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Introduction

Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) was a sage, an artist, and a poet. During the last three years of his life, he wrote in German—his mother tongue—approximately 3,500 short poems, in 23 separate collections. In content, Schuon's German poems are similar to those in his English collection *Road to the Heart*, but they are much more numerous, and the imagery is even more rich and powerful. The poems cover every possible aspect of metaphysical doctrine, spiritual method, spiritual virtue, and the role and function of beauty. They express every conceivable subtlety of spiritual and moral counsel—and this not merely in general terms, but with uncanny intimacy, detail, and precision. They exhibit incredible sharpness, profundity, comprehensiveness, and compassion. They are his final gift to the world, his testament and his legacy.

Some of the poems are autobiographical, with reminiscences of places experienced: Basle and Paris, the fairy-tale streets of old German towns, Morocco and Andalusia, Turkey and Greece, the American West. Others evoke the genius of certain peoples, such as the Hindus, the Japanese, the Arabs, the Red Indians, and also the Cossacks and the Gypsies. Yet other poems elucidate the role of music, dance, and poetry itself. In one or two poems, the godless modern world comes in for biting, and sometimes fiercely humorous, comment:

Ein weltlich Fest: Lampenkristalle schimmern
Im großen Saal —
Und glänzende Gesellschaft, Damen, Herrn,
Sitzen beim Mahl.
Man spricht von allem und man spricht von nichts —
Der Wein ist rot,
Und so der Blumenschmuck.
Doch keiner, keiner
Denkt an den Tod.

A worldly banquet: chandeliers glitter
In the large hall —
And brilliant society, ladies and gentlemen

Sit down for the meal.
They talk of everything and they talk of nothing —
The wine is red,
And so are the flowers.
But no one, no one
Thinks of death.

(*Stella Maris*, "The Celebration")

The poems embody both severity and compassion. They are powerfully interiorizing. Their content epitomizes Schuon's teaching, which he himself has summarized in the words Truth, Prayer, Virtue, and Beauty. For him, these are the four things needful; they are the very purpose of life, the only source of happiness, and the essential means of salvation. The poems convey these elements to the reader not only mentally, but also, as it were, existentially; their role is both doctrinal and sacramental.

The central role of prayer is powerfully expressed in the following poem entitled "*Panakeia*" ("panacea," the remedy for all ills):

Warum hat Gott die Sprache uns geschenkt?
Für das Gebet.
Weil Gottes Segen dem, der Ihm vertraut,
Ins Herze geht.

Ein Beten ist der allererste Schrei
in diesem Leben.
So ist der letzte Hauch ein Hoffnungswort —
Von Gott gegeben.

Was ist der Stoff, aus dem der Mensch gemacht,
Sein tiefstes Ich?
Es ist das Wort, das uns das Heil gewährt:
Herr, höre mich!

Why has God given us the gift of speech?
For prayer.
Because God's blessing enters the heart of him
Who trusts in God.

The very first cry in this life
Is a prayer.

And the last breath is a word of hope —
Given by God.

What is the substance of which man is made,
His deepest I?
It is the Word that grants us salvation:
Lord, hear me!

(*Stella Maris*, "Panacea")

Many of the poems express the purpose of life with unmistakable clarity, for example:

Jedes Geschöpf ist da, um "Gott" zu sagen;
So musst auch du der Welt Berufung tragen,
O Mensch, der du der Erde König bist —
Weh dem, der seines Daseins Kern vergisst;

Dies tut nicht Tier noch Pflanze, ja kein Stein;
Dies tut der willensfreie Mensch allein
In seinem Wahn.
Sprich "Gott" in deinem Wandern;
Es werde eine Gnade für die Andern.

Denn eine Aura strahlt vom Höchsten Namen —
Gebet ist Segen, ist der Gottheit Samen.

All creatures exist in order to say "God";
So must thou too accept the world's vocation,
O man, who art king of the earth —
Woe unto him who forgets the kernel of his existence;

No animal, no plant nor stone does this;
But only man, with his free will,
In his madness.
Say "God" throughout thy life;
It will be a grace for others too.

For an aura radiates from the Supreme Name —
Prayer is blessing; it is the seed of the Divine.

(*Stella Maris*, "The Aura")

But the dread consequences of a wrong choice are not forgotten:

In Indien sagt man oft, dass Japa-Yoga
Stets Segen bringe — dass das Rāma-Mantra
Ein Wundermittel sei, das helfen müsse.
Dem ist nicht so, denn zürnen kann Shrī Rāma.

In India it is often said that *Japa-Yoga*
Always brings blessings — that the *Rāma-Mantra*
Is a miraculous means, that cannot but help.
This is not so, for Shrī Rāma can also show His wrath.

(*Songs without Names I*-XXXIII)

Und Gottes Zorn — er war zuvor schon da;
Denn Gottes Nein begleitet Gottes Ja.
Ihr fragt: war Gott zuerst nicht reine Milde?
Des Zornes Möglichkeit war auch im Bilde.

And God's anger — it was already there;
For God's No accompanies God's Yes.
You ask: is God not first and foremost Mercy?
The possibility of anger is also in the picture.

(*Songs without Names II*-LXXII)

Das Gottgedenken muss den Menschen ändern,
Denn zum Beleuchten gibt die Lampe Licht;
Wenn unsre Seele nicht verbessert wird,
Dann zählt das Sprechen frommer Formeln nicht.

Lass ab von falscher Größe — werde klein
Und selbstlos, und du wirst im Himmel sein.

God-remembrance must change man,
For the purpose of a lamp is to give light;
If our soul is not improved,
Then reciting pious formulas is of no avail.

Renounce false greatness — become small
And selfless, and thou wilt be in Heaven.

(*Songs without Names IV*-II)

Our human smallness is exposed without pity:

Lärmendes Nichts ist manche Menschenseel —
Was bläht sie sich, als wär sie gottgeboren?
Ein kurzer Erdentraum voll Eitelkeit,
Ruhloses Tun — und alles ist verloren.

Besinnet euch: seid klein, denn Gott ist groß.
Er hat euch eine Heimat zubereitet
Im Himmelreich: ein goldner Zufluchtsort —
Wohl dem, der gegen seine Seele streitet!

Many a human soul is a noisy void —
Why is she inflated as if born of God?
A brief earthly dream, full of vanity,
Restless activity — and all is lost.

Remember: be small, for God is great.
He has prepared for you a homeland
In the Kingdom of Heaven, a golden shelter —
Blessèd is he who fights against his soul!

(*Adastra*, "Smallness")

Again and again, the poems return to the perplexing and agonizing problem of evil:

Da wo das Lichte erscheinet,
Da muss auch das Finstere drohen;
Wundre und gräme dich nicht;
So will es das wirkende Sein.
Siehe, die niederen Mächte
Bekämpfen heimtückisch die hohen;
Da wo ein Abel erstrahlet,
Da ist auch ein finsterer Kain.

Denn die Allmöglichkeit Gottes
Erfordert ja auch die Verneinung:
Wahrheit und Friede sind himmlisch,
Irdisch sind Falschheit und Krieg.
Ohne das Übel der Trennung,
Wo wäre das Gut der Verneinung?

Ohne der Finsternis Treiben,
Wo wäre der Trost und der Sieg?

Wherever light appears
Darkness must also threaten;
Do not wonder and grieve,
Existence will have it thus.
See how the lower powers
Maliciously battle the higher;
Wherever Abel shines,
There also is dark Cain.

For God's All-Possibility
Also demands negation:
Truth and Peace are of Heaven,
Earthly are falsehood and war.
Without the evil of separation,
Where would be the good of reunion?
Without the work of darkness,
Where would be solace and victory?

(*Adastra*, "Cosmos")

No translation can possibly do full justice to the "poetry"—the meter, rhyme, verbal appositeness, allusions, music, inspiration—of the original German. Each German poem is a diamond—sparkling and clear, an architectural masterpiece full of light.

In his rich profusion of references to the many and varied cultural forms of Europe and beyond—the streets of the Latin Quarter, Andalusian nights, the Virgen del Pilar, the Macarena, sages such as Dante, Shankara, Pythagoras and Plato, the Psalms of David, Arab wisdom, the graces of the Bodhisattvas, Tibetan prayer-wheels, Samurai and Shinto, the songs of love and longing of many peoples—in all of these diverse cultures, Schuon captures the timeless message of truth and beauty which each contains, and renders it present in a most joyful way. When these cultural forms happen to be ones that the reader himself has known and loved, the joy that emanates from the poems is great indeed.

Schuon's long cycle of poems has already been compared to Rumi's *Mathnāwī*. I think that many of his poems can also be compared to the Psalms of David: they are an expression of nostalgia, of mankind's longing for, and ultimate satisfaction in, the Lord. Their main theme is

trustful prayer to an ever-merciful God, and benevolence towards men of goodwill. First and foremost, the poems are instruments of instruction. As such, they are a powerful propulsion towards the inward.

A blessing lies not only in the quality of the poems, but also in the quantity—they constitute an all-inclusive totality. On the one hand, Schuon's German poems recapitulate the teachings contained in his philosophical works in French; on the other, they are an inexhaustible, and ever new, purifying fountain—a crystalline and living expression of the *Religio perennis*. They epitomize truth, beauty, and salvation.

—William Stoddart

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