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INTRODUCTION

> [E]verything has been said already, though it is far from being the case that everyone has always understood it. There can therefore be no question of presenting "new truths"; what is needed in our time, and indeed in every age remote from the origins of Revelation, is to provide some people with keys fashioned afresh . . . in order to help them rediscover the truths written in an eternal script in the very substance of man's spirit.[1]

Based on an intellectual vision of the Real, Frithjof Schuon possessed the rare ability "both to speak and to understand the various dialects through which the Spirit has chosen to communicate itself".[2] His more than thirty books form the centerpiece of a school of thought that is focused on the enunciation and explanation of the perennial philosophy (*philosophia perennis*).[3] It is a philosophy in the original sense of that term, a "love of wisdom",[4] whose subject is the essential and hence universal Truth that underlies the diverse religions, together with the human consequences of this Truth. Schuon's writings, therefore, offer us the necessary keys to understand the nature of God, the metaphysical Absolute, as well as to restore our soul's proper relationship to God, who is also the Sovereign Good.

"The term *philosophia perennis*", writes Schuon, "signifies the totality of the primordial and universal truths—and therefore of the metaphysical axioms—whose formulation does not belong to any particular system." It is in the same sense that one can speak "of a *religio perennis*, designating by this term the essence of every religion; this means the essence of every form of worship, every form of prayer, and every system of morality, just as the *sophia perennis* is the essence of all dogmas and all expressions of wisdom."[5] While it is impossible to exhaust the meaning of such a message, it is nonetheless possible to state, along with the editors of a collection of his writings, that

> Schuon's message has three main dimensions: comprehension, concentration, conformation. Comprehension of the Truth; concentration on the Truth through methodical and quintessential prayer; conformation to these dimensions through intrinsic morality, which means beauty of character. Without this beauty, there can be no serious assimilation of the metaphysical truth, nor any efficacious method of orison. To these, we may add a fourth and more extrinsic element: the beauty of our ambience and hence our affinity with virgin nature. As Plato expressed it: "Beauty is the splendor of the True."[6]

This summary was confirmed by Schuon himself in a 1991 film interview: when asked, "If you had to boil your philosophy down to a few elements and if you wanted to recommend ways to follow that philosophy, what would you say?", he answered:

> Essentialism, because I must focus everything on the essential. There are four elements that are essential:
>
> There is first discernment between the Absolute and the relative. *Ātmā* and *Māyā*, reality and illusion.
>
> Then prayer, because if one understands what is essential and what is Absolute, one wants to assimilate it; otherwise one is a hypocrite. In order to assimilate the truth of the Absolute one must pray. Now there are three types of prayer: first canonical prayer—in Christianity it is the Lord's Prayer. Then free, personal prayer, like the Psalms in the Bible—the Psalms are David's personal prayer with God. The third type of prayer is prayer of the heart—essential prayer, which is an act of contemplation in the innermost self. This is esoterism and I am interested in this. I say to people you must pray, always pray. You must have at least one canonical prayer every day and then you must talk to God; but you must always pray like St. Paul said in an epistle, "pray without ceasing"—this is "prayer of the heart". The Eastern Church knows this practice very well—the Jesus Prayer—*japa-yoga* in Hinduism. This is the second thing.
>
> The third thing is intrinsic morality: beauty of the soul; nobility; humility, which means objectivity toward oneself; charity, which is objectivity towards the neighbor; domination of oneself; generosity—this is beauty of the soul, this is intrinsic morality.
>
> The fourth dimension is beauty: beauty of forms, of surroundings, of dress, of comportment.

"Metaphysical truth, a life of prayer, moral conformity, interiorizing beauty: this is the essential, and this is our message."[7] Together, these principles can be said to make up a "fabric of elementary certainties that encompasses and resolves every human uncertainty and in this way reduces the whole problem of earthly existence to a geometry at once simple and primordial".[8] Schuon's article "*Sophia Perennis*", which appears as an Appendix to this biography, likewise contains a summary of these essential human dimensions. In this formulation the focus is placed on the first three of the elements identified previously, the fourth, beauty of forms and of surroundings, being implicit as a support for the others:[9]

> There is something that man must know or think; something that he must will or do; and something that he must love or be. He must know that God is necessary, self-sufficient Being, that He is That which cannot not be; and he must know that the world is only the possible, namely that which may either be or not be; all other discriminations

> and value judgments are derived from this metaphysical *distinguo*. Furthermore, man must will whatever directly or indirectly leads him to God, and thus abstain from whatever removes him from God; the main content of this willing is prayer, the response to God, and therein is included all spiritual activity, including metaphysical reflection. And then, as already mentioned, man must love whatever corresponds to God; he must love the Good, and since the Good necessarily transcends his own selfhood, he must make an effort to overcome this narrow and weak selfhood. One must love the Good in itself more than one's ego, and this self-knowledge and selfless love constitute the whole nobility of the soul.[10]

All this finds expression in the most essential way in one of Schuon's English poems, appropriately titled "Synthesis":

> Truth, Way, and Virtue: threefold is the Path
> From Earth to Heaven. First, discriminate
> Between Reality and Dream; then pray:
> Invoke the Name and reach the Godhead's Gate.
>
> Then Virtue: for we must conform our selves
> To That which we believe, adapt our soul
> To That which saves. Our very breath should be
> One with our Faith and with our highest Goal.[11]

Or again, with the inclusion of integral aesthetics or "the sense of forms" as the fourth dimension:

> There are principles that I constantly repeat,
> Because they belong to the sage who is without fault.
> First comes the doctrine concerning God;
> Then the invocation of the Highest Name,
> Which purifies and liberates the heart;
> Then comes the beauty of all virtue, nobility of soul;
> And finally the sense of forms, inward and outward.
> These are the four principles —
> God grant that they be never violated.[12]

Finally, we must never forget that a formal condition of any authentic spirituality is "a valid attachment to an intrinsically orthodox religion"; for "man is a form, and he cannot attain to the non-formal except in a form; otherwise the religions would not exist."[13] Schuon's message of Truth, Prayer, Virtue, and Beauty—far from replacing religion—can only be realized *within* the framework of a given religious tradition.[14] "The general conditions of our earthly world are such that these . . . elements, to be able to bear their fruits and to be sheltered from all deviation, need a framework of traditional orthodoxy, hence a religion; without this, wisdom would disappear; the

path would enjoy no guarantee of authenticity."[15] According to Catherine Schuon, his wife, "[Schuon's] function in the world is really to bring people back to practice their religion . . . to bring them back to a path that leads to God. . . . [M]any people have gone back and practiced their religion very seriously after having read his books. He wants to help us to go back to where we belong."[16]

Each of the aspects of Schuon's message is woven into the very fabric of his being—the man being inseparable from his message. A review of his biography bears witness to his crystalline discernment of the truth, his ceaseless practice of prayer, and his impeccable nobility of soul. In addition, his life testifies to the significance given to the beauty of surrounding forms, and to the importance placed on attachment to an orthodox religious tradition. There is, in short, undoubtedly a "connection between the work and the personality" of Frithjof Schuon, given that "the depth . . . and essentiality of Schuon's doctrinal message was a mirror image of his personal life as a spiritual master and spokesman of the *Religio Perennis*. . .".[17] It is proper, therefore, before turning to his biography, to present the essential elements of his message in further detail.

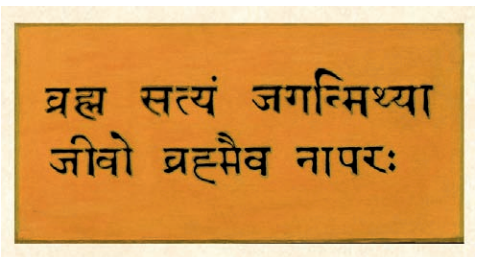
Metaphysical Truth

Schuon's point of departure is pure metaphysics such as it has been expressed, for example, by Plato in the West and by Shankara in the East.[18] It should be clearly stated, however, that Schuon's exposition of metaphysical truth cannot be reduced to the status of a historical interpretation of any particular figure or school. As he affirms in the Preface to one of his books, "it will be noted that we have in view, not traditional information pure and simple so much as intrinsic doctrinal explanations; that is to say the expression of truth of which the traditional dialects are the vestitures; hence it is not as a historian of ideas, but as a spokesman of the *philosophia perennis* that we expound diverse formulations of the truth that is everywhere and always the same."[19]

"The key to the eternal *sophia*", Schuon declares, "is pure intellection or in other words metaphysical discernment."[20] The nature of this discernment is aptly proclaimed by the Vedantic maxim ascribed to Shankara, "God is real, the world is appearance; the soul is not other than God" (*Brahma satyam, jagan mithyā; jīvo brahmaiva nāparah*).[21] "*Brahma satyam*—I cannot say anything better."[22] He expands on what is implied in the discernment of metaphysical truth:

> When speaking of discernment, we mean above all that between the Real and the illusory, *Ātmā* and *Māyā*, the Absolute[23] and the relative, necessary Being and possible Being; a distinction that implies on the one

hand the prefiguration of the relative in the Absolute, and on the other the projection of the Absolute into the relative, hence all the degrees and modes of universal Reality. The "prefiguration" of the relative in the Absolute is the Creator-Being with all the potentialities contained therein; the "projection" of the Absolute into the relative is the "Spirit of God", the celestial world, the universal Intellect, the *Avatāra*, Revelation; but also, the theomorphic microcosm, the human Intellect, the "naturally supernatural" prodigy of intellection; the organ of the *Sophia Perennis*, precisely.[24]



Sanskrit calligraphy in the Schuons' home

"The entire message of the *Upanishads*, of the *Brahma-Sūtras* of Bādarāyana, and finally of Shankara, may be condensed into the following words: '*Brahman* alone is real; the world is illusion, *Māyā;* the soul is not other than *Brahman.*'" (*To Have a Center*, "David, Shankara, Hōnen", 135)

These formulations are extended even further in a typically magisterial passage which covers nearly the entire arena of metaphysics and cosmology:

The fundamental content of the Truth is the Unconditioned, the Metaphysical Absolute; the Ultimate One, which is also the Absolutely Good, the Platonic *Agathón.* But it lies in the nature of the Absolute to be Infinity and All-Possibility, and in this sense St. Augustine said that it is in the nature of the Good to communicate itself; if there is a sun, then there is also radiation; and therein lies the necessity of the cosmos which proclaims God.

However, to say radiation is also to say separation from the source of light. Since God is the absolute and infinite Good, whatever is not God—that is to say, the world as such—cannot be absolutely good: the non-divinity of the cosmos brings with it, in its limitations, the phenomenon of evil or wickedness which, because it is a contrast, emphasizes all the more the nature of the Good. "The more he blasphemes", as Eckhart said, "the more he praises God."

> The essential here is discrimination between *Ātmā* and *Māyā*, between Reality seen as "Self", and relativity seen as "cosmic play": since the Absolute is infinite—failing which it would not be the Absolute—it must give rise to *Māyā*, a "lesser reality" and in a sense an "illusion". *Ātmā* is the Principle—the Primordial Principle, one might say—and *Māyā* is manifestation or effect; strictly speaking *Māyā* is in a sense also *Ātmā*, since in the last analysis there is only *Ātmā;* both poles therefore must impinge on one another and must be bound up with one another, in the sense that, in *Ātmā*, *Māyā* is in a way prefigured, whereas, contrariwise, *Māyā* in its own fashion represents or reflects *Ātmā*. In *Ātmā*, *Māyā* is Being, the Creator of the world, the Personal God, who reveals Himself to the world in all His possibilities of Manifestation; in *Māyā*, *Ātmā* is any reflection of the Divine, such as the *Avatāra*, the Holy Scriptures, the God-transmitting symbol.
>
> In the domain of *Māyā* or relativity, there is not only "space", there is also "time", to speak comparatively or metaphorically: there are not only simultaneity and gradation, but also change and succession; there are not only worlds, but also "ages" or "cycles". All this belongs to the "play" of *Māyā*, to the well-nigh "magical" unfolding of the possibilities hidden in the Primordial One.[25]

Schuon's poems often speak to the reader in a language at once simple and profound. Several of them relate to the fundamental discernment between Reality and illusion, including the following, which expresses "in few words" the doctrine of the *advaita* (or non-dualist) school of *Vedānta* associated with the great Shankara:

Advaita
Māyā is radiation from *Ātmā*,
For *Ātmā* radiates: It is the Highest Light.
In *Māyā* lie the cycles of the worlds —
But they are illusions, they touch not *Ātmā*.

Worlds and cycles arise and vanish —
Before *Ātmā*'s Reality nothing endures.
What you experience of places, times, and things
Is but a dream. This is the doctrine in few words.

However, O man: from *Ātmā* fell a spark
Mysteriously into the stream of thy heart.
Thy deepest depth is not blinded by *Māyā* —
It is none other than *Ātmā* —
Shānti Om.[26]

Life of Prayer

"We must know that God is Real—*Brahma Satyam*", Schuon observed in a 1991 interview, "but it is not enough to think it, we must assimilate it." While a sufficient degree of doctrinal knowledge is indispensable, "theoretical knowledge, even if perfect and hence unshakable, always requires a volitive element, which contributes to the process of assimilation or integration, for we must 'become what we are'".[27] This leads to the second element of Schuon's essential message, operative concentration or prayer.

Schuon provides this summary of prayer, encompassing all its possible modalities: "Prayer—in the widest sense—triumphs over the four accidents of our existence: the world, life, the body, the soul; we might also say: space, time, matter, desire. It is situated in existence like a shelter, like an islet. In it alone we are perfectly ourselves, because it puts us into the presence of God. It is like a miraculous diamond, which nothing can tarnish and nothing can resist."[28] He identifies three kinds of prayer: personal prayer, canonical prayer, and prayer of the heart.[29]

"The most elementary mode of orison—of contact between man and God—is no doubt prayer in the most ordinary sense of the word, for it is the direct expression of the individual, of his desires and fears, his hopes and gratitude."[30] This is what Schuon calls free or personal prayer—the prayer of David in his Psalms:

> The aim of this prayer is not only to obtain particular favors, but also the purification of the soul: it loosens psychological knots or, in other words, dissolves subconscious coagulations and drains away many secret poisons; it externalizes before God the difficulties, failures, and crispations of the soul, which presupposes that the soul be humble and genuine, and this externalization—carried out in the face of the Absolute—has the virtue of reestablishing equilibrium and restoring peace, in a word, of opening us to grace.[31]

Despite the personal character of this prayer, and the fact that it can be free and spontaneous in the manner of its expression, it is important to realize that this "does not imply that it is free from rules, for the human soul—as the Psalms admirably show—is always the same in its miseries and joys, and therefore in its duties towards God; it is not enough for a man to formulate his petition, he must express also his gratitude, resignation, regret, resolution, and praise."[32]

These teachings are summarized in Schuon's poem "Petition":

> Praise of God and thanks to God; and then another
> Prayer arises from our soul: petition.

Ask not only for thyself, but for thy neighbor too;
One asks not only for our daily bread.
And do not think that thy plea is not needed —
It too is remembrance of the Highest.

And ask for the ultimate Good: for God.[33]

The second form of prayer that Schuon indentifies is canonical prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer in Christianity and the *Fātihah* in Islam. It is a "discourse addressed to God", whose particular form is fixed by revelation or by traditional authority. Its purpose "is to tirelessly recall truths which man needs if he is not to become lost".[34] While the character of personal prayer is individual, the character of canonical prayer is universal "due to the fact that God is its author and that the reciting subject is not a particular individual, but man as such, the human species". Schuon further makes the point that "Canonical prayer shows its universality and timeless value by being expressed very often in the first person plural and also by its preference for using a sacred or liturgical and therefore symbolically universal language, so that it is impossible for whoever recites it not to pray for all and in all."[35] Canonical prayer, in short, "is not only a human discourse; it is also divine, which means that besides its literal value it has a sacramental import. It is on our level, yet at the same time beyond us."[36]

Man needs canonical prayer —
God wills that we think of Him in a rhythm;
Certainly, we can go freely to the Most High —
Nevertheless, God wills to guide the steps of the people.

For if the individual wishes to enjoy the Lord,
There must be a framework for all:
The Lord's Prayer and the *Fātiha* —
And long before these, the *Shemā*.

If there were not divine bread from which to live —
The possibility of wine would not exist.[37]

The third form of prayer is "prayer of the heart", that is to say the invocation of a sacred formula or Name of God.[38] "We have distinguished canonical prayer from individual prayer by saying that in the latter it is a given individual who is the subject, while in the former the subject is man as such; now there is an orison wherein God Himself is in a sense the Subject, and that is the pronouncing of a revealed divine Name."[39] In Christianity the doctrine and method of invocatory prayer is best preserved in the Eastern Church in the form of the "Jesus Prayer", but is to be found in the Western Church as well, for example, within the Rosary.[40] This practice is further to

be found in Hinduism (as *nāma-japa* or *japa-yoga*), in Islam (as *dhikr Allāh*), in Buddhism (as the *Mani mantra* in Tibetan Buddhism and the *nembutsu* in Pure Land Buddhism), [41] and in other traditions as well.[42] "The foundation of this mystery is, on the one hand, that 'God and His Name are one' (Ramakrishna) and, on the other hand, that God Himself pronounces His Name in Himself, hence in eternity and outside all creation, so that His unique and uncreate word is the prototype of ejaculatory prayer and even, in a less direct sense, of all orison."

A passage from one of his earliest published books succinctly articulates the meaning of invocatory prayer:

> [W]e must emphasize the fundamental and truly universal significance of the invocation of the Divine Name. This Name, in the Christian form—as in the Buddhist form and in certain initiatory branches of the Hindu tradition—is a name of the manifested Word, in this case the Name of "Jesus", which, like every revealed Divine Name when ritually pronounced, is mysteriously identified with the Divinity. It is in the Divine Name that there takes place the mysterious meeting of the created and the Uncreate, the contingent and the Absolute, the finite and the Infinite. The Divine Name is thus a manifestation of the Supreme Principle, or to speak still more plainly, it is the Supreme Principle manifesting Itself; it is not therefore in the first place a manifestation, but the Principle itself. [43]

And further:

> The sufficient reason for the invocation of the Name is the remembering of God; and this, in the final analysis, is not other than consciousness of the Absolute. The Name actualizes this consciousness and, in the end, perpetuates it in the soul and fixes it in the heart, so that it penetrates the whole being and at the same time transmutes and absorbs it. Consciousness of the Absolute is the prerogative of human intelligence, and also its aim.[44]

Schuon likewise sings of the glory of the divine Name in numerous poems, including this from his English-language collection, *Road to the Heart*:

> *The Name*
> Thy Name is wine and honey, melody
> That shapes our sacred way and destiny.
> Who is the Speaker and who is the Word?
> Where is the song Eternity has heard?
>
> The liberating Word comes from the sky
> Of Grace and Mercy; and we wonder why

> Such gift can be; the truth is not so far:
> Thy Name is That which is, and what we are.[45]

Moral Conformity

Following upon metaphysical comprehension (or "truth") and methodical concentration (or "prayer"), the third essential dimension of Schuon's message is moral conformation (or "virtue").[46] These three elements are inseparably related, for "Virtue is the touchstone of our sincerity; without it, Truth does not belong to us and the Way eludes us. The Truth is what we must know; the Way is what we must do; Virtue is what we must love, become, and be."[47]

All too often the virtues are seen as so many qualities for us to acquire and possess, but according to Schuon "Virtue is less the effort of acquiring qualities than the absence of faults; for, when evil is dissolved from within and fought from without, virtue shines forth; from the beginning it has slept within man, given that it stems from his deiformity."[48] It is also clear that we must avoid any false personal identification with virtue.

> Every man loves to live in light and in fresh air; no one loves to be locked up in a dark, airless tower. It is thus that one ought to love the virtues; and it is thus that one ought to hate the vices. No man who enjoys light or air would dream of saying: "I am the sun", or "I am the sky"; one loves the atmosphere of light and air, and that is why one enters into it. It is thus that one must enter into the virtues: because they are self-evident by their nature and because one loves their ambience.[49]

While there are several possible ways to categorize the myriad virtues, Schuon often singles out three virtues which he considers to be of fundamental importance: humility, charity, and veracity, or "effacement of ego, gift of self, realization of truth".[50] In the following extended passage, he discusses first the meaning of humility and charity, and then veracity:

> Virtue consists essentially in humility and charity; these are the fundamental qualities from which all others derive, to which they all relate, and without which no sanctity is possible. Humility presents itself under two aspects: awareness of one's metaphysical nothingness in the face of the Absolute and awareness of one's personal imperfection; this second humility implies not only a relentless instinct for detecting one's own limitations and weaknesses, but also a simultaneous capacity to discern the positive qualities in one's neighbor, for a virtue which is blind to virtues in others destroys itself thereby. Consciousness of one's individual insufficiency springs from the necessarily fragmentary character of the ego; in other words, to say "ego" is to say partial imperfection in regard to other individuals. Humility is moreover owed to all creatures, since all

of them manifest qualities and glorify God after their manner; the first relation goes from God to the thing, and the second from the thing to God; man has a right to the things of creation only on condition that he respect them, that is to say on condition that he discern in each one both its divine property and its spiritual language; man never has a right to destroy simply for the pleasure of destroying. Among virtue the position of humility is a special one—like that of the apex in a triangle—because it conforms to God, not by "participation" but by "opposition", in the sense that the attitude of humility, poverty, or self-effacement, is analogically opposed to the divine Majesty; this opposition is however a relative one, since it rejoins the direct analogy through its intrinsic perfection which is, *mutatis mutandis*, the simplicity of the Essence. Humility, therefore, is distinguishable from the other virtues by the fact that it marks a relatively indirect participation in the divine Prototype, or in other words by the fact that it is, depending on the point of view, either "more" or "less" than the other fundamental virtues.

As for charity, it consists in abolishing the egocentric distinction between "me" and the "other": it is seeing the "I" in the "other" and the "other" in the "I". Humility and charity are the two dimensions of self-effacement: they are, to use a Christian symbolism, like the vertical and horizontal branches of the Cross. The one can always be reduced to the other: humility is always to be found in charity, and conversely. To these two virtues must be added the virtue of veracity: it is love of truth, objectivity, impartiality; it is a virtue that situates intelligence in the framework of the will—to the extent that the nature of things allows of this or demands it—and its function consists in keeping away every passional element from the intelligence. Discernment must remain independent of love or hate: it must see things as they are, firstly according to universal Truth which assigns to each thing its degree in the hierarchy of values, and secondly according to the truth proper to things in their immediate nature; when the alternative presents itself, preference must be given to essential aspects, for which accidental aspects must not be substituted, and so forth. This serenity and this precision exclude neither love nor holy indignation, because these arise parallel to intellection and not within it: holy indignation, far from being opposed to truth, derives from truth as from its enabling cause. Truthfulness corrects any arbitrariness that might result from a humility or charity regarded in too subjective a way: it prevents humility from becoming an end in itself and thus sinning against intelligence and the nature of things; it likewise controls charity and determines its various modes. One has to be humble because the ego tends to think itself more than it is; and one has to be truthful because the ego tends to prefer its own tastes and habits to the truth. [51]

Finally, brief mention should be made of the way in which Schuon elucidates the complementary relationship between virtue and morality:

[Moral laws] are styles of action conforming to particular spiritual perspectives and to particular material and mental conditions, while

> the virtues on the contrary represent intrinsic beauties fitted into these styles and finding through them their realization. Every virtue and every morality is a mode of equilibrium. . . . Morality is a way of acting, whereas virtue is a way of being—a way of being wholly oneself, beyond the ego, or of being simply That which is. . . . This could also be expressed as follows: the various moralities are at the same time frameworks for the virtues and their application to collectivities. . . . Moralities are diverse, but virtue as it has been here defined, is everywhere the same, because man is everywhere man.[52]

And again in this poem, entitled "Virtue":

> Morality can be of different kinds:
> With devout feelings it can soar to Heaven,
> Shaped by the pious customs of society.
> It can also lie in the nature of things,
> In being, not feeling — in discerning
> The deep roots of good and evil,
> And not merely in naming them according to whim.
> Prescriptions are of use; but better still is virtue
> Which rises from mankind's primordial youth.
>
> The good as such comes from the beauty of God.[53]

Interiorizing Beauty

Schuon recalls, in the Platonic sense, the deeper dimensions inherent in the beauty of natural and artistic forms. "The message of beauty is both intellectual and moral: intellectual because it communicates to us, in the world of accidentality, aspects of [Divine] Substance, without for all that having to address itself to abstract thought, and moral because it reminds us what we must love and, consequently, be."[54] The moral message of beauty—its relationship to virtue—becomes clear once one understands that "Virtue is a presence of the divine Being in the will and in sentiment just as beauty is the presence of the Divine in form",[55] while the intellectual message of beauty—its relationship to truth—becomes clear through an understanding of the saying ascribed to Plato, "Beauty is the splendor of the True", to which Schuon added a commentary in saying that "Truth is the essence of the beautiful".[56] Truth, virtue, and beauty, "Only these three make life worth living."[57]

> *Truth*
> "In Beauty is the splendor of the True":
> If Truth we know, we will know Beauty too.
> And if in Beauty we can see the Good,
> Our spirit understands all that it should.

> Words in our earthly language may be weak,
> Yet Truth is strong; with Heaven's Heart we speak
> To show a path to living's inmost duty.
>
> "Allah is beautiful and He loves Beauty":
> There is a Splendor we can hear and see;
> A mirror of the True we ought to be.[58]

Schuon insists that beauty and art are natural and necessary dimensions of our human existence, so much so that not to feel the need for beauty is an infirmity. "[N]o religion is situated outside Beauty, every religion expresses itself through it; every traditional world is necessarily a world of Beauty, and this proves Beauty's interiorizing virtue."[59] One of the most insidious aspects of the modern world is precisely this lack of a sense of beauty and even a despising of it, and then replacing it with counterfeits of beauty—art for art's sake. In a 1992 film interview Schuon was asked, "What is the role of art in the spiritual life?" His response takes the understanding of art, and therefore of beauty, to its most profound level:

> [M]an needs beauty and he needs also symbolism. It is not enough to think about metaphysics, one wants also to see and to hear metaphysics in visible forms and this is symbolism. Symbolism coincides with beauty. If a thing exists it must be beautiful. So when God created man He was obliged, metaphysically speaking, to create him beautiful, because beauty is the norm. This is the metaphysical transparency of phenomena. One must look beyond the form at the essence. If I see something beautiful, a landscape, or a beautiful piece of music, or a human being, I see the *Rahmah*, I see *Ānanda*, I see the Principle.

To understand the meaning of beauty and symbolism is also to understand the importance of ambience, understood in its broadest sense:

> As for the environment which surrounds us and with which we surround ourselves, it is important because form is important; for we live among forms and we are a form, a form "made in the image of God". To affirm that "the spirit alone counts" is a hypocritical and unrealistic "angelism"—as if matter did not exist and as if an existing and ubiquitous thing could have no spiritual significance whatever. This is a typically profane error and thus as far removed as possible from esoterism, which insists not only on the symbolism of things—in art or handicrafts as well as in nature—but also on their aesthetic, moral, and quasi-musical message. The environment is an indirect element of intelligence and beauty in the spiritual life.[60]

At the same time, Schuon was well aware of the double-edged nature of beauty. The perception of beauty affects individuals differently and

depends upon a person's nobility of soul, his receptivity, and his degree of spirituality.

> [E]very beauty is both a closed door and an open door, or in other words, an obstacle or a vehicle: either beauty separates us from God because it is entirely identified in our mind with its earthly support which then assumes the role of idol, or beauty brings us close to God because we perceive in it the vibrations of Beatitude and Infinity which emanate from Divine Beauty. . . . Virtue cut off from God becomes pride, as beauty cut off from God becomes idol; and virtue attached to God becomes sanctity, as beauty attached to God becomes sacrament.[61]

It follows that to benefit from an earthly beauty we must fulfill a condition: "We must live the experience of beauty so as to draw from it a lasting, not ephemeral, element, hence realizing in oneself an opening towards the immutable Beauty, rather than plunging oneself into the current of things; it is a question of viewing the world, and living in it, in a manner that is sacred and not profane; or sacralizing and not profanating."[62]

There is a spiritual way that accentuates the element of sacrifice as a support for a life of prayer. While never denying the validity of this penitential perspective—"the narrow way of renunciation"[63]—Schuon points out that,

> . . . In our age of ugliness we more than ever
> Need the beautiful in order to live
> As men should live.
> In order to lift the soul
> From the din of the world, up to Heaven.[64]

Schuon's own path was one "of Truth and Beauty"[65]—"the noble path of equilibrium"[66]—in which it is recognized that:

> Beauty would have no sense in the eyes of God,
> If it did not have a meaning for our spirit —
> If it did not summon to interiorization,
> To nobility, and to the abode of the Most High.
>
> Many believe they must flee from seduction;
> I am far from blaming this misunderstanding,
> Because people are what they are able to be;
> Fortunate are those who through beauty are ennobled.[67]

— ·:· —

Mention must also be made of Schuon's close association with the phrase he coined, "the transcendent unity of religions"—the metaphysical thesis that there exists a single Unity underlying the diverse religions. In the Preface to his book, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*,[68] Schuon writes: "If the expression 'transcendent unity' is used, it means that the unity of the religious forms must be realized in a purely inward and spiritual way and without prejudice to any particular form. The antagonisms between these forms no more affect the one universal truth than the antagonisms between opposing colors affect the transmission of the uncolored light."[69]

The starting point of this concept is the acknowledgment that there are diverse religions which apparently exclude each other.[70] Some think this means that one religion is true and that all the others are false; others conclude that all are false. "It is as though certain persons, when faced with the discovery of other solar systems, continued to maintain the view that there is only one sun, our own, whereas others, perceiving that our sun is not the only one, denied that it was a sun and concluded that there was no such thing, since none was unique."[71] Schuon's writings demonstrate a third possibility—that all religions are right, not in their dogmatic exclusivism, but in their unanimous inner meaning.

Many modern writers who propound a belief in a universal Truth conclude that one can ignore or strip away the outward differences in the religions, in order to focus solely on their inner similarities.[72] Schuon rejects this notion and instead demonstrates that the outward distinctness in the forms is necessary and providential. He writes in a letter of the Divine Will underlying the divergences between religions:

> I must call your attention to an important aspect of universality or unity: the *divergence between religions* is not only due to the incomprehension of men; it is also in the Revelations, hence in the divine Will, and this is why there is a *difference between exoterism and esoterism*; the diverse dogmas contradict one another, not only in the minds of theologians, but also—and *a priori*—in the sacred Scriptures; in giving these Scriptures, however, God at the same time gives the keys for understanding their underlying unity. If all men were metaphysicians and contemplatives, a single Revelation might be enough; but since this is not how things are, the Absolute must reveal itself in different ways, and the metaphysical viewpoints from which these Revelations are derived—according to different logical needs and different spiritual temperaments—cannot but contradict one another on the plane of forms, somewhat as geometrical figures contradict each other as long as one has not grasped their spatial and symbolic homogeneity.[73]

The exoteric, or outward, dimension of each religious form has its own unique aspects that correspond to the human collectivity to which it is

addressed. The need for the diversity of religious forms corresponds to the diversity of human types, as one of Schuon's commentators has explained:

> He [Schuon] perceives humankind neither as a monolithic psychic entity nor as an amorphous agglomerate, but as being long since divided into several distinct branches, each with its own peculiar traits which determine its receptivity to truth and shape its apprehensions of reality. Needless to say there is no question here of any kind of racialism or ethnocentrism which attributes a superiority or inferiority to this or that ethnic collectivity. Nor, however, is there any sentimental prejudice in favor of the idea that the world's peoples are only "superficially" and "accidentally" different: "We observe on earth the existence of diverse races, whose differences are 'valid' since there are no 'false' as opposed to 'true' races." Each branch of humanity exhibits a psychic and spiritual homogeneity which may transcend barriers of geography and biology. . . .
>
> To the diverse human collectivities are addressed Revelations which are determined in their formal aspects by the needs at hand. Thus, "What determines the differences among forms of Truth is the difference among human receptacles. For thousands of years already humanity has been divided into several fundamentally different branches constituting as many complete humanities, more or less closed in on themselves; the existence of spiritual receptacles so different and so original demands a differentiated refraction of the one Truth."[74]

Schuon puts this consideration more succinctly in one of his poems:

> Why are there so many religions?
> Because God talks to men, not to angels.
> If there were only one religion in the world,
> Humanity, precisely, would not be human. . . .[75]

Schuon's writings show that every religion, in addition to its literal—exoteric—meaning, has an esoteric dimension which is essential, primordial, and universal. He describes the subtle relationship between esoterism and exoterism, or between a religion's essence and its form, as follows:

> The word "esoterism" suggests in the first place an idea of complementarity, of a "half" as it were: esoterism is the complement of exoterism, it is the "spirit" which completes the "letter". Where there is a truth of Revelation, hence of formal and theological truth, there must also be a truth of intellection, hence of non-formal and metaphysical truth; not legalistic or obligatory truth, but truth that stems from the nature of things, and which is also vocational since not every man grasps this nature.
>
> But in fact this second truth exists independently of the first; hence it is not, in its intrinsic reality, a complement or a half; it is so only extrinsically and as it were "accidentally". This means that the

> word "esoterism" designates not only the total truth inasmuch as it is "colored" by entering a system of partial truth, but also the total truth as such, which is colorless. This distinction is not a mere theoretical luxury; on the contrary, it implies extremely important consequences.
>
> Thus esoterism as such is metaphysics, to which is necessarily joined an appropriate method of realization. But the esoterism of a particular religion—of a particular exoterism precisely—tends to adapt itself to this religion and thereby enter into theological, psychological, and legalistic meanders foreign to its nature, while preserving in its secret center its authentic and plenary nature, but for which it would not be what it is.[76]

Schuon's philosophy thus provides a metaphysical framework that allows one to appreciate "the profound and eternal solidarity of all spiritual forms",[77] while respecting and maintaining the integrity of the outward forms themselves—forms which, in their turn, have always drawn their nourishment from the underlying esoteric teachings.

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It is important to have an outline of Schuon's point of view on modernity and the contemporary human condition, which is primarily based upon the traditional understanding of cosmic cycles. Hinduism offers a particularly well formulated expression of this universal doctrine, which is "diverse, but nonetheless homogeneous with regard to the essential":[78]

> [T]he world, or the manifested universe, the creation . . . is like the "breathing" of the Divinity; it is essentially subject to phases, to "divine lives", as the Hindus would say. There is firstly the *para*, which is the "life" of the demiurge itself and which lasts one hundred "years of Brahmā"; the "days of Brahmā"—the *kalpa*s—each represent the duration of a world, hence a "historical creation", the "night of Brahmā" being the "divine void" between two creations *ex nihilo*. Each *kalpa* comprises one thousand *mahā-yuga*s, each of which is divided into four ages or *yuga*s, namely: the *Krita-*, the *Tretā-*, the *Dvāpara-*, and the *Kali-yuga;* these are, analogically speaking, the golden age, the silver age, the bronze age and the iron age. Doubtless, there are variations in the different cosmological symbolisms of India, but the fundamental pattern remains identical. . . .[79]

According to Schuon, we must not lose sight of the fact that "we are in the 'iron age', the 'dark age', the *Kali-yuga*, or even at the end—particularly disgraced—of that age foreseen by all the traditional doctrines".[80] He draws our attention in this regard to the remarkable concordance between the views of orthodox Hindus and the Plains Indians of North America:

> A most striking feature of the North American branch of the Primordial *Sanātana Dharma* is the doctrine of the four *yuga*s: the sacred animal of the Plains Indians, the buffalo, symbolizes the *mahā-yuga*, each of its legs representing a *yuga*. At the beginning of this *mahā-yuga* a buffalo was placed by the Great Spirit at the West in order to hold back the waters which menace the earth; every year this bison loses a hair, and in every *yuga* it loses a foot. When it will have lost all its hair and its feet, the waters will overwhelm the earth and the *mahā-yuga* will be finished. The analogy with the bull of Dharma in Hinduism is very remarkable; at every *yuga*, this bull withdraws a foot, and spirituality loses its strength; and now we are near the end of the *kali-yuga*. Like the orthodox Hindus, the traditional Red Indians have this conviction, which is obviously true in spite of all the mundane optimism of the modern world.[81]

This traditional view, however, has been turned on its head by today's prevailing ideology, which views the course of human history as an evolutionary progression from a benighted past to an enlightened present.[82] As a society we have concluded, based largely upon our increased quantitative understanding of the material world, that we must be "wiser or better or both than our predecessors".[83] This anti-traditional belief focuses primarily—one could even say solely—on an increase in material pleasures, not on a reforming of the human soul.[84]

> [I]n the name of humanitarian egalitarianism, vocations are crushed and geniuses wasted, by schools in particular and by official worldliness in general; every spiritual element is banished from professional and public life. . . . On the other hand, by a kind of compensation, professional life more and more assumes a "religious" air in the sense that it claims the whole of man, his soul as well as his time, as though the sufficient reason for the human condition were some economic enterprise and not immortality.[85]

In response to such a view, Schuon writes:

> The world is miserable because men live beneath themselves; the error of modern man is that he wants to reform the world without having either the will or the power to reform man, and this flagrant contradiction, this attempt to make a better world on the basis of a worsened humanity, can only end in the very abolition of what is human, and consequently in the abolition of happiness too. Reforming man means binding him again to Heaven, re-establishing the broken link; it means tearing him away from the reign of the passions, from the cult of matter, quantity, and cunning, and reintegrating him into the world of the spirit and serenity, we would even say: into the world of sufficient reason.[86]

This is not to say that there is in the current age no connection with the Golden Age of Truth and Goodness. One of Schuon's poems, entitled "Points of Rest", provides a concise picture:

> The *Kali-yuga* is not merely a fall
> Downward; it stands still at certain points:
> Cosmic values can appear everywhere,
> If the Most High will.
>
> Truth and the power of Good are at work;
> The *Krita-yuga* shimmers through the night.[87]

Schuon's writings acknowledge the paradox that we live in the most irreligious era in history, while at the same time esoteric truths and spiritual practices that were previously safeguarded within the formerly "closed world" of each religion are now everywhere on public display and in many cases detached from living traditions:

> There is indeed something abnormal in this, but it lies, not in the fact of the exposition of these truths, but in the general conditions of our age, which marks the end of a great cyclic period of terrestrial humanity—the end of a *mahā-yuga* according to Hindu cosmology—and so must recapitulate or manifest again in one way or another everything that is included in the cycle, in conformity with the adage "extremes meet"; thus things that are in themselves abnormal may become necessary by reason of the conditions just referred to. . . . [I]t must be admitted that the spiritual confusion of our times has reached such a pitch that the harm that might in principle befall certain people from contact with the truths in question is compensated by the advantages that others will derive from the self-same truths.[88]

Schuon recognized the grave difficulty confronting the revealed religions, each of which is under assault from various modernistic forces: "Exoterism is a precarious thing by reason of its limits or its exclusions; there arrives a moment in history when all kinds of experiences oblige it to modify its claims to exclusiveness, and it is then driven to a choice: escape from these limitations by the upward path in esoterism, or by the downward path, in a worldly and suicidal liberalism."[89] He also recognized that one response to the pressures of modernity is religious fundamentalism with its inevitable result that "the outward and readily exaggerated incompatibility of the different religions greatly discredits, in the minds of most of our contemporaries, all religion".[90] By providing the metaphysical explanation for the differences in the outward forms of religions, Schuon has restored an understanding of their necessity, one could even say of their "divine right", to existence.

By the same token, the dissolution of the natural barriers that formerly enclosed religious worlds,[91] combined with the proliferation of profane

ideologies, has consequences for the faithful and for spiritual seekers who seek out sufficient answers to the flood of doubts and questions raised by these unusual conditions. Schuon's writings respond to this need in a comprehensive manner; he recognized that those who have the ability to speak with authority about esoteric truths are obliged to do so. "One of the paradoxes of our times is that esoterism, discreet by the force of things, finds itself obliged to assert itself publicly for the simple reason that there is no other remedy for the confusions of our time. For, as the Kabbalists say, 'It is better to divulge Wisdom than to forget it.'"[92] His mission was to unveil esoteric truths in order to provide the fundamental principles that can resuscitate each individual's faith in response to Truth: "Only esoterism can . . . restore the lost truth by referring to the total truth. . . . Just as rationalism can remove faith, so esoterism can restore it."[93]

These remarks provide an outline of certain key elements in Schuon's philosophy. Further discussion of the sage's thought is interwoven into the discussion of the events of his life, while the three appendices to this work present his essential message in his own words. Of course, to grasp the entire scope of his message, nothing can replace the in-depth study of his body of published writings. For those looking for an introduction to this corpus, Professor Harry Oldmeadow has written a valuable guide, *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy*, which complements the present work.[94] With this background, let us now turn to survey the life of Frithjof Schuon, a messenger of that "one and universal wisdom"[95] called the perennial philosophy.

Introduction

[1] *Understanding Islam*, "Preface", viii.

[2] Marco Pallis, *The Way and the Mountain,* 77. Antoine Faivre (b. 1934), Professor Emeritus at the Sorbonne, has said that Schuon "is not content with simply exhibiting a tolerant attitude toward various traditions or with finding similarities or commonalities between Christianity and other religions. For him it is more a matter of understanding and experiencing, out of his own soul and in his intellect, the inner core of what is Christianity-specific. . . . Some pages in this collection give the impression of having been written by a Christian who was desirous of putting forward arguments in favor of the truth of his faith." (*The Fullness of God: Frithjof Schuon on Christianity*, "Foreword", xii) Analogous comments could be made regarding Schuon's writings on each of the other great world religions.

[3] "In order to forestall the misunderstandings that sometimes result from such notions as 'school' or 'tendency'—and because we have had certain experiences—the reader ought to be warned that we do not necessarily subscribe to every assessment, conclusion, or theory formulated in the name of metaphysical, esoteric, or broadly traditional principles; in other words we do not espouse a theory simply because it belongs to a particular school, and we wish to be held responsible only for what we write ourself." (*Logic and Transcendence*, "Introduction", 5)

[4] "The word 'philosophy' ought to have its original meaning restored: philosophy—the 'love of wisdom'—is the science of all the fundamental principles." (*Transfiguration of Man*, "Thought: Light and Perversion", 3) See also *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, "Tracing the Notion of Philosophy", 89-100.

[5] "The Perennial Philosophy", 243. Different religions have recognized the existence of an eternal Truth that transcends the bounds of their own dogmas in varying degrees; the term "*philosophia perennis*" has cognates in different traditions that include *Sanātana Dharma* in Hinduism, *Lex Aeterna* in Greek philosophy, *Dīn al-Haqq* and *Hikmat al-Khālidah* in Islam (or *Jāvīdān Khirad* in Persian), and *Akālika Dhamma* in Buddhism.

[6] *Echoes of Perennial Wisdom*, "Foreword", iii-iv.

[7] From an unpublished document, September 1992, quoted in James Cutsinger, *Advice to the Serious Seeker*, 7.

[8] *Logic and Transcendence*, "Man and Certainty", 231.

[9] At other times Schuon further reduced the essential to the first two elements, referring to the "The two-fold definition of the *religio perennis*—discernment between the Real and the illusory, and a unifying and permanent concentration on the Real". (*Light on the Ancient Worlds*, "*Religio Perennis*", 121) See also *Songs without Names*, Twelfth Collection, CXXIX, 281 and *Songs without Names*, Fifth Collection, LI, 222.

[10] "*Sophia Perennis*", Appendix I, 144.

[11] *Road to the Heart*, "Synthesis", 88. And again: "Three things are sacred to me: firstly Truth; / Then, in its wake, primordial prayer; / And then virtue — nobility of soul which, / In God, walks all the paths of beauty." (*World Wheel*, Sixth Collection, LXXII, 111)

[12] *World Wheel*, Sixth Collection, CXXV, 127. And: "First the Truth, that saves the soul; / Then ceaseless thinking on the True. / Then our nobility of soul: arrayed / In beauty be the path of thy years. / These are the highest values which thy mind / Should always carry in its consciousness. / The rest is in the Hands of God. And what thou knowest, / Take to heart! Trust in God, and journey on." (*Adastra* & *Stella Maris*, "Values", 43)

[13] Text, "The Criteria of the Spiritual Man", and letter dated March 1, 1971, quoted in *Light on the Ancient Worlds,* "Appendix", 128, 131.

[14] "It is quite out of the question that a 'revelation', in the full sense of the word, should arise in our time, one comparable, that is to say, to the imparting of one of the great sutras or any other primary scripture; the day of revelations is past on this globe and was so already long ago. The inspirations of the saints are of another order, but these could in any case never falsify or invalidate tradition or intrinsic orthodoxy by claiming to improve on it or even to replace it, as some people have suggested." ("No Activity Without Truth", 10)

[15] Text, "The Elements of the *Religio Perennis*", quoted in *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, "Appendix", 130. "All the dogmas, all the prescriptions, and all the means of a religion have their sufficient reason in the three fundamental vocations of man: discernment, practice, and virtue. And all the gifts and means of a religion man bears within himself, but he no longer has access to them on account of the fall; whence precisely the necessity—in principle relative—of outward forms that awaken and actualize man's spiritual potentialities." (text, "The Criteria of the Spiritual Man", quoted in *Echoes of Perennial Wisdom*, 80-81) For more on Schuon's texts see chap. 22, "The Close of Two Cycles", 129, 219-220.

[16] Film interview, 2006. Jean-Claude Petitpierre speaks of how "Frithjof Schuon has written extensively about what it means to be a human being, what is our vocation, why are we on earth; and, he described the various paths through which, if we follow our vocation, we return to the Divine." (film interview, May 2005)

[17] Josep Prats & Esteve Serra, Prologue, *Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998): Notas biográficas, estudios, homenajes*, 19.

[18] See *Adastra* & *Stella Maris*, "The Choice", 35: "Thou hast chosen the path of Truth and Being, / The path found in Plato and Shankara. . .". See also *Songs without Names*, Seventh Collection, XLII, 18, *Songs without Names*, Tenth Collection, CXIX, 187, *Songs without Names*, Eleventh Collection, XXXII, 203, and *World Wheel*, Third Collection, XXVI, 110.

[19] *In the Face of the Absolute*, "Preface", 4. "*Pneumátikos*: Wisdom is his blood; / And yet: *Ex Oriente Lux* — which means: / Many a sacred word came from the East; / To it thou owest thy knowledge of *gnosis*. / But the source lies in the core

of our being, / Around which our thoughts are gathered; / Truth's lightning does not come from far away — / Before we were, it was within our heart." (*Adastra & Stella Maris*, "Portrait", 237)

[20] "The Perennial Philosophy", 243.

[21] "'*Brahma* is not the world' but 'all things are *Ātmā*'; '*Brahma* is true, the world is false' and 'He (the delivered one, the *mukta*) is *Brahma*.' In these statements the whole of gnosis is contained, just as it is also contained in the *Shahādah*, or in the two Testimonies, or again in the mysteries of Christ." (*Understanding Islam*, "The Path", 130-131)

[22] "I always like to return to Shankara, / For he is the deep happiness of my existence; / *Brahma satyam* — I cannot say anything better. / May God help me to carry life's burden." (*Songs without Names*, Twelfth Collection, CXVII, 277) See also *World Wheel*, Third Collection, CXIV, 138.

[23] Concerning the Absolute, Schuon writes: "God: the Absolute is real; that is, He is Reality (*Haqq*), Necessary Being (*al-Wujūd al-Mutlaq*), hence That which cannot not be, whereas things can either be or not be; being unique He excludes all that is not He; being total He includes all that is possible or existent; there is nothing 'alongside' Him and nothing 'outside' Him." (*Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, "Preface", xv)

[24] *Roots of the Human Condition*, "Pillars of Wisdom", 85. For a further discussion of the transpersonal intellect, see chap. 5, "Beginning to Write", 21.

[25] "*Sophia Perennis*", Appendix I, 141-142.

[26] *Adastra & Stella Maris*, "*Advaita*", 235.

[27] *Christianity/Islam: Perspectives on Esoteric Ecumenism*, "The Question of Protestantism", 46. And also: "Knowledge saves only on condition that it engages all that we are: only when it constitutes a path that works and transforms and wounds our nature as the plough wounds the soil." (*Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, "Knowledge and Love", 146)

[28] *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, "The Spiritual Virtues", 228.

[29] "I was asked how one should speak to God; / I said: canonical prayer / Is universal nourishment; then read the Psalms; /And invoke God, before whose Light ye stand — /All else is contained therein. / God Himself speaks in the deepest folds of thy heart." (*World Wheel*, Sixth Collection, LXIV, 108)

[30] *Stations of Wisdom*, "Modes of Prayer", 121.

[31] *Stations of Wisdom*, "Modes of Prayer", 121-122.

[32] *Stations of Wisdom*, "Modes of Prayer", 122.

[33] *Adastra & Stella Maris*, "Petition", 193.

[34] Text, "Reciting the *Fātihah*", discussed in *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings*, 87, 170 (cited as *Book of Keys*, 194).

[35] *Stations of Wisdom*, "Modes of Prayer", 121.

[36] Text, "Canonical Prayer", quoted in *Prayer Fashions Man: Frithjof Schuon on*

the Spiritual Life, "Appendix", 197.

[37] *Songs without Names*, First Collection, XCI. And again: "Canonical prayer — it should come / From within; what thou must say — / What Heaven has prescribed for thee — / Thou must say it out of the joy of thy heart. / For this discourse is like Moses' rod; / So pray with the words God has given, / For He knows man's deepest needs. / Then open thy heart to God, committing to Him / The supplication that burns in thy soul." (*Songs without Names*, Fifth Collection, CII, 237)

[38] Schuon refers to the practice of the invocation of a Name of God by such other phrases as, perpetual prayer, God remembrance, quintessential prayer, and ejaculatory prayer.

[39] *Stations of Wisdom*, "Modes of Prayer", 125.

[40] In *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*, "Some Observations", 108-109, 109n and "Christic and Virginal Mysteries", 119-124, Schuon discusses the recitation of the Latin Rosary, and in particular the Names of Jesus and Mary contained in the *Ave*, as a form of invocatory prayer. See also Jean Hani, "The Rosary as Spiritual Way". Rama Coomaraswamy, *The Invocation of the Name of Jesus: As Practiced in the Western Church* provides a summary of invocatory prayer in Western Christianity.

[41] The use of a *kōan* in Zen Buddhism has certain analogies to invocatory prayer, with the *kōan* being substituted for a divine Name or formula. "The *kōan* is a formula by intention absurd, destined to bring about a kind of liberating rupture in the mind of the person meditating on it, the mind in this instance being considered with regard to its hardness and blindness." (*Treasures of Buddhism*, "Remarks on the Enigma of the *Kōan*", 77)

[42] *Yellowtail: Crow Medicine Man and Sun Dance Chief*, 123-128 provides information on invocatory prayer within the Crow, Cheyenne, and Lakota tribes of North America. One is also reminded that the Kabbalists say that the entire *Torah* is included in the Tetragrammaton—the four Hebrew consonants of the ineffable supreme Name of God.

[43] *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, "Universality and Particular Nature of the Christian Religion", 145.

[44] *Stations of Wisdom*, "Modes of Prayer", 125, 127.

[45] *Road to the Heart*, "The Name", 18. See also: "There is one Word, it is the saving key: / Dwell thou in God, and God will dwell in thee. / Out of compassion to our world He came; / His are two homes on earth: our heart, His Name." (*Road to the Heart*, "One Word", 28)

[46] "Virtue is the conformity of the soul to the divine Model and to the spiritual work; conformity or participation". (text, "The Six Fundamental Givens", quoted in *Echoes of Perennial Wisdom*, 15)

[47] *The Play of Masks*, "Prerogatives of the Human State", 10-11. "Truths make us understand virtues, giving them all their cosmic amplitude and their efficacy.

Virtues for their part lead us to truths and transform them for us into realities that are concrete, seen, and lived." (*Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, "The Spiritual Virtues", 183) And also: "The intellective center of a being is not reached without involving his volitional circumference: he who wants the center must realize the whole; in other words, he who wants to know with the heart-intellect must 'know' with the whole soul, and this entails the purification of the soul and therefore the virtues." (*Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, "The Spiritual Virtues", 196)

[48] Text, "There is Only One Religion", quoted in *Echoes of Perennial Wisdom*, 33. And: "The essence of the virtues is emptiness before God, which permits the divine Qualities to enter the heart and radiate in the soul. Virtue is the exteriorization of the pure heart." (text, "The Six Fundamental Givens", quoted in *Echoes of Perennial Wisdom*, 15)

[49] Text, "To Love Light and Air", quoted in *Echoes of Perennial Wisdom*, 32.

[50] *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, "The Spiritual Virtues", 185.

[51] *Language of the Self*, "A View of Yoga", 53-55.

[52] *Understanding Islam*, "The Path", 160.

[53] *Adastra & Stella Maris*, "Virtue", 215. See also: "One should not confuse true virtue / With morality — purely outward acts / That change with land and custom, / And do not transform the substance of the soul. / Virtue is inward — it resides in the nature / Of things; its values are the same / From people to people, and in every religion; / Humility, magnanimity, and devotion are the paths / That lead from the earthly world to Heaven." (*Songs without Names*, Sixth Collection, LXXX, 279)

[54] *Esoterism as Principle and as Way,* "Foundations of an Integral Aesthetics", 178-179.

[55] *Language of the Self*, "A View of Yoga", 56.

[56] *World Wheel*, Seventh Collection, XCVIII, 159. See also: "Truth and beauty go together: / What is divinely true, radiates beauty; / The beautiful and the noble bear witness to the truth; / The sacred is God's bouquet of flowers. / Only the fool sees nothing beautiful in the doctrine / And gives not to beauty the honor of wisdom. / One could exaggerate the rights of beauty — / But one should not call it an empty illusion." (*Songs without Names*, Seventh Collection, LX, 23)

[57] *World Wheel*, Fifth Collection, CXV, 80. See also: "Truth and virtue; beauty and love; / If these alone remained to me, / The world could sink into the waters — / Let me drink only from the beautiful and true." (*World Wheel*, Fifth Collection, IX, 49)

[58] *Road to the Heart*, "Truth", 25.

[59] Text, "Interiorizing Quality of Beauty", quoted in Michael Fitzgerald, "Beauty and the Sense of the Sacred: Schuon's Antidote to the Modern World", 133.

[60] Text, "The Three Dimensions of the Perennial Religion", quoted in *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, "Appendix", 133. Schuon explains why for a Shankara, the

question of congenial ambience did not arise: " Someone said to me that Shrī Shankara, the *jnānī*, / Was no esthete, that he remained within the strict realm / Of metaphysics, that questions of beauty were foreign / To him, that he was and remained the pure wise man. / Ye mathematicians, break not the rod / On him who speaks about the beautiful. / The wise men of the East did not preach beauty, / For in their world there was nothing else. / In the ancient worlds — and in every land — / Truth and the beautiful went hand in hand." (*Autumn Leaves* & *The Ring*, "Esthetics", 17). See also *Songs without Names*, Seventh Collection, LXXVI, 29.

[61] *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, "Foundations of an Integral Aesthetics", 182. Schuon further explains the sometimes restrictive and cautious attitude that religion takes towards beauty: "The Semitic exoterisms excluded the cult of nature for fear of idolatry, sacred dance for fear of worldliness, primordial nudity for fear of immorality, and, quite obviously, non-dogmatizing metaphysics for fear of heresy, and there are other scruples of this kind. We are not saying that exoterism should react differently, for it has the right and even the duty to be realistic in its own fashion and on its own plane; we say, rather, that we must take exoterism for what it is, and not for esoterism." (personal paper, 1994)

[62] *From the Divine to the Human*, "The Sense of the Sacred", 105. And also: "The 'cerebral' should be balanced by the 'existential.'. . . Spirituality should never be something that accentuates the mathematical aspects of Truth to the detriment of its musical aspects. In India, home of the most rigorous metaphysic, one never sees such a hypertrophy; the atmosphere is suffused precisely with a sense of the sacred and with beauty, as is shown by its temples, its dances, music and other aspects." ("Notes on an Audience", Autumn, 1986)

[63] *Adastra* & *Stella Maris*, "Paths", 49.

[64] *World Wheel*, First Collection, XVII, 7.

[65] *Adastra* & *Stella Maris*, "*Adastra*", 3.

[66] *Adastra* & *Stella Maris*, "Paths", 49.

[67] *Songs without Names*, Tenth Collection, V, 154. And also: "It might be asked whether we have a right / To the enjoyments that life offers — / Should one not make penance, is not sacrifice / Required in a world where folly rages? / Certainly, there must be renunciation and sobriety — / But also respect for the deep dignity / Of Beauty, for it bestows the wine of the Spirit. / In what is noble there is also pleasure, not merely burden; / There is also an opening towards the Above. / People are not / All alike, nor are the paths to the Kingdom of Heaven." (*Songs without Names*, Fourth Collection, LXXIX, 182) See also *Songs without Names*, Third Collection, XLV, 124 and *Songs without Names*, Eighth Collection, LXXXVII, 84, and CXVIII, 94.

[68] *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, "Preface", xxxiv. This 1953 publication was Schuon's first English-language book (his third book in print) and received wide acclaim. T.S. Eliot, a Nobel Prize Laureate in Literature, declared: "I have met with no more impressive work in the comparative study of Oriental and

Occidental religion." Some years later, Schuon freely retranslated the work into German as *Von der inneren Einheit der Religionen* (1981) using a more synthetic style and adding new material, including a chapter that is not in the original French. "The result", Schuon states, "is quite different in places from the French text; it is more concentrated, without losing anything of what is essential, quite on the contrary." (letter to Martin Lings, December 8, 1957)

[69] Schuon's Preface to *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* continues: "If an example may be drawn from the sensory sphere to illustrate the difference between metaphysical and theological knowledge, it may be said that the former, which can be called 'esoteric' when it is manifested through a religious symbolism, is conscious of the uncolored essence of light and of its character of pure luminosity; a given religious belief, on the other hand, will assert that light is red and not green, whereas another belief will assert the opposite; both will be right in so far as they distinguish light from darkness but not in so far as they identify it with a particular color." He goes on to explain that light colored by the form of a religion, "will of necessity confuse the symbol or form with the naked and supra-formal Truth". (xxx-xxxi)

[70] "If Revelations more or less exclude one another, this is so of necessity since God, when He speaks, expresses Himself in an absolute mode. . .". (*Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*, "Diversity of Revelation", 18)

[71] *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, "Limits of Religious Expansion", 79-80.

[72] Schuon notes the problematical existence of a "fatuous universalism", insisting that it is "better to believe intelligently in one's own religion—while believing it to be the only true one—than to believe stupidly in the validity of the other doctrines and traditions; stupidly, that is to say on a sentimental basis devoid of any intellectual quality." (letter dated May 29, 1964)

[73] Letter dated 29 May, 1964, quoted in *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*, "Appendix", 133 (emphasis by Schuon). Schuon also notes: "The Divine Being contains all the spiritual possibilities and consequently all the religious and mystical archetypes; having projected them into existence, He looks upon each of them with a particular and appropriate Gaze; in an analogous sense, it is said that the angels speak to each person in the appropriate language. This 'Gaze' or 'Face' is a kind of new 'divine subjectivity', subordinated to that of God as such, and transmitting it to man in a particular mode; it is thus that colorless light, without ceasing to be light, projects the colors of the rainbow; and it is thus that water, transformed into ice, gives rise to crystallizations and consequently to differentiated and even opposed manifestations. If there is a conflict between religions, confessions, and ways, it is because there is competition between archetypes; these could never be fundamentally contradictory—the apparent opposition of the colors red and green is resolved precisely in their colorless origin—but they are nonetheless mutually exclusive, except at their centers, which by definition are non-formal and open onto pure light." (*Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, "The Mystery of the Hypostatic Face", 92)

[74] Harry Oldmeadow, *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy*, 83-84, incorporating quotations from *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*, "Diversity of Revelation", 20, 17.

[75] *Songs without Names*, Tenth Collection, XLIII, 165.

[76] *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, "Two Esoterisms", 115.

[77] *Transcendent Unity of Religions*, "Preface", xxxiv.

[78] *From the Divine to the Human*, "Structure and Universality of the Conditions of Existence", 60n.

[79] *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, "Creation as a Divine Quality", 55-56.

[80] *Eye of the Heart*, "Between East and West", 68.

[81] *The Feathered Sun*, "His Holiness and the Medicine Man", 113-114. Christianity does not have a precise parallel to the doctrine of the four ages, but the idea of a continual decline in spirituality over time is expressed by the fall from the Garden of Eden at the time of the Original Sin and the Biblical prophecies of Armageddon, the Apocalypse, the Last Days, and the Day of Judgment. The Islamic teachings contained in the Koran and the *hadīth* (sayings of the Prophet), are remarkably similar to the Christian teachings. See Martin Lings, *The Eleventh Hour*, for information on the Christian and Islamic teachings about the Last Days, Harry Oldmeadow, *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy*, chap. 12, "Cosmic Cycles and the *Kali-Yuga*", for an extensive discussion of this topic drawing on diverse sources and traditions, and, more generally, René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World* and *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*.

[82] Schuon's views on evolutionism and progress are summarized in Harry Oldmeadow, *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy,* chap. 13, "Scientism, Evolution, and Progress".

[83] *Of the Land and the Spirit: The Essential Lord Northbourne on Ecology and Religion*, 203.

[84] Schuon does not deny the startling results produced by modern science, nor does he condemn all aspects of modern scientific methodologies. However, "One must beware of sensory and mental illusions, / When making an objective investigation; / In such matters, the scientist is entirely right — / But he is not right when he thinks that the Intellect can be dispensed with, / As if the sage were but a dreamer; / Knowledge is deception, when the Intellect is not the center. / The truth is that pure objectivity is necessary — / And with it the whole Self, not merely the half; / The essential Self which sees all that is real — / The Light of Eternity." (*Songs without Names*, Third Collection, XCVIII, 142)

[85] *Language of the Self*, "The Meaning of Caste", 137, 137n.

[86] *Understanding Islam*, "Islam", 26.

[87] *Autumn Leaves & The Ring*, "Points of Rest", 29.

[88] *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, "Preface", xxxiii.

[89] *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, "Understanding Esoterism", 19.

[90] *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, "Preface", xxxiii-xxxiv.

[91] Prior to the Renaissance, traditional societies were more or less closed in the sense that they did not mix with one another in most parts of the world. Each traditional civilization had its own way of life based on the spiritual genius of its primary religion and was unfamiliar with the beliefs of other cultures, except at the borders of their respective civilizations. A greater mixing of religions and societies began at the time of the Renaissance through more accessible modes of travel and the wider distribution of the printed word, a process that has accelerated into our day. This coming together and forced interaction of adherents to different religions is an unprecedented circumstance.

[92] *Transfiguration of Man*, "Thought: Light and Perversion", 10. See also: "We live in an age of confusion and thirst in which the advantages of communication are greater than those of secrecy; moreover, only esoteric theses can satisfy the imperious logical needs created by the philosophic and scientific positions of the modern world." (*Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, "Introduction", 7)

[93] *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, "Introduction", 8.

[94] Oldmeadow (b. 1947) first contacted Schuon in 1980 when he was preparing his master's degree thesis at the University of Sydney, entitled "Frithjof Schuon and the Meaning of Tradition". He is now a professor at Latrobe University in Bendigo, Australia. Other sources to facilitate further study include: *The Essential Frithjof Schuon*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings*, by Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude, and *Advice to the Serious Seeker: Meditations on the Teaching of Frithjof Schuon*, by James Cutsinger.

[95] Letter dated 26 February, 1963, quoted in *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*, "Appendix", 135.

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