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The following is the "Foreword," written by Huston Smith, to *The Eye of the Heart*, by Frithjof Schuon

Frithjof Schuon's writings are studded with passages of indescribable beauty, but no one has ever charged them with being easy reading; out of incomprehension, I myself almost gave up on the first of his books that I came upon. And so, as one who providentially got over the hump and has continued to read him for thirty years, I propose to use this foreword to say in the simplest possible way why I consider him to be the most important religious thinker of our century.

Human beings need two things. We need to be anchored vertically in the Absolute; to be redeemed from loneliness, confusion and lassitude, the human heart must be pierced, centrally and solidly, by the *axis mundi*. Concomitantly and horizontally, we need to reach out with open arms towards our fellow men and bear one another's burdens. The mission of the world's religions is to meet these twin needs, but on the surface they seem to conflict. The revelations that launched them differ, and this seems to present their adherents with an impossible choice. They can either adhere to their religions' absolutes and find themselves separated from people who live by different absolutes; or they can ignore the distinctive teachings of their revelations that give them their cutting edge, and thus reduce them to vague generalities that cover all religions. The latter choice eases religious friction, but at the cost of denaturing revelation, whose power requires concreteness. Facing this disjunction, religious conservatives take the right fork in the road, holding to their absolutes and risking dissension. Religious liberals

choose the other fork and turn left. They cash in absolutes in the interests of presumptive social harmony.

Modern philosophy and theology have not been able to solve this problem. Frithjof Schuon, riding the wave of the timeless perennialist position which he has detailed with unprecedented completeness, solves it by stepping out of it. His step is an upward one which introduces a third dimension into the picture and solves the dilemma in the way a three-dimensional globe resolves the spatial distortions that two-dimensional map makers cannot escape. There is a type of person for whom formlessness — being free of boundaries that "cabin, crib and confine" — tokens greater concreteness and reality, not less. Saint Denis, Meister Eckhart and Shankara are classic instances of such persons, but their type surfaces everywhere. For such people, the Absolute in its fullness exceeds all of its formal, historical instantiations, including the great, enduring revelations that are its expressions in history. These revelations are the clearest depictions of itself that the Absolute can effect in the world of forms.

Only two points need be added. First, perennialists do not, as is often charged, make end runs around the revealed religions to create a religion of their own. They are fully aware that, being as human as everyone else, their lives too must traffic mostly in forms, and that the configurations of forms that mortals slap together cannot match those that God has ordained. The second required addendum is that perennialists are not utopian. Their stance towards their co-religionists is that of the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* who wrote, "The point I am making is correct, but if you cannot grasp it, then let it be, until God himself helps you to understand" (Chapter 34).

Having decided that most readers of this book would find it useful to have it placed against its orienting backdrop, I have turned this foreword to that end and will be brief about the book itself. Originally published in Paris at exactly mid-century, *L'Oeil du Coeur* was one of Schuon's earliest books. A number of its chapters have been

included in English translations of his subsequent books and have been replaced in this one by articles that have not hitherto appeared in English. As if in tribute to God's infinity, the topics the book covers are wide-ranging; they include the issues of free will's relation to predestination, God's omnipotence in the face of evil, and faith's interface with intelligence. Threading these diverse issues is the clear enunciation of God's "simplicity" in the technical sense of that word. In its Vedantic formulation, "*Brahma* is Reality, the world is appearance, the soul is not other than *Brahma*."

Again in this book, as everywhere in Schuon's writing, one is struck by the hierarchical, vertical character of his thinking his depiction of an absolute and transcendent Reality that deploys itself through All-Possibility and ultimately returns to Itself through human beings "made in the image of God." Beauty is the vehicle for this return: outward beauty which comes from God and leads back to Him; and inward beauty — virtue — which is essential for human participation in the Divine Nature.

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features in
The Eye of the Heart
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