

Tradition, Orthodoxy and the Interfaith Movement: Where do the Traditionalists Stand?

By Charles Upton

Part One: An Open Letter to the Traditionalist/Perennialist School

[Part One of this article contains the text of a cover letter (now an “open letter”) that accompanied a mailing by the author of his new publication, *Findings in Metaphysic, Path and Lore, With a Response to the Traditionalist/Perennialist School* (Sophia Perennis, 2010).]

Dear Friends¹:

Greetings. I have sent complementary copies of this book to the few people whom I imagine may understand some of the issues addressed; the list of recipients appears below.

The subtitle of the book is “A Response to the Traditionalist/Perennialist School.” For the past 20 years I have done my best to form my intellectual life around the writings of the School, which I believe represent the greatest re-presentation of the major themes of metaphysics and the spiritual life that has appeared in the west for several centuries, and in which may be found a truly providential unveiling of these perennial principles for our own time. However, it is my impression that the Traditionalist/Perennialist School has changed so radically since the days of the original *Studies in Comparative Religion* that it is hardly recognizable as the School of Guénon, Coomaraswamy and

¹ Copies of this letter, and of *Findings* were mailed to: James Cutsinger, Reza Shah-Kazemi, William Stoddart, Eric and Irena Galati, Barry and Rebecca McDonald, Mark Perry, Harry Oldmeadow, Rodney Blackhirst, Timothy Scott, Leonard Lewisohn, Samuel Sinner, William Chittick, Patrick Laude, Jeremy and Tanya Henzell-Thomas, Marco Toti, Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, Wolfgang Smith, Kamal Southall, Vincent Cornell, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and M. Ali Lakhani.

Schuon; this change is far from universal, and perhaps not yet entirely dominant, but it is clearly in evidence. Thus you will find in *Findings* a spirited defense of Traditionalist doctrines as well as a demonstration of how they can be employed in several different contexts to inform our practice of the spiritual life; but you will also find a criticism of certain trends in 21st century Traditionalism/Perennialism that appear—to me at least—to run counter a number of principles that were central to the first two generations of the School. In this letter I will be more explicit about my reasons for offering this criticism than I am in the book itself, since it was written for those investigating Traditionalism/Perennialism as well as those already identified with it. [To speak only of myself, the metaphysical principles that came to me through the Traditionalist School penetrated so deeply that I know they will be with me for the rest of my life—which makes the growing departure from them on the part of some who used to follow them a tragedy for me personally.]

In particular, there seems to be a tendency in present-day Traditionalism/Perennialism to identify doctrinal orthodoxy with “exoterism” exclusively, to the point where “esoterism” becomes transformed into a rather individualistic kind of speculation—though some, after reading this book, may decide that I have been guilty of the same thing myself! And one apparent consequence of this growing divorce between esoterism and orthodoxy is the inability to distinguish *exoterism* from *heresy*. The “esoteric” is considered to be so far beyond religious exoterism that widespread heresy in the exoteric field should be of little concern to him. This is certainly not in the spirit of Frithjof Schuon’s highly critical response to Vatican II, to take only one example.

It is true that Schuon distinguished between quintessential or plenary esoterism, and the sort of esoterism that presents itself as the inner meaning of one particular revelation. And while it is important not to let the horizons of plenary esoterism be limited by identification with a single religious “language,” we also need to guard against the alienation of esoterism from exoteric religion entirely—in the minds of the *esoterics themselves*, that is, given that the exoterics cannot be expected to understand such subtleties. As Schuon himself pointed out, when religion finds itself hard pressed to maintain orthodoxy in the face of modernism, it falls to the esoterics to uphold it. It is my impression, however, that some who identify with Traditionalism/Perennialism today no longer feel

bound by either the doctrinal or the ritual norms of orthodoxy—*any* orthodoxy—their excuse being that “plenary esoterism” absolves them of this duty. Nor is this drift away from orthodoxy entirely invisible to the general public outside the Traditionalist/Perennialist School; one blog, for example, is presently quoting Frithjof Schuon in support of the idea that the human race is now “growing beyond the religions”. [For Frithjof Schuon’s position on orthodoxy, see *Stations of Wisdom*: World Wisdom Books, 1995, p. 1; *From the Divine to the Human*: World Wisdom Books, 1982, p. 138; *Stations of Wisdom*: World Wisdom Books, 1995, pp. 22-23; *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*: Perennial Books, 1995, p. 10.]

In addition, there used to be a consensus that, in the nature of things, only a few would be able to grasp even the rather preliminary notion of the transcendent unity of religions, not to mention plenary esoterism itself; consequently little was to be expected from the “ecumenical” or “interfaith” movements in this regard. It now seems, however, that the Traditionalist/Perennialist School is much more open to the interfaith world, and struggling to take its place within it, despite the fact that the interfaith movement is in many ways anti-traditional, and includes elements seeking to place the revealed religions under secular authority, sometimes even in terms of doctrine. Certain Traditionalist/Perennialists have perhaps been misled into thinking that they can play a meaningful role in that arena in view of the developing synthesis between an older sort of ecumenism emphasizing tolerance and mutual understanding between the established faiths—certainly good things in themselves—and the newer mass interest in every sort of esoterism, pseudo-esoterism, occultism, primal religion and archaic or mythic worldview, which might make it seem as if the masses, or a significant percentage of them, have now become “esoterically sophisticated” enough to understand Perennialism, and profit from it. A false hope like this ignores the fact that though the postmodern “esoterist”, though he may have gained a certain worldly sophistication in esoteric lore, has usually discarded—or never developed—any truly traditional worldview or sense of the sacred; this is an effect all too often produced by postmodern sophistication itself.

I believe it is true to say that a traditional sense of the sacred, the “instinct” for God so to speak, cannot really be handed down via books or the internet; apart from the unpredictable action of the Deity which can intervene at any point, it must be transmitted face-to-face. As the

generations who lived in more traditional times—that is, within a modernism that still allowed a cultural corner for the revealed religions—give way to entirely postmodern generations where even the cultural memory of the true quality of traditional spirituality has evaporated, the fundamental sense of the sacred from which every civilization springs (or every one worthy of the name) is simply not being passed on, its vacant chair occupied by mere information.

Lastly, the Traditionalist/Perennialist world seems either largely ignorant of, or unthinkingly willing to accept, the great strides toward the co-optation of the interfaith movement made by the globalist elites—those worldly principalities and powers whose firm intent seems to be to wipe whatever remains of traditional civilizations from the earth. (Let anyone who doubts the reality of this influence simply do a Google search on “Rumi”; he or she will see glowing endorsements of the Mevlana on a number of diplomatic, State Department-oriented and globalist/idealist websites—not the real Mevlana, of course, but a spurious figure concocted by the social engineers to represent universal peace and religious unity—and thereby to co-opt *tasawwuf*. Between an attraction to Islamicist militancy on the one hand and the growing co-optation by the globalists and/or the West on the other, the territory available to truly traditional and independent Sufism continues to shrink.) Globalization is often seen as a good, or at least as an inevitability, as well as a trend that might allow Perennialist intellectuals to secure a degree of patronage from the worldly elites, given the need of these elites to “celebrate diversity”—at least initially—so as to ultimately found a monolithic global system of culture, economics, and political power. It may well be that such a system can never be firmly established—particularly since imposed unity inevitably generates rebellion and chaos—but the widespread attempt to establish it, by cultural, financial, political and military means, has already been destructive enough. Its agents and patrons know full well that their Tower of Babel will ultimately fall unless held together by the mortar of religion—not any true religion revealed by God, certainly, but rather one of their own making, the product of a concerted, intensive and long-term course of “research and development”, as well as of a perversion and co-optation of the established faiths.

The Traditionalist/ Perennialist School of today, however, seems largely unwilling to investigate the methods and goals of the global Powers

That Be in this regard—though Guénon certainly made an admirable beginning—unwilling or simply unable to discern and trace their agenda (quite successful so far) of liquidating Tradition and establishing Counter-Tradition. For this reason the School seems ill-prepared at this juncture to function as a spiritual “remnant” in these final days of the *Kali-yuga*—which may in fact turn out not to have been the role assigned to it in the Divine economy. Indeed, the very eschatological vision that would allow them (us?) to understand and respond to the profoundly dark yet spiritually pregnant quality of these times—so well represented by Guénon’s *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* and Martin Lings’ *The Eleventh Hour*—seems to have largely evaporated; if one wishes to be accepted by this world, to remind it that it’s on its last legs is not the most effective way of achieving this goal.

But maybe I’m wrong. Maybe I’m seeing things only from my own ill-informed and narrow point of view. That is why I am receptive to, I welcome, I actively solicit, any comments or criticisms you may wish to offer. I may need correction on a number of points; the disappointed are sometimes unfair, and always attached to their assumptions. And at this point someone might ask: Who exactly is exhibiting these tendencies? Where have these attitudes appeared in print? My answer is that to go any further than I already have in “naming names”—for example, by being explicit about the way “plenary esoterism” has been inappropriately used to justify what from my point of view can only be called, in terms of the particular traditions to which it has been applied, heresy in word and sacrilege in deed—would shift my critique from the plane of principles to that of persons, and thereby generate unnecessary conflict. If anyone among my correspondents recognizes these trends, and also considers them problematic (which not everyone necessarily will), then that person can respond or not as he or she chooses without feeling unfairly drawn into a controversy that, left to himself, he never would have chosen.

And if the Traditionalist/Perennialist School has indeed changed, then so be it. I owe it to the people whose statements and positions I have taken exception to (and as I say, I have rarely named them) to assume that they have their own good reasons for what they believe and what they do; I have no wish, and certainly little power, to change their minds. I would only hope that this book has taken a few steps toward

clarifying the real nature of these changes, so that those approaching Traditionalism/Perennialism from the outside can decide for themselves whether to form their spiritual worldview on the original principles of the School, or follow those contemporary teachers whose approach to Perennialism differs from that of earlier generations.

Sincerely,
Charles Upton

Part Two: Esoterism and Tradition

In Islamic history it was Imam al-Ghazzali who did more than anyone else to reconcile the exoteric and esoteric poles of the faith; his job was to demonstrate to the exoteric legalists how Sufism is intrinsically orthodox. In our own time, however, we face a different and perhaps even more serious dilemma: today, at least in certain cases, we must work to convince the *esoterics themselves* that their understanding is orthodox, that it forms the inner core of their chosen revelation and that, in terms of this world, it cannot viably exist outside it.

Frithjof Schuon made a fruitful distinction between confessional esoterism, which is limited to the inner understanding and exegesis of a single religious revelation, and plenary esoterism, which pertains to the Truth per se. What is sometimes forgotten, however, is that this distinction has to do with the *expression* of spiritual truth—either outwardly or in terms of one’s own merely mental understanding—rather than its full and concrete realization in dimensions beyond thought. The ultimate goal of esoterism is the direct realization of the Absolute, not the expression of metaphysical principles in this or that philosophical or mythopoetic language, whether such language pertains to a single revelation, to several revelations simultaneously, or to the Truth itself without immediate reference to any particular revelation. If the concept of the transcendent unity of religions is valid, then all true and revealed religions necessarily meet in the Transcendent, in the Absolute; consequently the esoterism of any “confessional faith” must provide access to this Absolute—and in the realm of the Absolute, all distinctions between confessional esoterism and plenary esoterism necessarily disappear. The highest realization of a fully-realized Sufi, for example, who thinks and speaks only in terms of Qur’an and hadith, and that of a “plenary esoterist” who has command of many religious languages and conceptual

perspectives, are identical—necessarily so, since God is One. If each of the revealed traditions did not in itself give access to Absolute Truth, we would be justified, if not duty-bound, either to syncretize them as representing various *fragments* of the Truth, or else reject them all.

The identity of confessional and plenary esoterism does not apply, however, as soon as the *expression* of this realization comes into play. Realization of the Absolute makes the plenary expression of metaphysical truth possible, but does not guarantee it. We cannot confidently assert, for example, that the spiritual degree of Meister Eckhart, or Dante, or Dionysius the Aeropagite, or Ibn al-'Arabi, or Jalaluddin Rumi, or Nagarjuna, or Shankara was necessarily inferior to that of René Guénon or Frithjof Schuon because Eckhart, Dante and Dionysius limited themselves to the language of Christianity, Ibn al-'Arabi and Rumi to that of Islam, Nagarjuna to that of Buddhism, and Shankara to that of Hinduism. Vertical depth of realization does not guarantee horizontal plenitude of expression, nor is such horizontal plenitude always a sign of vertical depth. The lack of such plenitude *may* indicate that, in terms of the soul in question, what is known and realized in the Inner has not entirely penetrated the Outer and thereby fully alchemized the thought, the feeling, the will, and sometimes even the body of its recipient; it may also simply reflect a difference in spiritual milieu, and consequently in the *swadharma* or particular spiritual duty and destiny of the one inhabiting and speaking to that milieu. And certainly many of those who reached the highest realization never taught openly or wrote a single word.

As Martin Lings pointed out in *The Eleventh Hour*, one of the graces of the latter days is “encyclopedic knowledge”; it is much easier now than it was even at the beginning of the 20th century to express spiritual and/or esoteric truth in a “plenary” manner. Unfortunately, this very facility can fool the one capable of it into believing that he or she is the equal, or even the superior, of many earlier sages; a comparison of the *texts* appears to give clear evidence that this is the case. The actual text in question here, however, is not the one written by you or me, but the one written by God, in relation to which we are neither the pen or the word, but the blank page. “To know is to be” is only true if, God willing, we have paid the price to make it true. If not, then this dictum is no more intrinsically valid than “to think is to do” or “to fantasize is to create”. God, when He intends to speak, is capable of speaking through whatever mouth is available to Him, whether or not His instrument has

concretely actualized the truth he or she expresses. God may pick us up, speak the very Truth through our mouths, then lay us down again untransformed and unrepentant. *As for the poets, the erring follow them. Hast thou not seen how they stray in every valley, and say that which they do not? Save those who believe, and do good works, and remember Allah much, and vindicate themselves after they have been wronged?*[Q.26:224-227] The “knowledge” that is intrinsically one with “being” is *total* realization, not simply the intermittent intuition of spiritual realities, even if such intuition derives from levels of being that transcend the rational mind.

The realm of spiritual expression, however, must not be left to the Devil; the clear and accurate expression of metaphysical truth is a sacred duty, and when it comes to such expression plenary esoterism excels, since it is able to see the doctrines of confessional esoterism in their metaphysical transparency, and thus as legitimate modes of expression for esoterism per se—something that the confessional esoterics, not to mention the exoterics, will *not* see. The lesser cannot beget the greater; exoterism cannot beget confessional esoterism, nor confessional esoterism, plenary esoterism, which is necessarily based on direct Intellection (though such Intellection can rarely develop outside of a traditional milieu based on a Divine revelation). But if, as Schuon said, “revelation is the intellection of the macrocosm, as intellection is the revelation of the microcosm”, then plenary esoterism, confessional esoterism and exoteric religion, from one perspective, form a single whole; they cannot viably exist without each other in this world. The problem is that this world is presently acting to drive them apart so as to destroy both (in earthly manifestation that is, not in Principle). And one of the ways in which the Prince of This World is working to widen the split between them is by tempting us to identify exoterism and confessional esoterism with orthodox Tradition, while falsely seeing plenary esoterism as situated outside it, since it is based upon direct Intellection. Frithjof Schuon, however, taught that “To be orthodox means to participate by way of a doctrine that can properly be called ‘traditional’ in the immutability of the principles which govern the universe and *fashion our intelligence*”.² Plenary esoterism is *formless*; it can neither possess a form of its own nor exist without form in this world; the only forms

² *Logic and Transcendence*, World Wisdom Books, p. 1.

entirely proper to it, which allow it to take its place on earth, are those of the revealed faiths.

Part Three: The Danger of Co-optation by the Globalist Agenda

It is inevitable, however, that some who espouse plenary esoterism will not retain a firm grasp on this truth—for how can one truly “grasp” the formless? Even the most rudimentary approach to this esoterism—the concept of the transcendent unity of religions—is a difficult notion for many since the unity in question is precisely transcendent, beyond human conception. Yet the very act of announcing it necessarily challenges us to understand it, at which point the human mind must swing into action, generating images and concepts which, while they may approach the truth of the transcendent, can never equal it. [The Sufi method of contemplating the inconceivable Divine, known as *fikr*, recognizes this limitation. In the course of this practice we negate every human conception of the Divine as it arises, until a shift takes place in which our human attempt to understand God is replaced by God’s self-revelation to us; we come to realize that knowledge of God not is a product of our effort, but of His generosity.]

The inescapable attempt to understand plenary esoterism with the thinking mind will inevitably generate certain errors that only a fuller and deeper *jñānic* realization has the power to dispel. One is the tendency to see plenary esoterism as superseding orthodoxy and tradition (an idea that will not always be entirely conscious or explicit); the other is to consider it to be only “natural” that the doctrine of the transcendent unity of religions should outwardly express itself and “take its place” in the context of the Interfaith Movement. The first error is based on a false idea of transcendence, the second on a false idea of unity.

The first error must ultimately lead those deluded by it to seek or develop forms through which plenary esoterism may ritually express itself, forms which will necessarily be heterodox in nature. As for the second error, it is much more likely that the Interfaith Movement will falsify and pervert the transcendent unity of religions than that the TUR will influence the Interfaith Movement in any positive way, given that this movement is often horizontal, anti-traditional, and suspicious of the very concept of transcendence, which it tends to see as the origin of all dangerously exclusivist religious claims—and of environmental destruc-

tion as well, since the “Green” element within the Interfaith Movement commonly sees the traditional doctrine of God’s transcendence as “hatred of the Earth”. Unfortunately, Perennialism is now being presented to the Interfaith Movement—or perhaps it would be better to say that it is being viewed by that movement—simply as a more sophisticated sort of worldly ecumenism.³

If the true nature of esoterism is not rigorously understood—which includes the understanding that in essence it is a realization, not a doctrine—then it will be used as an excuse to play fast and loose with orthodox dogmatic formulations, thus undermining the traditional faiths and generating an alternate heterodox dogmatism of its own. Historically, this has been the fate of every form of esoterism that has departed from its parent religion. The difference with Perennialism is that it is, as it were, an esoterism of *all* the religions, which means that it will either be the quintessential exegesis of these religions, allowing those who understand it to live them in their esoteric depths—on a level which, in terms of realization though not in terms of doctrine, necessarily transcends those religions *vertically*, in the same sense that Allah is not limited by Islam because He is not limited by anything—or else the seed of a highly sophisticated “generic metaphysics” that will exercise a dissolving influence on the religions, and thus be of great use to the New World Order.

Schuon never had, nor did he seek, a universal *appeal*; his writings were of universal *significance*, not appeal. God help us if his doctrines ever become widely popular, or (as is more likely) if they are adopted by the global elites. It is my belief that these elites embrace elements that are not simply secular or anti-traditional, but truly counter-traditional and counter-initiatory, elements seeking employ “the truths of the ages”, along with any false spiritual innovations that may also suit their purpose, to further their essentially worldly aims. Some within the elites, for example, have adopted various New Age doctrines and practices since these are “easily transportable” and not tied to the “backward” traditional

³ In a separate but related error, certain Muslims (Muhammed Hajji Legenhausen, for example) are beginning to see Perennialism as a philosophical or theological school within Islam, a school they mostly consider heretical. This is due in part to the fact that most of the Christian Perennialists among Schuon’s followers, particularly Rama Coomaraswamy, have passed on, after which it has fallen primarily to the Muslim Perennialists to define Perennialism and speak for it to the world.

cultures they often see as a break on progress and an impediment to full globalization. As the New Age loses force as a popular movement, certain of its ideas are being taken up by various elements within the global elites as a “meta-paradigm” which they hope will be of help to them in creating their One World Religion; William Quinn’s *The Only Tradition*⁴ throws some light on these plans (from the inside), as well as (from the outside) Lee Penn’s *False Dawn: The United Religions Initiative, Globalism, and the Quest for a One-World Religion*⁵. A false “quintessential esoterism” for the elites, a popular Neo-Paganism for the masses, with the world religions neutralized and put firmly in their place by an increasingly powerful and well-funded Interfaith Movement falsely viewed as “the only alternative” to tribalist religious terrorism—this, as I see it, is a dominant strand in the religious agenda of the globalists.

In a recent e-mail, Professor Rodney Blackhirst of LaTrobe University in Bendigo, Australia, put his finger on the problem of the use of the interfaith movement to control the religions by placing them under secular authority:

I am....concerned about secularizing “inter-faith” movements. I might have told you that here in Bendigo I was invited onto an inter-faith council, supported by the local government. But then I found they wanted to start a series of “inter-faith services” — prayer services that cater to everyone at once. I objected to this but was told that government funding had such strings attached. The government, that is, has a policy of discouraging the various religions from conducting “exclusive” religious services. I can foresee a time when it will be illegal (under anti-discrimination laws) for Muslims to conduct a prayer service that doesn’t cater to Christians or Buddhists. That is where we are heading.

And of course exclusive services for Christians or Buddhists or anyone else would be prohibited as well under such rules, or at least serious curtailed; Lee Penn, for one, has documented in *False Dawn* the stated desire of certain figures in the Interfaith Movement to prohibit religious proselytization as representing a kind of religious “imperialism” in the doctrinal sphere. In any case, Professor Blackhirst’s experience is evidence of a governmental intent (or perhaps it is only a trend, the potential consequences of which the governments in question are not always clear on) to homogenize the religions and destroy their autonomy;

⁴ William Quinn, *The Only Tradition*, SUNY, 1997.

⁵ Lee Penn, *False Dawn: The United Religions Initiative, Globalism, and the Quest for a One-World Religion* Sophia Perennis, 2005. The book is also available online at www.falsedawn.us.

we can only hope that the doctrine of the transcendent unity of religions, misinterpreted and inverted in a manner no true Traditionalist/Perennialist would sanction, does not end by giving aid and comfort to this agenda.⁶

Part Four: Vigilance in the Interfaith Arena

People interested in interfaith dialogue do not always ask themselves who may be involved in setting the agenda for such dialogue. Blinded by their good will, which they unthinkingly attribute to all concerned, they find it hard to conceive that they might be used by forces with unstated agendas, that what appears on the surface to be the willing cooperation of independent religious institutions and individuals may actually be a scenario orchestrated by people whose names appear nowhere on the program. When approaching the interfaith arena one should always ask: "Who are the sponsors of this event? Who is funding it? What are their connections? Based on their history and their associations, what might their dominant agenda be? Is it stated or unstated? And is it really compatible with my own hopes for the outcome of this dialogue?" Public actions and publicly expressed positions are clearly visible; the same cannot be said, however, for *contexts*—and it is in the setting and manipulation of contexts that real power resides. In order to exercise the necessary vigilance when approaching the world of interfaith, especially when involving oneself with initiatives which are extra-national or global in scope, I would caution as follows:

First, we need to be more critical in our understanding of the idea of *Unity*, a word that is often employed as a rallying-cry in interfaith settings, yet is not always clearly defined. When encountering this concept in the Interfaith realm, one should ask these basic questions: *Exactly what does the word Unity mean in the present context? Mutual respect and discretion? Mutual action toward common goals? Doctrinal unity? Political unity? All or none of the above?; and Would the achievement of this or that particular sort of Unity really be a good*

⁶ Note: I refer anyone wishing to further research the globalist agenda to co-opt and control the traditional faiths to Lee Penn's *False Dawn*, *supra*, as well as to his recent report "The Religious Face of the New World Order: From the Vatican to the White House to the United Religions Initiative", which contains among other things a detailed analysis of Benedict XVI's 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, where the "pope" openly calls for a One World Government. It is available at: www.usasurvival.org/docs/Global_Religion.pdf.

thing? If so, why? If not, why not? Global unity is often unthinkingly presented as if synonymous with global peace. Global imperialism and hegemony, however, are quite different forms of “unity”, just as “pacification” is poles apart from true peace.

Second, we need to be more vigilant about globalist interfaith agendas. We need to ask ourselves: *Are the majority of those dedicated to “global governance” people of deep religious faith? Are they essentially traditional in their outlook? Some, certainly, are people of faith, but many are essentially secularists—and if this is the case, then why are they so interested in religion? Why do they so vigorously patronize and fund the Interfaith Movement?* The obvious answer is: to further their own ends. And what are these ends? Some global elites see religion not as a doorway to the Transcendent, a path to God established by God, on His own initiative, by which we may return to Him, but as a socio-political control system or ensemble of such systems. They hope to influence the world religions as a way of extending their own influence over the various “sectors” that these religions represent. In order to further this agenda they most often appeal—for obvious reasons—to religious “idealism” rather than to the separatist “tribal” identities that the religions also foster; they seek the “universalist” common denominator among religions as a way of preventing interreligious violence and stabilizing the emerging global order. And this apparently benign agenda has put the minds of many religious leaders at ease regarding the Interfaith Movement as a whole.

Third, we need to remind ourselves that the agendas the secularist sponsors of the Interfaith Movement see as a common good will inevitably conflict with the idea of the good held by the traditional religions, since the secularist sees his good only in terms of this world, while the religious believer sees his in terms of both this world and the next, with the next world taking precedence—or, if he happens to be an esoterist, in terms of a Reality that pervades, and transcends, both worlds. Such perspectives, based on faith and intellection, leave the highest secular idealism far behind—even if it clothes itself in “spiritual” garb, as New Age idealism always has insofar as it hopes to “tap spiritual energies” to further its *own* agenda (not God’s) for global unity and/or environmental regeneration. The perspectives of the traditional religions can only be damaged or obscured by any attempt to place them within a worldly

context that is simply too narrow to contain them.

Fourth, we must also entertain the possibility that the dangers of the Interfaith Movement go beyond those created by well-meaning but narrow-minded idealists. In *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, René Guénon spoke of the various stages of “anti-Traditional action”. The first is “Anti-Tradition” per se, the general materialist or secular tendency to debunk religion. The second is “Pseudo-Initiation”, the development of various illegitimate groups and doctrines invented by well-meaning but deluded pseudo-esoterics. The third is “Counter-Tradition” or “Counter-Initiation”, the conscious and deliberate perversion of esoterism, and consequently of all true religion, by subversive groups and individuals in direct contact with the Powers of Darkness. Certain aspects of the Interfaith Movement have evidenced signs of one or more of these three elements, and therefore the uncritical though well-intentioned participation of Traditionalists/Perennialists in certain kinds of interfaith activities can be harmful, and poses a danger that Tradition might provide a platform to those with counter-Traditional agendas.

I can do no better than to end this article with a highly relevant quote from Seyyed Hossein Nasr:

....people search in these ecumenical movements for a common denominator which, in certain instances, sacrifices divinely ordained qualitative differences for the sake of a purely human and often quantitative egalitarianism. In such cases the so-called “ecumenical” forces in question are no more than a concealed form of the secularism and humanism which gripped the West at the time of the Renaissance and which in their own turn caused religious divisions within Christianity. This type of ecumenism, whose hidden motive is much more worldly than religious, goes hand in hand with the kind of charity that is willing to forego the love of God for the love of the neighbor and in fact insists upon the love of the neighbor in spite of a total lack of love for God and the Transcendent. The mentality which advocates this kind of “charity” affords one more example of the loss of the transcendent dimension and the reduction of all things to the purely worldly. It is yet another manifestation of the secular character of modernism which in this case has penetrated into the supreme Christian virtue of charity and, to the extent that it has been successful, has deprived this virtue of any spiritual significance.... It would be less harmful to oppose other religions, as has been done by so many religious authorities throughout history, than to be willing to destroy essential aspects of one’s own religion in order to reach a common denominator with another group of men who are asked to undergo the same losses. To say the least, a league of religions could not guarantee religious peace, any more than the League of Nations guaranteed political peace.⁷

⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Preface to *Shi’ite Islam* by ‘Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba’i: SUNY, 1977; pp. 5-6.