic before the "new men and women." These men and women, moved by the Holy Spirit, will be able to provide guidance.

After the inflexible law of the Old Testament (age of the Father), there was "the middle age" (age of the Son) as an intermediate period attributed to the Roman Church. These first two ages are rigid and the pessimistic vision that infuses them causes sadness. Joachim's universe undergoes a movement of perfection. There is not misfortune and misery awaiting the men and women inspired by the last age, but joy for everything will be transfigured by the Holy Spirit. According to Joachim of Fiore, it seems that these three ages take place inevitably, regardless of the response of humanity to God, without taking in consideration one's sins or repentance.

Marie-Madeleine Day (1903-1988)



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THE CYCLES ACCORDING TO WESTERN TRADITION

Dear Initiate,

I greet you before the Luminaries of the Traditional Martinist Order!

In the previous monograph, we saw that in the Eastern Tradition time is considered as having a circular character and is divided in cycles of various lengths. We also saw that it is possible to establish a connection between the four Yugas of Hinduism and the four Ages of the Western Tradition. It is precisely the study of these four Ages that we will undertake today.

In the Western Tradition, humanity is considered to evolve following cycles that are more or less linear and that integrate four successive Ages. These are the Golden Age, the Silver Age, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age. According to this principle, what is commonly called the *beginning of time* corresponds to the Golden Age. During this Adamic period, Humanity's nature was purely spiritual and Humanity lived in the bosom of the Divine Immensity, beside the Creator. Then came the Fall and with it, the end of the Golden Age. The Judeo-Christian tradition gives a particular version of this event in the *Book of Genesis*. According to this biblical account, the Fall of Humanity took place in many steps and is still continuing today. Regarding this, we can say that the history of humanity is the story of its descent into matter and its subsequent rise toward Divinity.

We know that the Greeks drew the essential elements of their cosmogony and their myths from the Egyptian tradition. Evidently, they adapted this tradition to their mentality and colored it with poetry. It is at the dawn of the eighth century BCE with Homer, in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, that there appeared one of the first philosophical approaches to time. Later, Hesiod, a contemporary of Homer, presented the story of the creation of the world and the birth of the Greek gods in his famous book *The Theogony*. We generally consider that the Greek Tradition owes its mythological conception of the universe to this great philosopher and poet. In *The Works and Days*, another important work, he presents the most precise text of all Greek literature on the four successive Ages that govern the evolution of humanity. Because of its importance, it seems useful here to cite a long excerpt from this work:

First of all the deathless gods who dwell on Olympus made a golden race of mortal men who lived in the time of Cronos when he was reigning in heaven. And they lived like gods without sorrow of heart, remote and free from toil and grief: miserable age rested not on them; but with legs and arms never failing they made merry with feasting beyond the reach of all evils. When



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they died, it was as though they were overcome with sleep, and they had all good things; for the fruitful earth unforced bare them fruit abundantly and without stint. They dwelt in ease and peace upon their lands with many good things, rich in flocks and loved by the blessed gods.

But after earth had covered this generation -- they are called pure spirits dwelling on the earth, and are kindly, delivering from harm, and guardians of mortal men; for they roam everywhere over the earth, clothed in mist and keep watch on judgments and cruel deeds, givers of wealth; for this royal right also they received; -- then they who dwell on Olympus made a second generation which was of silver and less noble by far. It was like the golden race neither in body nor in spirit. A child was brought up at his good mother's side an hundred years, an utter simpleton, playing childishly in his own home. But when they were full grown and were come to the full measure of their prime, they lived only a little time in sorrow because of their foolishness, for they could not keep from sinning and from wronging one another, nor would they serve the immortals, nor sacrifice on the holy altars of the blessed ones as it is right for men to do wherever they dwell. Then Zeus the son of Cronos was angry and put them away, because they would not give honor to the blessed gods who live on Olympus.

But when earth had covered this generation also -- they are called blessed spirits of the underworld by men, and, though they are of second order, yet honor attends them also -- Zeus the Father made a third generation of mortal men, a brazen race, sprung from ash-trees (4); and it was in no way equal to the silver age, but was terrible and strong. They loved the lamentable works of Ares and deeds of violence; they ate no bread, but were hard of heart like adamant, fearful men. Great was their strength and unconquerable the arms which grew from their shoulders on their strong limbs. Their armor was of bronze, and their houses of bronze, and of bronze were their implements: there was no black iron. These were destroyed by their own hands and passed to the dank house of chill Hades, and left no name: terrible though they were, black Death seized them, and they left the bright light of the sun.

But when earth had covered this generation also, Zeus the son of Cronos made yet another, the fourth, upon the fruitful earth, which was nobler and more righteous, a god-like race of hero-men who are called demi-gods, the race before our own, throughout the boundless earth. Grim war and dread battle destroyed a part of them, some in the land of Cadmus at seven-gated Thebe when they fought for the flocks of Oedipus, and some, when it had brought them in ships over the great sea gulf to Troy for rich-haired Helen's sake: there death's end enshrouded a part of them. But to the others father Zeus the son of Cronos gave a living and an abode apart from men, and made them dwell at the ends of earth. And they live untouched by sorrow in the islands of the blessed along the shore of deep swirling Ocean, happy heroes for whom the grain-



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giving earth bears honey-sweet fruit flourishing thrice a year, far from the deathless gods, and Cronos rules over them for the father of men and gods released him from his bonds. And these last equally have honor and glory.

And again far-seeing Zeus made yet another generation, the fifth, of men who are upon the bounteous earth. Thereafter, would that I were not among the men of the fifth generation, but either had died before or been born afterwards. For now truly is a race of iron, and men never rest from labor and sorrow by day, and from perishing by night; and the gods shall lay sore trouble upon them. But, notwithstanding, even these shall have some good mingled with their evils. And Zeus will destroy this race of mortal men also when they come to have grey hair on the temples at their birth. The father will not agree with his children, nor the children with their father, nor guest with his host, nor comrade with comrade; nor will brother be dear to brother as aforetime. Men will dishonor their parents as they grow quickly old, and will carp at them, chiding them with bitter words, hard-hearted they, not knowing the fear of the gods. They will not repay their aged parents the cost their nurture, for might shall be their right: and one man will sack another's city. There will be no favor for the man who keeps his oath or for the just or for the good; but rather men will praise the evildoer and his violent dealing. Strength will be right and reverence will cease to be; and the wicked will hurt the worthy man, speaking false words against him, and will swear an oath upon them. Envy, foul-mouthed, delighting in evil, with scowling face, will go along with wretched men one and all. And then Aidos and Nemesis, with their sweet forms wrapped in white robes, will go from the wide-pathed earth and forsake mankind to join the company of the deathless gods: and bitter sorrows will be left for mortal men, and there will be no help against evil.

As you may have noticed when reading this text, Hesiod spoke about a first race, the golden race and then evoked the silver race, the bronze race, and the iron race. These four races correspond respectively to the Golden Age, the Silver Age, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age. We can compare the Golden Age to the Terrestrial Paradise, the Silver and Bronze Ages to Proto-History, and the Iron Age to History since the emergence of writing. The text of Hesiod refers also to the presence of the famous Age of Heroes between the third and the fourth Age. For the Greeks, heroes resulted from the union of gods or goddesses with mortals. As such, they represented the link between Divinity and humanity. Among the most famous, we can cite Heracles, Theseus, Perseus, Achilles, and Ulysses. From all evidence, they are linked to a mythical time and not to an actual cycle of humanity.



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You will also note that Hesiod's description of the Iron Age is rather negative, even apocalyptic. In spirit, it corresponds to the description of the Kali-Yuga made by the Rishis of India, which we considered in the previous monograph. Again, it is difficult to make the distinction between the symbolic nature of the events described and their prophetic aspects. The way to do this consists of making this topic the object of profound reflection and regular meditation. As Martinists, also remember that we do not need to be fatalistic about the future of the world because humans have free will on the individual, as well as on the collective plane.

Independent from the writings of Hesiod, the Pythagorean *Tetraktys* may be considered the metaphysical model of the chronological succession of the Four Ages. According to this theory, the Golden Age has a duration of 25,920 years and corresponds to the 4 of the Tetraktys; the Silver Age has a duration of 19,440 years and corresponds to the 3; the Bronze Age has a duration of 12,960 years and corresponds to the 2; and the Iron Age has a duration of 6,480 years and corresponds to the 1. We can therefore observe a decreasing order of the Four Ages following the Tetraktys of Pythagoras (4-3-2-1). Also note that the sum of these Four Ages is 64,800, which is the duration of a Hindu Mahayuga.

After Hesiod, Plato gave the most coherent account of the Greek conception of the Four Ages in the fifth century BCE. In the *Statesman* (sections 271-272), he described the Golden Age at length. After having evoked the fact that during this period humans communicated freely with Nature, he indicated that, "...*God was their shepherd, watching over them*" (271e). Later, he also added: "*That, Socrates, was the life of men in the reign of Cronus; but the life of the present age, which is said to be the age of Zeus, you know by your own experience. Would you be able and willing to decide which of them is the more blessed?*" (272b). Later in the text, he gave the following clarification: "... *it would be easy to decide that the people of those old times were immeasurably happier than those of our epoch.*" (272c). Again in the *Statesman*, it is interesting to note what Plato said about the catastrophic end of the Golden Age: "...*then the helmsman of the universe dropped the tiller and withdrew to his place of outlook, and fate and innate desire made the earth turn backwards. So, too, all the gods who share, each in his own sphere, the rule of the Supreme Spirit, promptly perceiving what was taking place, let go the parts of the world which were under their care.*" (272e). From a symbolic point of view, this underlines the process that humanity has followed in its isolation from the original State as well as the cyclical character of its evolution. We will have the occasion to revisit this point in the next monograph.

With regard to Martinism, it is interesting to compare the notion of the Ages, as defined in Greek mythology, with the concept of the Fall, as described in religious works, such as the Old Testament. Such a comparison allows us to deduce that the end of the Golden Age, that is, the



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Fall, corresponds in Greek mythology to the war that the young Zeus fought against his father, Cronos, and his uncles, the Titans, with the help of the infernal powers. This war was followed by the exile of Cronos. We therefore see that the fundamental idea of a primordial Chaos is present in some form in all traditional or mythological texts.

The notion of the Four Ages not only belongs to the philosophers of ancient Greece; it was also known by the prophets of the Old Testament. Daniel evoked it in the visions that allowed him to interpret the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. A great statue appeared in his visions and was described in the *Book of Daniel* (2:32-34): "*The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay.*" This description expresses the knowledge the prophet had of the division of the Four Ages of the cycles governing the evolution of humanity, such as the Greeks and the Hindus knew them.

Before closing the study of this monograph, it seems important to also mention the theory of Joachim of Fiore, an Italian monk who lived in the Middle Ages, in the twelfth century. He developed the theory that the history of the world would unfold in three Eras: the first – the era of the Father – began with Adam, according to Joachim. The second – the era of the Son – was initiated by Jesus Christ. The third – the era of the Holy Spirit – would be marked by the appearance of a new religion replacing the religion of Peter. According to Joachim of Fiore, this new religion will be a kind of mystical Church. Even though this theory was condemned in 1215 during the fourth Lateran Council, it was well accepted in the sixteenth century and was very popular. Many thought that the Era of the Holy Spirit was near. It is therefore not surprising that the famous Rosicrucian, Simon Studion, referred to it many times in his masterwork *Naometria* or *The Art of Measuring the Temple*. We can also note that the Rosicrucian Manifestos of the seventeenth century would refer to this theory, among others.

May you ever dwell in the Eternal Light of Divine Wisdom!



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PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The Four Ages according to the Greek Tradition:

- Golden Age (Terrestrial Paradise): 25,920 years
- Silver Age (Proto-History): 19,440 years
- Bronze Age (Proto-History): 12,960 years
- Iron Age (History): 6,480 years Total
64,800 years
(Hindu Mahayuga)

Pythagorean Tetraktys

- Golden Age = 25,920 (6,480 x 4) → 4
- Silver Age = 19,440 (6,480 x 3) → 3
- Bronze Age = 12,960 (6,480 x 2) → 2
- Iron Age = 6,480 (6,480 x 1) → 1



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SUMMARY

After carefully studying this monograph, read the following summary. It contains the major points that you may want to reflect and meditate on during the coming days. If you have trouble understanding one of the points, return to the explanations given in the monograph. Immerse yourself in learning the points covered in this summary before proceeding with the study of the next monograph.

- In the Western Tradition, humanity is considered to evolve following cycles that are linear and that integrate four successive Ages, which are the Golden Age, the Silver Age, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age.
- It is at the dawn of the eighth century BCE, with Homer, in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* that a first philosophical approach to time appeared.
- We can compare the Golden Age to the Terrestrial Paradise, the Silver and Bronze Ages to Proto-History, and the Iron Age to History, since the emergence of writing.
- The Pythagorean Tetraktys can be considered the metaphysical model of the chronological succession of the four Ages. According to this theory, the Golden Age corresponds to the 4 of the Tetraktys, the Silver Age to the 3, the Bronze Age to the 2, and the Iron Age to the 1.
- The Golden Age has a duration of 25,920 years, the Silver Age has 19,440 years, the Bronze Age has 12,960 years and the Iron Age has 6,480 years. The sum of these four Ages is 64,800 years, which is the duration of a Hindu Mahayuga.
- With regard to Martinism, it is interesting to compare the notion of the Ages, as defined in Greek mythology, with the concept of the Fall, as described in religious works, such as the Old Testament.
- Joachim of Fiore, an Italian monk who lived in the twelfth century, developed the theory that the history of the world would unfold in three Eras: the era of the Father, the era of the Son, and the era of the Holy Spirit. The Rosicrucian Manifestos of the seventeenth century would refer to this theory, among others.

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