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APPENDIX II
Biography of William Stoddart

William Stoddart was born in 1925 in the village of Carstairs in southern Scotland. His early schooling was in that locality, and later he attended the University of Glasgow, where he studied French, German, and Spanish. Since that early start, he has been an enthusiast for the treasures of Western European languages and literatures. Later, still at the same university, he graduated in medicine, with further studies at the universities of Edinburgh and Dublin.

From his early youth, Stoddart was interested in seeking to understand the profound meaning of things. In an interview with Lynn Pollack (2003), he recalled: "I was raised in a simple and elementary Protestantism (the Bible, God, Christ, and prayer). I never rejected these things but, already at the age of twelve, I made the wonderful discovery of the Eastern religions. This was thanks to my father who, as a marine engineer, went frequently to India and worked with Indians, many of whom I met when their ships were in British ports, and also to my early education, which involved receiving elementary information about Hinduism and Islam." He later added: "It never for a moment entered my head that these religions could be false. I knew instinctively that they were true, but had no idea at the time just how much the doctrine of 'the transcendent unity of the religions' was going to mean for me in later life. I should add that this intuition of the validity of the non-Christian religions in no way weakened my attachment to Christianity."

In 1945, at the age of 20, Stoddart discovered the writings of Ananda Coomaraswamy. This decisively changed, and gave direction to, his life. For the first time, he began consciously to understand what was meant by "objectivity" and absolute truth. In one of Coomaraswamy's books, he came across the name of René Guénon and, having sensed that this was someone of significance, he experienced, in 1946, his first encounter with Guénon's works. Of this experience, he said: "I found it difficult to believe that anyone could go so much further than Coomaraswamy, but Guénon certainly did." But there was more—much more—to come. On his first visit to Paris in 1947, he discovered, in a left-bank bookstore, the journal *Études Traditionnelles*, which was the vehicle for Guénon's writings. Stoddart immediately subscribed to this journal, and bought all the back num-

bers that were available. Again in the above-mentioned interview, he described the sequel to this as follows: "I went through these numbers one by one, systematically reading all the articles by Guénon. Then I looked at the other articles. One evening I noticed an article entitled 'Modes of Spiritual Realization'. It looked as if it were along Guénonian lines, so I plunged into it and, as I slowly made my way through it, I had the experience of a whole 'Taj Mahal' of truth—crystalline and 'symmetrical'—being constructed before my eyes! This article went so much further than René Guénon! Was such a thing possible? It was as if one were being transported bodily into the Kingdom of Heaven! I wondered: 'Who on earth can be the author of such an article?' So I looked for the author's name, and saw 'Frithjof Schuon'. I immediately picked up the whole bundle of *Études Traditionnelles* that was in my possession and looked for everything that this Frithjof Schuon had written. There were only a few items at that time, but fortunately there were some. I eagerly read these, and was totally transported by them."

Stoddart traveled much during his life. Soon after the end of the second world war he began his Continental explorations. In 1947 he visited France and Belgium, in 1949 Spain and Portugal, and in 1950 Italy. On this last trip, he discovered, in a bookshop in Florence, the name and address (in Naples) of an Italian translator and publisher of Schuon's writings, and he there and then decided to proceed to Naples in order to visit him. This was to be his first meeting with someone familiar with the Guénon-Schuon teachings, and this person, in addition to informing him about many things, also gave him the addresses of similarly-minded people in London. Thus began a life-long association with the Guénon-Schuon school of intellectuality and spirituality, a school which in due course became known as the "traditionalist" or "perennialist" school.

Stoddart graduated in medicine in 1949. After a few years in general practice, he became a clinical research physician in the pharmaceutical industry, an occupation in which he spent most of his working life. From 1950 to 1952, he was a medical officer in the British army—military service being compulsory at that time—and was stationed in Hamburg, Germany. This was a linguistic godsend for Stoddart, as it enabled him to deepen his knowledge of the German language, something which, for very specific reasons, was to stand him, later in life, in very good stead.

Stoddart's working life caused him to spend several years firstly in Manchester and then in Glasgow, but during these years he paid

frequent visits to his traditionalist friends in London, as well as continuing with his European travels. In 1968, Stoddart moved definitively to London, where he spent the rest of his working life until he retired to Windsor, Ontario, in 1982. More of this later.

Frithjof Schuon resided in Lausanne, Switzerland and, in 1950, Stoddart paid his first visit to Lausanne. There he met many of Schuon's friends, but (as he has said) he was too afraid to ask for an interview with Schuon himself! Only three years later, in 1953, did he return to Lausanne, with the sole object of meeting Frithjof Schuon. This was the first of a life-time of meetings with him, for henceforth Frithjof Schuon was Stoddart's spiritual mentor. From these days onwards Stoddart also enjoyed a close association with Schuon's friend and collaborator Titus Burckhardt.

People often asked Stoddart what Schuon was like, and what he could tell them about him. In an interview with Michael Fitzgerald (2005), he described Schuon as follows: "Schuon was a combination of majesty and humility; of rigor and love. He was made of objectivity and incorruptibility, coupled with compassion. In meeting with him many times during a period of nearly five decades, the immediate personal qualities which constantly struck me were his infinite patience and his infinite generosity."

Mention was made above of Stoddart's love of European languages. Stoddart was enthralled by the 3,500 didactic and aphoristic poems which Schuon wrote during the last few years of his life. Schuon's twenty or more philosophical works were written in French, but his poems were in German, his native language. In collaboration with Schuon and his wife, Stoddart participated in the project of making this vast collection of inspired poems available in English. He also translated into English several of Schuon's French books, and several of Titus Burckhardt's German books.

Stoddart had indeed a life-long interest in languages, ethnicities, and religious cultures. Aristotle said that each language is a "soul", and consequently it can be said that each language is also a "world". Even more importantly, each religion is a "soul", and each religious culture is a "world". Besides being an expression of divine truth, and offering the believer a means of salvation, each religion and, within it, each major "division" or "sector" (but not every minor sect or cult!) has its own perfume or *baraka*. It was with this conviction, and in this spirit, that Stoddart engaged in his many travels, which, in fact, were exercises in religious and cultural assimilation. For example, from the very beginning of his travels in the 1940s and 1950s, he was acutely

conscious of, and sensitive to, Western European Catholic civilization as he traveled in the Catholic countries (especially France, Spain, and Italy, but also Ireland and Poland), to 16th century Protestantism as he traveled in Northern Europe (especially Germany, Holland, and Scandinavia), and to Orthodoxy as he traveled in Eastern Europe (specifically to Greece, Russia, and Serbia).

It was not long before Stoddart began visiting non-European religions and countries: Islam (in Morocco, Turkey, and Bosnia); Hinduism (in India); *Hînayâna* Buddhism (in Sri Lanka), and *Mahâyâna* Buddhism and Shinto (in Japan). Indeed—apart from the spiritual life as such—Stoddart's main interest has always been *Religionswissenschaft*, or "comparative religion", as it used to be called. In the light of his readings and travels, Stoddart authored three short books: *Hinduism and its Spiritual Masters*, *Outline of Buddhism*, and *Sufism: The Mystical Doctrines and Methods of Islam.* Each of these was published in several languages besides English. He has also contributed articles to a variety of learned journals throughout the world. For more than four decades, his essays have been appearing in prestigious publications such as *Studies in Comparative Religion* (England), *Sophia* (USA), *Sacred Web* (Canada), *Connaissance des Religions* (France), *Sophia Perennis* (Spain), *Religio Perennis* (Brazil), and *Caminos* (Mexico). For many years Stoddart was also the assistant editor of the British journal *Studies in Comparative Religion.*

Stoddart's books and essays have been acclaimed for their clarity and, in particular, for their "synthetic" or "essentialistic" character. A reviewer in the American journal *Sophia* (4, 2, Winter 1998) wrote: "Stoddart has a tremendous capacity for synthesis; he is in fact a master of synthesis, an author who is able to extract the essence of the phenomena that he examines." In the same vein, Professor Huston Smith expressed his astonishment at how Stoddart, in his relatively short books, managed to compress so much information into such a small compass. The late Annemarie Schimmel, professor of Islamic Studies at Harvard, in reference to Stoddart's book on Sufism, remarked on the clarity of his expression. Montgomery Watt, professor of Islamic studies at Edinburgh University, wrote: "Stoddart's book is no mere academic study, but a presentation of Sufism as one possible way of salvation." Mark Tully, the BBC bureau chief in New Delhi, considered his book on Hinduism to be a unique and remarkable guide.

Reference was made above to Stoddart's frequent meetings with Frithjof Schuon while the latter lived in Lausanne. When, in 1980, Schuon moved to Bloomington, Indiana, Stoddart, like several other

of his European followers, decided to follow him to the new world. In 1982, Stoddart moved to Windsor, Ontario, so as to be able to continue his personal relationship with his august spiritual mentor. Stoddart had to choose Canada rather than U.S.A., because it was easier for him to immigrate to the former than to the latter. Windsor is in fact the geographical point in Canada that is closest to Bloomington.

Once resident in Canada, Stoddart remained active in writing, translating, and editing in the field of the philosophy of religion. In addition to his many trips to Bloomington, he continued to make occasional journeys to Europe and Asia. On all his journeyings Stoddart visited and made friends with traditionalists or perennialists in many European countries as well as in India and Japan, and especially with his colleagues and collaborators in Brazil, with whom he formed a close relationship. He also conducts a voluminous correspondence with friends and enquirers all over the world.

In Windsor, Ontario, where he now lives, Stoddart has a simple but charming home, full of interesting books and *objets d'art* from each of the great religious civilizations. The fact that his present abode faces, on the one side, the serene waters of Lake St. Clair and, on the other, the busy Detroit River, evokes the happy combination of deep serenity and prodigious intellectual output that is the characteristic mark of Stoddart's personality.

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