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Prologue

A Fateful Meeting of Minds: A. K. Coomaraswamy and R. Guénon

by Marco Pallis

Memories of the great man whose centenary we are now wishing to celebrate go back, for me, to the late 1920s, when I was studying music under Arnold Dolmetsch whose championship of ancient musical styles and methods in Western Europe followed lines which Coomaraswamy, whom he had known personally, highly approved of, as reflecting many of his own ideas in a particular field of art. Central to Dolmetsch's thinking was his radical rejection of the idea of "progress," as applied to the arts, at a time when the rest of the musical profession took this for granted. The earlier forms of music which had disappeared from the European scene together with the instruments for which that music was composed must, so it was argued, have been inferior or "primitive" as the saying went; speaking in Darwinian terms their elimination was part of the process of natural selection whereby what was more limited, and therefore by comparison less satisfying to the modern mind, became outmoded in favor of what had been rendered possible through the general advance of mankind. All the historical and psychological contradictions implied in such a world-view were readily bypassed by a society thinking along these lines; inconvenient evidence was simply brushed aside or else explained away by means of palpably tendentious arguments. Such was the climate of opinion at the beginning of the present century: if belief in the quasi-inevitable march of progress is nowadays beginning to wear rather thin, this is largely due to the results of two world-wars and to the threats of mass-destruction which progress in the technological field has inevitably brought with it. But even so, people are still reluctant to abandon the utopian dreams on which world opinion had long been fed by

politicians and the mass-media alike; the progressivist psychosis needs a rather naive optimism for its complement, as has been shown again and again. The warnings of a Coomaraswamy do not fall gratefully on such ears.

While I myself was working with Arnold Dolmetsch, Coomaraswamy's name had occasionally cropped up in conversation, but at the time its mention struck no particular chord in my consciousness. Awareness of what he really stood for came indirectly, after one of my fellow-students had introduced me to the writings of René Guénon, a French author who was then creating a stir among the reading public of his own country by his frontal attack on all basic assumptions and valuations on which the modern Western civilization rested, including the belief in "progress"; these ideas he contrasted with the traditional principles and values still current in the East and especially in India. A French periodical to which Guénon was a frequent contributor and to which, for that reason, I hastened to subscribe, was found to contain a continual stream of articles from Coomaraswamy's pen which, as I soon perceived, matched those of Guénon both on the critical side of things and in their most telling exposition of metaphysical doctrine, in which Gita and Upanishads, Plato and Meister Eckhart complemented one another in a never ending synthesis. Such was the intellectual food on which my eager mind was nourished during those formative years; looking back now, it is difficult to imagine what later life might have become but for these timely influences.

It can perhaps be said, however, that the seed thus sown did not fall on ground altogether unprepared for its reception. Discovery of Guénon and Coomaraswamy came to me less as a fresh illumination than as an adequately documented and reasoned confirmation of something I had believed ever since I was a small child, namely that the West enjoyed no innate superiority versus the East, rather did the balance of evidence lean, for me, the other way. I did not have to go outside my family circle to discover this; my parents (both of whom were Greek) had spent many happy years in India and the tales they told me about their life out there coupled with the no less telling evidence afforded by objects of Indian craftsmanship to be found in our home had left my childish mind convinced that the Indian ideal was the one for me. The colonialist claims and arguments which my English teachers, when I went to school, wove into the history lesson only drove me to exasperation; by the time I was

ten *purna svaraj* for the Indians had become an article of faith, though everybody around me said this could never happen. Given this pre-existing tilt in my thinking and feeling, the reading of Coomaraswamy and Guénon was just what I needed in order to bring my ideas into focus by showing, apart from the particular case of India, that there was an essential rightness attaching to a traditional mode of life, whether found in Europe, Asia or elsewhere, as compared with the secularist, progressive, bigotedly "tolerant" liberal society in which I had grown up. Occasional contributions to Mahatma Gandhi's funds marked my youthful enthusiasm for the Indian cause; the danger that India herself might, under pressure of events, get caught up in the secularist ideology after the departure of her former colonial masters did not at that time cloud the horizon of my hopes to any serious extent.

To return to Guénon and Coomaraswamy: in terms of their respective dialectical styles contrast between these two authors could hardly have been greater; if they agreed about their main conclusions, as indeed they did, one can yet describe them as temperamentally poles apart. In the Frenchman, with his Latin scholastic formation under Jesuit guidance, we meet a mind of phenomenal lucidity of a type one can best describe as "mathematical" in its apparent detachment from anything savoring of aesthetic and even moral justifications; his criteria of what was right and what was inadmissible remained wholly intellectual ones needing no considerations drawn from a different order of reality to reenforce them—their own self-evidence sufficed. Guénon was in fact a mathematician of no small parts, as can be gathered from a brief treatise he wrote on the *Infinitesimal Calculus* where the subject is expressly related to transcendent principles; a science describable as traditional will always take stock of this possibility, where a profanely conceived science will ignore it; all the tragedy of modern science is bound up with this cause.

To a mind like Guénon's abstract thinking comes all too easily; it was to his great credit that he all along stressed the need, side by side with a theoretical grasp of any given doctrine, for its concrete—one can also say its ontological—realization failing which one cannot properly speak of knowledge; for academic philosophizing Guénon had nothing but contempt. His insistence on the essential part to be played by an initiatic transmission, from guru to disciple, took many people by surprise at the time when his first books

appeared; such an idea, let alone its practical application, had long fallen into abeyance in the Christian world, as Guénon observed, a fact which made him doubt whether *moksha* in the Hindu sense was any longer attainable for those following the Christian way; at best something like *krama mukti*, so he thought, remained there as a possibility. With his mind largely conditioned by his own Catholic upbringing, he failed to notice the existence of the Hesychast tradition in the Orthodox Church where a teaching in many respects reminiscent of the Eastern initiations is still to be found alive as a shining exception in the Christian world; had Guénon become aware of this fact in good time certain misconceptions on his part affecting inherent possibilities of the Christian life would probably have been avoided.

Apart from his amazing flair for expounding pure metaphysical doctrine and his critical acuteness when dealing with the errors of the modern world, Guénon displayed a remarkable insight into things of a cosmological order; here one cannot fail to mention what was perhaps the most brilliantly original among his books, namely *The Reign of Quantity*. In this work a truth of capital importance was revealed, one which will have numerous practical applications over and above its general bearing: this is the fact that time and space do not, as commonly believed, constitute a uniform *continuum* in neutral matrix of which events happen and bodies become manifested. On the contrary, time-space itself constitutes a field of qualitative differences, thus excluding, in principle and fact, the reduction of anything whatsoever to a purely quantitative formula. It will at once be apparent that, given the above awareness, all the assumptions leading to an exclusively quantitative science of the universe fall to the ground. Moreover this same awareness will be found to coincide with the traditional concept of *samsara*, where nothing is ever identical or repeatable as such. The concept of cosmic cycles of varying character and duration is likewise made clearer by Guénon's penetrating insight into this subject.

Turning now to Coomaraswamy, we encounter a warm-hearted soul expressing itself in firm yet gentle language, but also a mind as implacable as that of Guénon when it comes to accurate discrimination between truth and falsehood. An intellectual genius well describes this man in whose person East and West came together, since his father belonged to an ancient Tamil family established in Sri Lanka while his mother came of English aristocratic stock. An

immensely retentive memory coupled with command of many languages both classical and current constituted the equipment of this prince among scholars. In the matter of checking his references Coomaraswamy was meticulously scrupulous where Guénon was the reverse; the latter could jump to conclusions and then proceed to argue from there, where the former would first have subjected his material to every kind of cross-reference prior to committing himself to a definitive opinion. One must also welcome, in Coomaraswamy, a highly active aesthetic perceptiveness, itself a source of illumination throughout his life, side by side with the rational faculty; whereas in Guénon's case one can speak of a quasi-total absence of aesthetic criteria whether pertaining to human craftsmanship or drawn from the realm of Nature; the written word remained, for him, his almost exclusive source of information. Coomaraswamy, on the other hand, was extremely sensitive to all that eye or ear could tell him; he loved his garden in more senses than one. The traditional lore of the North American Indians, when he got to know of it, moved him very deeply: here among these much persecuted remnants of the indigenous population of the Americas was still to be found an organic intelligence able to read the open book of Nature as others read their written Scriptures; the metaphysical insight of these people in regard to all that is created, as constituting a living revelation of the Great Spirit was, as Coomaraswamy immediately perceived, highly reminiscent of Vedic times—one could here without exaggeration speak of a type of wisdom belonging to an earlier *yuga* which somehow had got perpetuated into these latter times bringing a message of hope to a forgetful and much tormented world. The recognition that every plant, every insect, stones even, participate in *dharma* and have to be treated, not as mere spoils for man's appetites, but as his companions in terms both of origin and ultimate destiny conditioned, for the Red people, all their ideas of what is right and wrong: what a happier world this would be had such ideas remained prevalent among all mankind!

My own personal connection with Coomaraswamy dates back to the late 1930s when I was engaged in writing my first book *Peaks and Lamas* in which two Himalayan journeys were described in detail, leading up by stages to the discovery of Mahayana Buddhism under its Tibetan form. A letter addressed to Coomaraswamy asking him to clarify a certain Sanskrit term was the start of a correspondence

which continued with ever increasing frequency and intimacy during the years that followed. With the outbreak of war in the autumn of 1939 I found myself caught up in local activities of various kinds which, however, left me some time for writing. I and my friend Richard Nicholson, who shared my principal interests and had taken part in the Indian expeditions mentioned above, decided to use our leisure time in translating two of Guénon's most important treatises the *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines* and his supreme masterpiece, *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedanta*; they were eventually published by Luzac, London, as part of a series covering much of Guénon's work.*

Each of these books presented a problem which touched us personally in the shape of a chapter concerning Buddhism, which Guénon summarily dismissed as little more than a heretical development within the Hindu world itself; there was no evidence to show that Guénon before arriving at this negative conclusion had consulted any authoritative Buddhist texts as a check upon any hostile criticisms he might quote from already prejudiced sources, an omission of which Coomaraswamy would have been incapable. What were we then, as translators, to do? Should we simply render the text just as it stood or should we, before doing so, risk an appeal to the author in the hopes that he might reconsider some of the things he had said on the subject? For him to think of doing so, however, some fresh and convincing evidence was indispensable: how could the personal experience of two young men carry any weight with a man of the eminence of René Guénon? Only one person seemed qualified to make him think again: this was Coomaraswamy both because of the high respect in which Guénon held him and also as a scholar able to produce concrete evidence of an irrefutable kind. A letter was hastily sent to Boston asking for support in the form of authoritative quotations coupled with permission to use his name.

Coomaraswamy willingly acceded to our request; a letter from him soon followed containing incontrovertible evidence proving that Guénon had made a number of mis-statements of fact in regard to what Buddhism actually teaches; it was left to us, however, to mar-

* Editor's Note: The publishers Sophia Perennis of Ghent, New York are in the process of completing the publication of *The Collected Works of René Guénon* (in 24 volumes).

shal the arguments in logical succession on the basis of the fresh material thus supplied to us, to which we now were able to add some observations of our own, based on what we had seen and heard during our intercourse with Buddhist authorities in Sikkim, Ladak and other places. This letter was then sent off to Cairo where Guénon was then living: in fact he spent all the rest of life in that city.

We were not left to wait long for a reply, which went beyond our fondest hopes in its completeness. Guénon directed that the two offending chapters be suppressed, promising also to replace them by others composed on quite different lines. Indeed, he went further, since he directed us, by anticipation, to make similar corrections in other texts of his if and when we came to translate them; for this purpose he supplied a number of re-worded passages, mostly not of great length, but sufficient to meet our various objections. For this comforting result we have to thank Coomaraswamy to a large extent, even though the initiative came from us; Guénon's intellectual integrity in bowing before the evidence also deserves grateful acknowledgment.

What perhaps also comes out of this episode is the fact that, in judging the authenticity of a tradition, there are other ways besides the scrutiny of texts, important though this obviously is; an intelligent perception of beauty can provide no less valid criteria. Could anyone really look on the paintings to be found at Ajanta and in countless Japanese or Tibetan temples and still believe that the impulse behind these things stemmed from a basic error? The same argument would apply to the art of the Christian and Islamic, as well as of countless tribal, traditions existing all over the world until recent times, to say nothing of Hindu art in all its exuberant glories. Contrariwise, the sheer ugliness of the modern civilization as displayed in its most typical products bespeaks an underlying error; this evidence of the senses, which Guénon largely ignored, was crucial for Coomaraswamy, being complementary to whatever his reason for its part could show him. So should it be for ourselves, though not many today think or feel in this manner. If they did so, the world would be a very different place.

The end of the war sent our thoughts speeding in an easterly direction, with Tibet as our ultimate goal. Some time previously we had received the joyful news that Ananda Coomaraswamy, his wife and their son Rama were about to transfer their home to India, where they hoped to find some quiet spot, in the Kumaon hills per-

haps, so that the master himself might live out his days in an atmosphere of contemplative recollection; apart from translating Upanishads, his professional activities would be at an end: such was the plan outlined in a letter to me. In anticipation of this move he asked me to let his son accompany Richard Nicholson and myself as far as Kalimpong in the Himalayan foothills of northern Bengal, which was to be our base while waiting for permission to cross the Tibetan frontier. Meanwhile Rama was to enroll as a student at the Haridwar Gurukul where an old friend of his father's held a senior position on the teaching staff.

To the above proposal we gladly agreed, and all the more so since we already knew Rama personally from his having spent holidays with us while attending his father's old school Wycliffe College in Gloucestershire. During these visits, with his father's warm encouragement, I had been teaching Rama something of those older forms of music which Arnold Dolmetsch had imparted to me. For this art Rama displayed a marked talent, becoming rapidly proficient on the Recorder or straight flute blown through a whistle mouth-piece, from which he drew a tone of bird-like quality only granted to a few. The long journey from Liverpool to Calcutta by slow cargo-boat enabled us, among other things, to pay a hasty visit to René Guénon in Cairo. A longish halt in Ceylon likewise enabled us to make an excursion via Ramesvaram and Madurai as far as Tiruvannamalai where we obtained the *darshan* of Sri Ramana Maharshi, further confirmed by the moonlight circuit of Arunachalam, following which we went on to rejoin our ship at Vizagapatam.

The year 1947 was marked by three events each of which concerned us deeply; firstly, we were allowed to go into Tibet—participation in the life of an unusually contented people still living on entirely traditional lines, as was then the case, was an unforgettable experience which taught one more than many books; secondly, India attained her political independence while we were in Tibet—for me this was a childhood's dream come true; thirdly, 1947 was the year not only of Coomaraswamy's seventieth birthday which drew forth the congratulations of a multitude of well-wishers from all over the world, but also of his death—he passed away quite unexpectedly while working in the garden he loved, a painless end for himself which left so many others saddened. So, after all, we were not destined to look on the face of the man whose teachings had

played so great a part in our intellectual formation over the years; our karma and his denied us this boon.

News of his father's decease only reached Rama Coomaraswamy belatedly, through a paragraph he chanced to see in a newspaper; the reason for this was due to the widespread disorders which followed on the separation of Pakistan. With so many refugees on the move, posts and communications in northern India became disorganized, so that for a time Srimati Luisa Coomaraswamy's letters failed to reach her son; eventually, however, a message got through instructing Rama to rejoin his mother in America as soon as possible, thus spelling an end to their Indian plans. Rama eventually took up the study of medicine and now practices as a surgeon of high distinction at Greenwich in the State of Connecticut. His professional activities have not, however, deterred him from making his own original contribution to those causes which his father had served with such brilliance, as evidenced by a number of papers from Rama's pen in which traditional values are expounded, mostly in relation to Christian problems.

The association of two great names which has provided its headline for the present discussion, besides drawing attention to the essential part played by Guénon at the time when Coomaraswamy's genius was about to produce its finest flowering, pays tribute to a quality these men possessed in common, namely their ability to build an intellectual bridge between East and West; the rare designation of *tirthankara* befits them both. A certain difference of emphasis did however, enter in, due to the circumstances in which each author found himself: when Guénon started writing the Christian Church, despite some erosion of its membership under pressure of the times, still presented, especially under its Catholic form, a certain appearance of solidity, not to say fossilization, for such it had largely become. What distressed Guénon particularly was the painfully exoteric thinking which passed for Christian theology; the metaphysical implications of the Christian dogmas seemed to have been almost totally lost sight of. In order to recover the missing dimension, minus which any religion is doomed to more or less rapid disintegration, Guénon felt that a knowledge of the Eastern traditions, notably the Hindu and the Taoist, might be a means of spurring Christians into rediscovering the deeper meaning which the teachings of the Church harbor implicitly and this, for Guénon was the only remaining hope for the West.

With Coomaraswamy the intellectual balance was held more evenly: though his own paternal ancestry imparted a characteristically Indian trend to his thinking his commentaries on Christian and Platonic themes displayed a sympathetic insight not less than when he was handling Hindu or Buddhist subjects. His bridge was designed to carry a two-way traffic without particular bias in one or other direction. This does not mean, however, that he was any less severe than Guénon in condemning the West for the harm it had wrought in all those Asian and African countries that had, during the colonial era, come under its sway; he singled out for particular blame that alien system of education with which the name of Macaulay is associated in India as well as the industrialism which, all over the world, has deprived the multitude of simple men and women of that sacred motivation which is the true satisfaction of the human need to work; but at the same time he was also forever reminding Western people of the precious spiritual and artistic heritage it still could claim to possess, if only it would re-read the signs of its own history.

Since the years when Guénon and Coomaraswamy were both writing, the climate of Western thought and feeling has undergone a noticeable change, of which those who are watching events from an easterly vantage-point might profitably take stock. Though the official ideology in Europe and America is still geared to the dogma of "progress," that is to say of an optimistically slanted evolutionary process with Utopia (or shall we say the reign of Antichrist?) at the end of the road, many of the previously confident assumptions that go with such an ideology are now being seriously called in question by a thoughtful minority and more especially among the young. Doubts concerning the long range viability, not of such and such a socio-political institution, but of the modern civilization in its entirety are to be heard with increasing frequency in the "liberal" countries—in places under Marxist control to express such opinions might well land a man in Solzhenitsin's "Gulag Archipelago." Where free criticism on the subject is still forthcoming, it often takes the concrete form of small-scale attempts to opt out of the prevailing system, for example by going in for a hard life of subsistence farming in a remote corner of the country—its very hardness is welcomed as an ascesis—or else by embracing a handicraft like weaving or pottery; one such highly successful craft has been the making of musical instruments according to ancient models, by way of supply-

ing a growing demand consequent upon the revival of early music inaugurated by my own teacher, Arnold Dolmetsch. Individual experiments apart, the Gandhian ideal of moderation, affecting human appetites as well as possessions, has certainly gained a lot of ground in the West, not merely because people think this will make for greater happiness in the long run, but also as offering them a somewhat better chance of survival if and when the catastrophe many are now fearing comes to pass.

Yet another sign of weakening belief in the modern way of life and its hitherto accepted valuations is the wish, evinced by many people, to come to proper terms with Nature instead of treating her together with all her progeny as a field for limitless exploitation or else as a potential enemy to be brought to heel; phrases like the "conquest" of Everest or of the Moon no longer win the passive acquiescence of some time ago; in many ears they strike a sacrilegious note. People nowadays are apt to feel uncomfortable when they hear it said, across the official media, that lions or tigers are to be saved from extermination to serve as "big game" or that rare plants should be scheduled for protection as being "of scientific interest." The need to safeguard some beautiful mountain area does not spring from the fact that this provides an attraction for tourists (not to mention their money); for this sort of argument the present generation of Nature-lovers has no use. As for the pollution of which we hear so much today—the gradual poisoning of land, sea, the very air we breathe by the accumulated by-products of industrial expansion—this is now seen by many as the reflex of a no less widespread pollution of the mind: without a prior cleansing of the mind to the point of revising all its demands both material, moral and intellectual, how dare one hope to escape the consequences of past heedlessness?—this question is also being asked today.

All these various forms of self-questioning are converging towards an awareness of the fact that man's place in this world, if it confers privileges on the one hand, comprises grave responsibilities on the other both in regard to how we view and treat our fellow-creatures great and small (including even those we term "inanimate," a questionable term in itself) and also in regard to how we shall acknowledge, through our own conduct, the global sacredness of Nature in her capacity of cosmic theophany, in which each kind of manifested being, including ourselves, has its appointed place

and function as a unique and therefore irreplaceable witness to the Divine Act which called it into existence. Man, as the central being in a given world, is called to act, as their common mediator between Heaven and Earth, on behalf of all his fellow-beings: the Bodhisattva's cosmic compassion as expounded in the Mahayana scriptures carries a similar message, if differently expressed. It is towards some such awareness that many people are now beginning to feel their way in the West; for Eastern people the danger is lest they now lose touch with that same message as formerly voiced in their own traditions, enamored, as so many of them are, of the very errors the West imposed on them by force or fraud and from which it is now itself in danger of perishing—truly a paradoxical reversal of the respective positions.

Returning to the West, with America chiefly in mind, it has come both as a shock and an encouragement for many to discover that this, for them, newly found awareness had already been the very stuff of life for the indigenous peoples of the American continent since time immemorial as well as the mainspring of their day-to-day behavior; the strong sense of kinship between mankind and the rest of creation is the secret of the Amerindian wisdom. It will surely be a pleasure to Indian readers to learn that one who, in recent years, has done much to reveal that wisdom to the reading public both of his own country and further afield—his name is Joseph Epes Brown—was powerfully influenced during his student years by Coomaraswamy, a happening which set him on the spiritual quest which eventually introduced him to the Red Indians; it was thus that he met the aged and saintly Hehaka Sapa ("Black Elk"), a great sage on any showing. Professor Brown is now teaching in the University of Montana in the far West, close to the people he has learned to love. Many of his students belong to that people, being for that reason fortunate in having for their present mentor one who really understands their ways.*

Another member of the same band of Harvard students who had frequented the Coomaraswamy household and taken to heart

* Editor's Note: Professor Joseph Epes Brown passed away in his home in Stevensville, Montana in September 2000, leaving behind an important body of writings on the traditional lifeways of the Native Americans, including *The Sacred Pipe*, *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian*, *Animals of the Soul*, and *Teaching Spirits: Understanding Native American Religious Traditions*.

the sage advice to be had there was Whitall N. Perry, now living in Switzerland.* Somewhere in his writings the great Doctor had expressed the opinion that, with the way things are tending, a day might soon come when a man of culture would be expected to familiarize himself with more than just what the Greek and Latin languages had offered hitherto: Sanskrit and Chinese, Tibetan and Arabic would all contribute to the intellectual nourishment of such a person, failing which he would remain hopelessly provincial in his outlook. In this same connection Coomaraswamy had mentioned the need for someone to compile an encyclopedia of the great traditions of the world, both Eastern and Western, to serve as a general book of references for those seeking corroboration of their own faith in the parallel experience of men of other orientations; he also spoke of "paths that lead to the same summit" as the common ideal which, if sincerely realized might yet rescue mankind from the worst disaster. But to assemble such an anthology—here was a task to daunt even a brave and assiduous mind! Could anyone be found to undertake it?

The task itself found its man in Whitall Perry. For some seventeen years he labored in selfless dedication, combing the spiritual literature of the world, past and present, East and West together. The outcome of all this was a complex mosaic of quotations arranged in such a way as to illuminate, and by their contrast heighten, one another's meaning. Highly informative but concise comments precede each section and sub-section of this monumental compilation, while an ingenious system of cross-references is there to enable students of particular subjects to unearth additional material to be found elsewhere. At the end of it all, the author did me the honor of asking me to contribute a preface, which I did all the more gladly since this enabled me to pay, if indirectly, a concrete tribute to Coomaraswamy himself as originator of the idea of an encyclopedic work laid out on this scale. The title chosen for it was *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*: would that the man who inspired this project had lived to see his expressed wish realized so amply!

By natural disposition Ananda K. Coomaraswamy was nothing if not a *karma-yogin*. Assuredly a metaphysical flair like his does not go

* Editor's Note: Whitall N. Perry has subsequently relocated to America, where he currently resides in Bloomington, Indiana.

without a strongly contemplative bent; nevertheless he remained primarily a man of action, a warrior for *dharma* with pen and word. This impression of the man moreover provides a cue for us in this, his centenary year. What better homage to his memory can one find than to join him in striking a blow or two in the battle of Kurukshetra, which is ever with us? No need to look far afield for opportunities; one's daily occupations, one's home with its furnishings, how one spends one's leisure time, what one chooses to wear or not to wear and for what reason, all these things together contribute a field of battle adequate to the powers of any normal person, to say nothing of various public causes.

If all these matters of human choice and conduct belong by definition to *samsara* as generator of distinctions and contrasts continually varied and renewed, it is well to remember that this unremitting round of birth and death, terrible as such, yet offers us who are involved in it one compensating advantage inasmuch as it also provides a constant and inescapable reminder of *nirvana*; but for the variety of experience thus made available, what motive would anyone have for thinking of *moksha*, let alone realizing it actively? To quote another master of the Perennial Philosophy, Frithjof Schuon, "do what it may to affirm itself, *samsara* is condemned to unveil *nirvana*": could anyone have put the intrinsic message of existence more succinctly?

I venture to believe that Coomaraswamy, were he with us again today, facing a world that seems to be decomposing before our eyes, would express himself in similar terms: hopefully therefore, in function of those very vicissitudes which, for the man of profane disposition, drive him to despair.

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