

European Culture and Identity Between Crisis and Tradition: the Conservative Continental Discourse of the XX - Early XXI Centuries

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ABSTRACT

The article addresses the contemporary crisis of European culture and identity and focuses on three answers to this crisis that were given by conservative continental discourse during the past hundred years. First, we take a look at the idea of the "Faustian" culture proposed by O. Spengler and shared by E. Jünger of the interbellum period and other writers of the German "Conservative revolution" in the 1920s. Then we expand our search beyond the theory of "Germanic roots" and study the trend of deriving the European identity from Homeric legacy, presented in particular by D. Venner. Finally, we examine the perennialists' idea of the integral tradition which is supposed to be the origin of particular historical traditions as it is formulated in the works of R. Guénon, J. Evola and F. Schuon. Our research follows the methods of discursive analysis, history of philosophy, philosophy of history, comparative, socio-philosophical and culture studies.

Keywords: communication, conservatism, crises, culture, Europe, identity, modernity, tradition

I. INTRODUCTION

In the era of the regularly proclaimed death of the subject and object-oriented ontologies, it becomes more and more problematic to raise the question of one's identity. However, does self-identity mean so little to us to finally abandon this question as such?

The modern crisis of classical identity finds theoretical expression in various projects of dynamic (temporal) identity, when my "I" is like a suit or dress waiting among other suits and dresses from which every morning I choose myself before leaving the house. The choice of oneself corresponds to the choice of a performance, and whether this choice is preceded by a certain identity remains hidden behind an impenetrable veil of mystery. Another possible option is multiple identity, suggested, for example, by the models of "schizosubjectiveness" [1] or "identity etcetera" [2].

The prototype of the idea of a dynamically changing identity, and with it the system of our preferences and values, was proposed by F. Nietzsche, when he defined value as an expression of increase and decrease of power. Analyzing the prerequisites and consequences of the phenomenon of "death of God" described by F. Nietzsche, M. Heidegger characterizes value as

viewpoint, "the point of sight" [3].

The point of sight can change. However, the change of identities cannot be completely arbitrary. The transition from one identity to another presupposes the presence of already predetermined identities and, possibly, some existing set of tools for constructing a new identity. Slipping into the "identity etcetera" also needs a certain set of given identities, to which we attribute the ellipsis "..." in order to declare in it, in this ellipsis, as J. Butler suggests, we are more than any member of our series or even a combination of them.

Today the main problem of self-identity is, first of all, not how we should bring ourselves (and our self-realization) in accordance with ourselves, which was thought to be the main task for a person of past eras, but the search for an answer to the question of what the self *is*, what exactly should we attribute our identity to, and does such a "self" exist at all. On the one hand, such a situation certainly presupposes greater freedom and openness for the creative construction of one's own subjectivity [4]. On the other hand, we are forced to admit that, rocking on the waves of "fluid modernity" [5], in fact, we don't always have with the opportunity, ability, or simply feel the desire for creative self-construction. In addition, along with the growth of uncertainty, we are more and more captured by the existential confusion, the fear of being *something wrong* or not being *at least something*, and the anxiety

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caused by the incessant chase of the wandering lights, so often promising, but so rarely giving us gifts that would not have turned from gold into shards of clay the moment a new wandering light looms somewhere ahead.

If we acknowledged the present crisis of identity, our next task would be to make the correct diagnosis. The task is not easy because the "crisis" manifests itself in a multitude of symptoms, many of which may seem very beneficial to some. It is also worthwhile to assume that behind this complex and multidimensional phenomenon an equally complex tangle of causes lays, and, therefore, the diagnosis should also be complex and multidimensional. To omit any of the essential sources is as dramatic as it is to mistakenly include an extra reason that has no real relationship to the problem or does not exist at all. With the latter assumption, we come to another question: can all fundamentally significant factors in this issue be empirically verified or logically explicated? And if we are ready to doubt this, can we afford to restrict ourselves to a positivist attitude and won't our eye mislead the hand gripping Occam's razor?

One of the logical conclusions that we could draw, having recognized the existing state of identity as a crisis, would be the assumption that the loss of former stability of the projects of self-identification comes from the weakening or even vanishing of the rhythms of regular reproduction of identity. That is, behind the certainty of identities there was a long duration of continuity, and this continuity became thinner or was cut off.

II. GOING BACKWARDS IN SEARCH OF THE "TRUE ORIGIN"

Why are we talking about a crisis of European identity? In addition to the fact that this issue cannot but worry many Europeans, one should take into account the historical influence of Europe on other cultural and political spaces, as well as the fact that to this day Europe as a geopolitical player (though it does not have the role that it played until the end of World War II) still did not leave the world arena. The fate of Europe also concerns Russia. We also note the fact that despite the widespread trends of detraditionalization [6], most of the "big" non-European identities do not know such a crisis, and if they do, then, as a rule, on a much smaller scale. And where this crisis is also observed, it is most often a reaction to the European crisis.

If this crisis is based on a discontinuity, then it is quite reasonable that one of the most obvious remedies is seen by many in restoring the "connecting thread", that is, in returning to a legacy that seems to have ceased to be inherited.

Let us make a reservation right away that in this study we will consider the answers proposed by primarily the thinkers of *continental* Europe. Foggy Albion, as it was repeatedly pointed out, in particular, by Carl Schmitt [7], since the era of the industrial revolution, being a part of Europe, at the same time opposed the continent as a bearer of a special British destiny.

We will also limit the chronological framework to the period of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, since, despite the fact that many authors of previous eras - from Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre to Louis-Gabriel-Ambroise de Bonald and Juan Donoso Cortés - acted as the heralds of the coming crisis, it was in the 20th century that the fact of changes in the self-consciousness of the European became obvious to almost every social theorist.

Where do the representatives of conservative thought in continental Europe suggest to look for the origins of European identity? How deeply into the past can we dig so that we can say: "yes, it's still *us*"? And at the same time, how not to be confused by the breakdowns and catastrophes in European history, which, as it might seem, should irrevocably change what we would call by the term "soul", which is quite unpopular today, - the European soul?

Europe after the World War II is a completely different Europe, and in a certain sense, after this bloody and catastrophic milestone, its new history begins. In this regard Dominique Venner writes about the trauma from which Europe has not yet recovered [8]. Isn't the post-war European a completely different person? Does it make sense to look for the roots of his identity in the pre-war period? However, Venner believes that even after the trauma of two world wars, the Holocaust and Hiroshima, European identity has not been lost forever. Europe is "asleep", it went into this dream, fleeing the horror, which in many ways it gave rise itself, but unlike philosophers who prefer to part with the "ghosts" of the past in order to move forward, Venner and his associates believe that the memory of the past is still alive, and, moreover, only through appeal to it can the future of the European as a European be ensured. According to Alain de Benoist [9], the key for a rebirth of the lost legacy demands a positive rethinking of collective identity, the principles of "serving the people", the rehabilitation of politics that should be freed from serving the economy (and above all the market) and the principles of a multipolar world, which would ensure the right of each pole to its logic, its traditions and its identity.

For representatives of the Conservative Revolution in Germany in the 1920s the turning point is 1918, the year of the end of the First World War, a crushing defeat for Germany and the humiliating, in the opinion

of the Germans, terms of the Peace Treaty of Versailles of 1919.

But the war of 1914-1918 and its "fruits" have changed not only Germany, but the whole of Europe. First of all, the war itself has changed, its new face is a "technical battle", as Ernst Jünger defines it, in which the military will is opposed not to the will of another warrior, but to technology [10]. In this war, the "soldier" almost completely replaces the "knight". But the technical battle is just one of the manifestations of the new world - the world of machines and machine energy.

Although 1918 becomes in some way a "point of no return", the basis for the future, from the point of view of most authors of this trend, cannot be found exclusively in the future itself. But this does not mean a return to Kaiser's Germany, which is no longer possible, but a movement forward, which should be supported not by the life of the recent past, but by values and ideals related, rather, to the eternal plan, or, as, for example, Edgar Julius Jung believes, by the restoration of respect for all those elementary laws and values, without which a person loses connection with nature and God and cannot set up a proper way of existence [11].

Looking even further into the past one could take the French Revolution of 1879 for the historical line from which the identity of the modern European emerges, as many representatives of the liberal discourse do. However, is it necessary to specifically note that for the conservative thought we are studying, the Enlightenment and the "ideas of 1789" are midwives of the new socio-political and cultural order, which eventually gave rise to the existing crisis? The revolution itself seems to be either a stage of degradation, or a divine punishment for the "abominations of the Enlightenment", as J. de Maistre believed. According to Charles Maurras considering France as "a liberator" is a dangerous delusion. Its *liberté* in fact turned out as an assertion of freedom not only from the laws of the state, but also from the laws of the natural order and reason (since nature and reason are hierarchical, and reason, at the same time, is "sensitive" to natural differences). Its *égalité* shows itself as the power of not all, but the majority, that is, the "lowest elements of the nation" ("the least energetic producers" and "the most greedy consumers"). And, finally, its *fraternité* becomes a cosmopolitan brotherhood with "strangers" with irreconcilable hostility to "neighbors", if the latter do not agree with this principle [12]. Consequently, the true ancestral source of the European should be sought in the times preceding the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, and precisely in what which was erased and discarded by them as a relict and prejudice.

In addition, let's mention that even the new mentality triumphed after the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment and bourgeois revolutions - with its belief in progress, the intrinsic value of the individual personality, the omnipotence of reason, etc. - for many conservative authors, is a late product of the European spirit - the Faustian soul in Oswald Spengler, or the Abrahamic component that was once included in it while it is not native to Europe and born under the scorching sun of the desert, as it is viewed by A. de Benoist [13] and D. Venner [14].

As it becomes obvious from what was said earlier, we intend to leave out of the brackets of our consideration conservatism, speculating about continuity on the scale of a couple of decades or even several centuries. First of all, we will be interested in views, according to which, searching for the answer to the question "what does it mean to be a European?", we must try to dive into deeper levels of historical and cultural commonness and, as possible, seek the very mother bosom of the European tradition. And the considered conservative thinkers of the 20th and early 21st centuries, highlighting the possible roots of European identity in the darkness of times with their - sometimes very politically engaged - intellect, give us at least three different answers.

III. FAUST'S CULTURE AT THE DUSK OF THE WEST

The first of the answers deduces the true European identity from Germanness, from what O. Spengler calls the Faustian soul. Each "high" (historical) culture, according to Spengler, grows out of its own unique prime symbol, that "does not actualize itself; it is operative through the form-sense of every man, every community, age and epoch and dictates the style of every life-expression." [15] The prime symbol manifests itself in how living existence catches the cosmic *tact* and acts and creates in accordance with it. Later, when being (the stage of culture, the "body of soul") is replaced by waking-being (the stage of civilization, "the mummy of soul") with its inherent desire for systematization and rationalization, this prime symbol will become the basis of thought, but will gradually outlive itself as the basis of action. Not only high cultures are deeply individual, but so are the representatives of them. "In the last resort every individual man and every individual moment of his existence have their own race," writes Spengler [16]. However, representatives of high culture are united by a common soul and unity of destiny, despite all their individual characteristics, and this destiny is also based on the prime symbol of their culture.

Unlike, for example, the passive Apollonian, Indian or Russian souls, the Faustian soul, according to Spengler, is an expression of an active life principle, it

is characterized not by mental statics, as, say, the Apollonian soul, whose prime symbol is a limited, self-contained material Body, but dynamics. Its primordial symbol is "infinitely profound three-dimensional Space" [17], in which, however, there is a horizon. This horizon constantly attracts the Western soul, but, typically for the horizon, it constantly runs away from a person. Infinity assumes the will, which is the core of this soul. "Passion of the third dimension" - this is how Spengler calls the will of a Western person [18]. "Will" as a "structural myth" of the Western European soul is closely intertwined with the myths of "Force" and "Deed" [19]. What should this Force be directed to, what should this Deed serve? Faustian man is historical in the sense that he seeks to know history and become its subject, he aims "at carrying on a life that emerged long before him and will draw to its end long after him" [20]. If, suppose, the existence of an Indian is absolutely ahistoric "stirrings of a sleeper", and his life is life as "a dream", then his history turns out to be the history that "happened". Western history is, first of all, "a willed history" [21]. And this will, as Spengler believes, is intrinsically inherent in what he calls "the primitive feeling of Care" [22]. Thus for Spengler socialism, understood, above all else, as a complex of not rights, but responsibilities and expression of the principle of caring for the whole to which you belong (state, people, etc.), is a sunset reflection of the Western, Faustian soul. And if a European wills, then in his autumn hour this will, in accordance with his destiny, is the will for socialism and the welfare of the people and the state as "the body of the people." What turns out to be the center of application of power, and the main focus of goals? It is shared being, shared with those like you, rooted in the past and aspiring to the "eternal tomorrow", our common homeland. The homeland for the Faustian man, in contrast, for example, to the Apollonian man, is not "earth", but "country" [23], this, as it turns out, is one of the main characteristics of the identity of the Faustian European, as Spengler imagines it.

However, Europe (both of Spengler's and our time), with all its commonness, is not homogeneous. When communities, through participation in which a person's identity is defined, mean nations, is there any sense in talking about the common that does not divide, but connects European peoples? Yes, such a talk may be irrelevant in relation to certain periods and issues, when to talk about "general" means to betray "ours". But it is potentially possible in this theoretical model as well, and it can be actualized in the face of a common tragedy or a common challenge.

It is obvious that, according to the considered approach, the cultural border of Europe (in faustian style) does not coincide with its geographical borders. And at the same time, while Spengler calls communist Russia, which was born in the body of the still

becoming Russian culture, "*the Tatar horde*", many thinkers of the conservative revolution who are generally consonant with him, for example, Arthur Mähler van den Bruck, sympathize with Russia. Young peoples, as it follows from his reasoning, should unite against the West (around, of course, Germany), while accepting the achievements of rationalistic Western civilization and giving them to even more "young" peoples, so they can have a beneficial effect on the latter. At the same time they could again learn "unconditional spirituality" from younger peoples (as Mähler van den Bruck believes in the 1910s [24]).

However, for Spengler, such a cultural exchange does not seem promising, and in fact, even possible. Faustian culture – as well as any other - is not capable of adequate reception of other cultures and artifacts created by them. Spengler fundamentally rejects the historical division "Ancient world - Middle Ages - Modern time", which has been established since the Enlightenment, because of its linear-progressive logic, but also because of the idea of continuity between the Ancient and Medieval "civilizations". Faustian man can perceive the achievements of another high culture - in this case Apollonian - only superficially [25]. What a person of a different cultural soul-image actually put into them remains hidden for us, we do not discover another culture, but rather re-create it - based on the world-picture, born of our own prime symbol. Such a thought allowed Spengler to defend the "Westernness" of European civilization, despite the historical "influences" of the East: for example, Christianity, being, in his opinion, a product of the Arab-Byzantine magic soul, was not perceived by the medieval Faustian soul in its original form, but underwent transformation in accordance with the prime symbol of Western culture. But at the same time, this approach limits any search for European identity, if in this search we go beyond the boundaries of Germanism and combine an enthusiastic reading of Goethe, for example, with an equally inspiring reading of Homer. This broader perspective, where representatives of other nations as heirs of a single European tradition stand alongside the "Germans", will be pictured now.

IV. AB HOMERE: THE AED OF PAN-EUROPEAN CULTURE AND IDENTITY

We can find an attempt to deduce European civilization from Greco-Roman antiquity in a variety of authors, however, there are those among them who use this line of succession in order not to "deeply root" the principles of democracy, rationalism and even secularity, but, on the contrary, relying on the Greeks and Romans, to oppose the Enlightenment, the ideals of 1789, the bourgeois "power of money" and the modern "nihilism" spawned by them. With certain reservations we can relate to such thinkers, in particular, Ch.

Maurras, who links Athens, Rome and Versailles into a single chain of traditions [26]. The ancient heritage brought the French - and through them the rest of Europe - "law, reason, order, taste, mental, moral and aesthetic discipline" [27]. However, the continuity of tradition for Maurras must be critical "since without thought the past is dead" and so "tradition is not the inertia of the past." [28] As for those phenomena in Europe, which do not coincide with the heritage of Athens and Rome, including parliamentarism (the electoral system is "the daughter of public opinion, which is bought with gold" and "the granddaughter of this gold" [29]), individualism (putting the interests of a person above the interests of his nation), romanticism, Christianity of "sensual emotions" (as opposed to "civilized Christianity"), etc., he attributes them to the result of the spiritual influences of the "dark north" or other, not at all northern, cultures and puts them outside the brackets of the ideal of "perfect humankind".

Spengler's idea that European identity as such can be derived primarily from Germanic roots may seem at least ambiguous to many Europeans. The situation is similar if we derive Europeanness solely from Greek antiquity. Therefore, it is required to present the ancient Greeks not as the only source of the "true European", but as the spokesmen of common principles shared by different European cultures. D. Venner, in particular, is trying to follow this path.

According to him, Europeans, unlike many other cultures, do not have their own sacred books. The Bible is not a product of the European spirit. The foundation of this spirit must therefore be sought not in religious texts, but in poetry, from which the cosmos of the European is born. According to Venner, we can derive the spirit and basic principles of the European tradition from Homer's poems. Celts, Germans, Latins and Slavs share the common heritage, and its main principles can be found in the Iliad and the Odyssey [30]. What are the basic principles of this tradition? According to Venner, there are three of them: nature as a foundation, excellence as a goal, and beauty as a horizon.

As he believes, European identity goes back 30,000 years. The first traces of future Europeans, in his opinion, are captured in animalistic cave paintings of religious content, specific only to Europe, dating back to the period from 32 to 12 thousand years BC, and widely represented from the Pyrenees to the Urals. These drawings already show the characteristic features of the European tradition as a whole: this is a respectful, inclusive attitude to nature, the continuation of which is a person, its consecration, the principle of competitiveness-struggle, and a specific aesthetic experience of the surrounding reality [31]. Following Georges Dumézil, Venner notes the common inherent correspondence between the three-functional cosmic principle and three main social functions: (1) the

function of knowledge and supreme power, (2) the function of maintaining the first function by military force, (3) the function of ensuring fertility in all its forms [32]. Venner also shares Dumézil's ideas about the specific features of European city-states that distinguish them from Eastern despotism. These are, first of all, the supremacy of male deities, the understanding of the destiny of women in tragic way, patriarchal and feudal social order, which essentially makes it an example of "organic" or "authoritarian" democracy, as well as ideas of the "fundamental freedoms" shared by people in these societies.

And all these features are already present in the poetic legacy of Homer. The gods in his poems, on the one hand, are allegories of nature, destiny and human feelings. But, on the other hand, we should not belittle and secularize the numinosity of Homer's cosmos because of this allegorality. In the vision of the Iliad and the Odyssey nature does not resemble positivist's nature as it is alive, sacred and divine. A similar situation is with destiny, which is not a simple abstraction or a set of events that befell a person, but first of all, the man's task, which arises from his involvement in sacred nature. And human feelings are not only mentally and physiologically conditioned reactions to what is happening; through allegorical expression in divine figures, they appear to be reflections of principles ontologically or even metaphysically included into the cosmic order.

And in this Homeric space, the human destiny is revealed to us, first of all, in his *heroes*, on whose personality Homer's poems are focused. Such attention to the personality, according to Venner, is specific to European culture from its very beginning and is not typical for most other traditions [33]. The hero's destiny lies in excelling the enemy and at the same time in excelling oneself. Destiny is extramoral, its agonism stems from *polemos*, whose status, as Heraclitus believed, is cosmic. *Polemos* is simultaneously a source of both conflicts and harmony. In the agonistic activities of a hero we also find the manifestation of excessiveness (*hybris*) which is another important European characteristic both horrifying and exciting [34]. The principle of "excellence as a goal" is not an end in itself, but rather a stimulus, thanks to which a man, in fact, becomes a hero, if he remains faithful to himself in spite of fate. The highest, culminating point of the hero's formation is associated with suffering. But this is not a passive enduring suffering, but the suffering of a struggling hero.

The perception of war in the European tradition, according to Venner, is closely related to its fatality and uncertainty of the outcome. However, in the experience of the warrior - be it a Homeric hero or a medieval knight - there is no moral condemnation of the enemy.

Harmony with the world also includes belonging to the Fatherland. Devotion to their Home exalts the characters of Homer in a special way.

The misfortune that accompanies the tragic destiny cannot be canceled, but it can be "surpassed" in beauty. "People become songs," - this is how Venner paraphrases Homer, meaning that heroic destiny serves not the hero himself, but his descendants. Becoming a part of the epic, misfortune or even vice and crime (like the act of Paris) is transferred to the dimension of beauty. Beauty for the primordial European tradition, according to Venner, is above morality; aesthetic, not moral virtues occupy the first place. The harmony that reigns between people is also beautiful, as long as they live in accordance with the order given by nature.

This pan-European tradition, which has found its crystallized embodiment in Homer's poems, manifests itself, as Venner claims, throughout the subsequent history of Europe, being the essential core of European identity. It continues to exist in the Middle Ages in parallel with the teaching of the Church and despite its formal dominance. The legacy of the blind Aed, as Venner believes, is alive to this day, representing a reliable support in the midst of all the "turmoil" and nihilism of our time.

At the same time, among the thinkers who have devoted themselves to finding and describing the earliest origins of our traditions, we find another interpretation of the role of Homer. So, according to Mircea Eliade, the "Homeric conception of the Gods and their myths that imposed itself throughout the world and that was finally fixed, as if in a timeless universe of archetypes, by the great artists of the classical period" [35], and the importance of Homer for the formation of Western European consciousness can hardly be overestimated. However, his poems were not addressed to the whole society, but to its rather narrow part - to the military and feudal aristocracy - which, apparently, predetermined the choice of mythological material, which was included in the Iliad and Odyssey, while a whole layer of ancient archetypal images remained out of Homeric frames and to a much lesser extent was included into the classical (and, above all, originally Greek) concept of the religious experience of the ancient Greeks.

The next part of our study is devoted to a brief examination of attempts to present an extremely integral vision of the sacred, which lies at the foundation of any tradition.

V. TOWARDS THE INTEGRAL TRADITION: WHAT REMAINS FOR EUROPE

Assuming the existence - and, what is important, comprehensibility - of a tradition that is universal and transcendent in nature, we cannot stop at statements

such as "all religions talk about the same thing" or "the gods of different religions are the same", which are fraught with extreme simplification and contradict the experience of representatives of various confessions. Nevertheless, we could admit that there is some common initial core, principle or set of principles, preserved under the phenomenological and doctrinal non-identity of traditions. Such an assumption we can find in perennialism that asserts that the source of genuine spirituality accessible to man lies in the *philosophia perennis*, "eternal philosophy" (for example, Oldos Huxley [36] or *religio perennis*, "eternal religion" (for example, Frithjof Schuon [37])). For René Guénon all true traditions turn out to be paths paved on the same mountain. The paths are different, but the top of the mountain is one, and it is to it that the traveler ascends, walking the path of one tradition or another. But while for a person these paths start from the foot of the mountain, the paths themselves due to their transcendental root (the symbol of an inverted tree rooted in heaven) descend from its top.

The motherly (for many Europeans) Christian tradition, understood in this way, is included in the body of a broader tradition. However, the devil is said to be in the details, and there may be different answers about how exactly this inclusion occurs. So Guido de Giorgio, presuming the unity of the Roman pre-Christian, Roman Christian and post-Roman Christian tradition, considers Christianity as a new disclosure of the innermost truth, known already by Rome [38]. But for Julius Evola, the medieval Christian civilization retains its connection with the original tradition not thanks to the "new", Christian, discovery of sacred truths, but solely thanks to what was inherited from Rome and survived in spite of its Abrahamic, church component [39].

If we return to the symbol of a mountain and many paths leading to its top, then, according to Guénon, a person has the opportunity to choose which of them to climb, because the peak is one for all these path. But, having started the ascent, he can no longer, figuratively speaking, jump from one path to another - the distance between them is too great. The transition to another tradition requires a new initiation, and in this case, we will have to start our ascent anew - from the foot of the mountain, along a new path. Meanwhile, it is reasonable to ask the question: if we assumed that the principle that lies at the core of any tradition is one, then are the doctrinal and ritual differences something secondary, and if so, can some of them be discarded and replaced by others taken from another tradition? This point of view is defended, in particular, by F. Schuon, who allows, for example, a synthesis of Sufi practices, the cult of the Virgin Mary, Hindu beliefs and rituals of North American Indians.

The tragedy of European traditional identity, if we follow the reasoning of the late Guénon, is that today the Christian tradition has lost the initiatory esoteric continuity and become reduced to religion, that is, according to Guénon, to its exoteric component – that is to a set of dogmas, external forms and moral precepts [40] – while it suffers its doctrinal disintegration. He is not satisfied with the "sentimentalism" of Christianity as well [41]. As for other possible echoes of the European tradition proper, life has completely left them [42]. However, the unity of the original tradition presupposes the possibility of communion with the "primordial truth" through initiation and immersion in another, still living tradition - for example, in one of the traditions that have survived in the East. Eastern Christianity, as Guénon believes, still retains the "continuity of the initiatory chain" in the practices of hesychasm [43]. Guénon himself, disappointed with the spiritual life of contemporary Europe, turns to Islam and joins one of the Sufi orders (*tarikats*). Many of the traditionalists of the time followed his example. And young M. Eliade is trying to find himself in the bosom of the Hindu tradition.

The historical existence of traditions, and along with them, of man, is represented as degradation in accordance with the doctrine of cycles, which lies at the basis of the traditional metaphysics of history. Modern man lives in the last of the ages (Kali-Yuga, according to Hindu teaching), characterized, among other things, by the maximum distance from the true traditional order. But different civilizations are moving along the path of decline of "genuine intellectuality" at different rates, and the European has gone further from his traditional origins than others. The vector of his "development" is exclusively material, which makes his civilization "a veritable anomaly" [44]. Modernity for Guénon and his direct followers appears as an area of inversion, anti-tradition and counter-initiation.

Traditional metaphysics, according to Guénon, recognizes of the unity of all levels of being. The world owes its existence not to "creation" in the sense that the Abrahamic religions give it, but rather to the manifestation of the divine order. Consequently, there are no gaps between different levels of being, and everything that exists in all its diversity and, above all, all its natural forms can be read as symbols of a supernatural principle. Preference is given to an apophatic judgment due to the incomprehensibility of the first, pre-cosmic principle. The role of man is determined by his intermediate position between heaven and earth; hence his mediating function comes: to serve as a conductor of the spirit in the world of manifested forms.

Since the manifestation of the transcendental principle is of a descending nature, a man of tradition receives the metaphysical truth, according to the logic

of spatial symbolism, "from above" and in turn transfers it to those who occupies the steps below on this "ladder to heaven". In addition, his actions must also correspond to the traditional principle and thereby become its manifestations, bringing the world around to a state of true order where this order has been lost, and maintaining this order where it is present. Consequently, the hierarchy is the only ontologically correct embodiment of the traditional principle in the society, and the highest role in this social hierarchy should belong to the person who, by the right of his metaphysical location, unites the roles of the king and the high priest.

J. Evola suggests that historically the first human epoch was the era of the so-called Arctic civilization (the "Golden age"), where the Uranian-heavenly principle and the solar principle of the "stationary sun" dominated. The royal role in this civilization, in his opinion, also implied the possession of the highest "Apollonian" truths, which in that era were not yet hidden from man but were intelligible to the ruler [45]. The ruler acted as a "pontiff" - a bridge connecting heaven and earth. The domination of the "priestly" principle spreads along with the establishment of the Atlantic-Southern civilization (the "Silver Age"), where the Apollonian male principle is replaced by the female, maternal and demetric one. At the same time, the value of the personal principle, understood in this epoch as illusory and requiring dissolution in the true impersonal principle, is also pushed into the background; the individual is inferior to the collective. The principle of hierarchy is replaced by equality, solar heroics is replaced by lunar humility and compassion. The truth is hidden under the veil of priestly garments. The secret, the mysterious, or, in fact, the incomprehensible occupies the place previously reigned by Apollonian clarity. Mostly agreeing with the description of the "mother's civilization" with J.J. Bachofen [46], Evola emphasizes its not original, but independent status. The Atlantic civilization is followed by the Titanic (where the gross, materialized masculine principle rebelles against the female demetric spirituality, as well as "against the brother," that is, the equal), Aphroditic (with materialization of female spirituality in the field of sensuality) and Heroic ones. In the latter, an attempt is made to return to the Uranian-solar principle and to fight the domination of both the lunar priestly spirituality and the materialized masculine and feminine principles that have departed from the spirit. This is the "Bronze Age".

In the context of this hypothesis, the heritage of Greece and Rome is inherently ambiguous: it contains, on the one hand, autochthonous Atlantic and aphroditic elements and, on the other hand, the Uranian-solar elements brought from the North. Democracy in the perspective of the described opposition is presented by Evola as "not the conquest of the Greek people", but as

a victory of the South (Asia Minor). Another Greek "child", philosophy, up to Socrates, according to Evola, keeps "alignment" with higher spirituality. But Socrates, who turned the weapon of the sophists against themselves, trying to overcome their relativism for the sake of the only truth and the common good, turns out, to be more dangerous to tradition than his opponents, whose idea of man as a "measure of all things" is only "a symptom of decline". The universal must be affirmed through an appeal to the spiritual, and not through syllogistics.

Rome for Evola appears as the last "all-time successful" attempt to resist the decline. Roman idea of "conquering virility" is revealed in the doctrine of the state (which was under aegis of Olympian deities, particularly of the sovereign and ungenerated Jupiter Capitoline, under whose aegis the state power was), the power of *autoritas* (which included social authority, reputation and status) and the principle of *imperium* (understood "not in the hegemonic and territorial sense of the world", but "in terms of power and the mystical and dreadful force of command" [47]). This is how the Roman form of the primordial traditional heritage is forged. In this form the European of subsequent eras, according to Evola, retains his belonging to the universal tradition, and thus Rome turns into a suprahistorical symbol.

The spread of Christianity, which Evola understands as the embodiment, first of all, of the feminine, lunar principle, falls on a time when the heroic principle in Rome exhausts itself. However, even later, solar forms of organization of human existence (such as the idea of the empire as *sacrum* and *pax* endowed with a supernatural meaning, as well as the sanctified ethics of personal heroism) will still find their, albeit twilight, incarnation in the Byzantine and Holy Roman Empires, Ghibelline Middle Ages and Feudal Order. The birth of nations and the nationalism, the transfer of power to the "merchant caste", the triumph of materialistic individualism mark the beginning of the "Iron Age", in which the involvement in tradition is the lot of only a few [48].

A truly traditional order implies the compliance of all social practices to a metaphysical doctrine that goes back to the transcendental principle. Cognition, morality, religious rituals without this correlation turn out to be meaningless and gradually turn into forms of anti-tradition [49]. The same is true in regard to political action: whatever its slogans are, no matter how ancient symbols are carried on flags, without the traditional metaphysical dominant, which is primary in relation to any social, economic, national interests, no political initiative can bring a man closer to traditional order. Moreover, any appeal to traditional symbols, which remains only external, will be "infected with modernity" and can become the basis for further

destruction and "overturning" of tradition, when genuine spirituality is replaced by its perverted likeness. The counter-tradition comes to replace anti-tradition (denial of tradition). A bitter disappointment awaits J. Evola, who tried to introduce a truly traditional (in his understanding) doctrinal core into existing political regimes and thereby set the latter in the direction of the "true" traditional order; and after the end of World War II, he sees the only solution for a person turned to tradition, in *apoliteia* [50] - the path of refraining from political participation, on which the main task is to preserve knowledge about traditional principles and transfer them to those who are still able to perceive them.

VI. CONCLUSION

The ideas advocated by the authors touched upon in this article, of course, are beyond the applicability of the principles of verification and falsification. However, we note that the search for cultural roots and identity is most often carried out in a plane different from the world of objective scientific knowledge, and therefore we are investigating not history, studying which we can still, although far from always, pretend to be objective, but discourses. Discursive truth is determined by the totality of premises of a particular discourse, while their truth status within a given discourse, as a rule, is not questioned. This truth may diverge from the truths of other discourses due to the difference in premises, as well as the mismatch of points of problematization, however, within the maternal discourse, it will work as truth and thereby predetermine both evaluative criteria and how the subjects of this discourse prefer some practices to others that do not find sufficient justification in the light of what is considered to be the truth.

Any of the presented answers turns out to be problematic and not free from risks and dangers - both for the subjects of these discourses and for those who, in the opinion of the former, don't fit the frames of "true Europeaness" or "truly traditional identity." What, for example, should a person from one of the Slavic peoples think about his destiny as a European, taken through the prism of the "Faustian soul"? The idea of "multipolarity" advocated by de Benoist, with all the plurality inherent in it, nevertheless defends the principle of the righteousness of every nation not anywhere on our planet, but "at home." Guénon pinned his hopes on the "spiritual elites" who would have to turn a society sick of "modernity" back to tradition, but what would he suggest to do with modernity and the bearers of its spirit if he were forced to admit that this task would be impossible - both for the Western "elites" and for the "elites" in the East?

Even those who claim that certain ideas have a suprahistorical status might agree that the actual

focusing of thought on these ideas is historically and culturally determined. Each of the conservative projects we have considered, undoubtedly, reflects the anxieties and aspirations of their time and the society to which the thinker belonged. This factor was, probably, enormously influential in the case of the concept of the "Faustian" soul with its focus on the Germanic roots of European civilization. If during the Interbellum period such understanding of their identity could really inspire some Europeans (although, of course, not all of them), then after the horrors and tragedies of the World War II, the credit of trust in such rhetoric suffered, if not even fatal, then at least an extremely heavy blow. In addition let's mention that in the 20s and 30s. of the previous century, the Nietzschean idea of the will inspired the hope that, if correctly applied, this will can change the existing order of power; whereas in the second half of the 20th century there comes the bitter understanding of the "sobering" truth that "power is stronger than any will to power", as it is formulated, in particular, by C. Schmitt [51]. A similar picture of power, which is capable of subjugating or simply sweeping away any direct resistance, no matter how strong and sincere the will behind it is, is also drawn by E. Jünger [52]. After 1945, as de Benoist notes, there is an obvious desire to minimize also the "fact of Indo-European civilization" as inconvenient, embarrassing and "politically undesirable" [53].

The scope of what appears to be "genuine" will also be a problem that cannot be simply brushed aside. It may turn out to be "too narrow" in the case of "profaustian" thinking - and hence a "European in general" might find it unconvincing, or "too broad", as in the case of perennialist universalism, and consequently difficult to apply as a credo for finding one's own identity, which usually requires more localization.

The project of "returning to Homer", with all the radicalism that accompanies it, may seem the most "restrained" and "balanced" and not least because, in particular, both Venner and de Benoist had the opportunity to comprehend the experience of their conservative predecessors and take the necessary lessons from it. At the same time, their works are chronologically closest to the modern reader, and, therefore, are more "synchronous" to him: their realities have not yet outlived themselves and have not become the "affairs of the past", where only Clío could be their judge. Yet here we cannot completely insure ourselves against doubts whether everything originally European was included in this project, and besides, how should a European of, say, Christian convictions fit into it? The paganist component of this project turns out to be not a stepson or bastard of its general line, but, rather, its father and mother.

If we follow the logic of the perennialist conservative response to the crisis of European identity, does the return of the European to his tradition seem to us really possible? For Guénon, a necessary condition on this path is, as we remember, the act of initiation. And although, in his opinion, there are most likely no living initiatory forms in Europe, there is still the possibility of turning to other, still fruitful, branches of the single tree of tradition. Vedanta and its heritage seem to him the closest to the original universal tradition, but, as we have seen, other options are not excluded. Will this be the foundation of a proper *European* identity? No, but Guénon's priority seems to be belonging not to the particular tradition, but to the original one. On the other hand, Schuon admits that, being initiated into a different, non-European tradition, the initiate can turn to the cultural and doctrinal heritage of Europe (such as the cult of the Virgin Mary). The Divine is one, and the key to it, with proper preparation, is before us - it is beauty [54]. Nevertheless, in the case of such an extremely broad universalism, which, according to Guénon's logic, is rather syncretism than synthesis, we have the right to ask the question: are we still talking about European identity? Evola, on the other hand, gives the very fact of initiation much less importance. There are other ways by which a person can "reach" the traditional source (which, however, we will not dwell on in this article). Thus, it follows from his reasoning that even in a situation of faded initiatory connection, a European can still count on reunification with a spiritual tradition, which, with certain reservations, could serve as the basis for his identity.

Concluding our study, outside the framework of which, of course, both other conservative teachings and many authors, whose thoughts could also be attributed to the described three responses to the contemporary identity and culture crisis, remain, we note that our own ideological biases and political position should not probably be an obstacle to further exploration of conservative discourses, the outline of which has been proposed in this article. If certain postulates, their premises and consequences appear to us as an illusory dream or a dangerous chimera, we should not discount what they can mean and what inspiring power they can have for those to those who share this dream. Shouldn't we pay more attention to these ideas? Or should we rather ignore them and, like an exorcist casting out demons, surround them with a "magic circle" - in our case, a circle of silence?

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