

Sufism and the Way of Blame: Hidden Sources of a Sacred Psychology

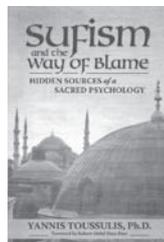
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“The People of Blame [*Malamatiyya*] are the masters and leaders of the folk of God’s path. Among them is the master of the cosmos, that is, Muhammad, the Messenger of God—
God bless him and give him peace!”¹

- *Ibn ‘Arabi*

While the wide proliferation of Sufism (*tasawwuf*, the inner dimension of Islam), has brought much needed attention to this rich spiritual tradition which plays a critical role in circumventing the phenomenon of Islamophobia in the West and extremism within the Muslim world itself, the downside is that Sufism has become another commodity for Western consumption. Sufism, like other traditional spiritualities, has not been able to easily deflect the waging insurgence of the New Age movement which introduced pseudo-Sufis² who



¹ William C. Chittick, “The People of Blame” in *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), p. 372.

² See L.P. Elwell-Sutton, “Sufism and Pseudo-Sufism”, *Encounter*, Vol. XLIV, No. 5, (May 1975), pp. 9-17; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “What Does Islam Have to Offer to the Modern World?” in *Sufi Essays* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1972), p. 169; Elizabeth Sirriyeh, “Sufi Thought and its Reconstruction” in *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Suha Taji-Farouki and Basheer M. Nafi (London: I.B. Tauris & Company, 2004), pp. 104-127; Peter Lamborn Wilson, “The Strange Fate of Sufism in the New Age” in *New Trends and Developments in the World of Islam*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (London: Luzac Oriental Press, 1997), pp. 179-209; Andrew Rawlinson, “A History of Western Sufism,” *Diskus*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1993, pp. 45-83.

attempt to divorce Sufism from its Islamic origins or to lower it to a psychology.³

Little is known about the so-called “way of blame” or “blameworthy”, known as the *malāmatiyya* (the term is derived from the Arabic word *malāma* “to blame”), and so it is noteworthy that an entire book is dedicated to this important subject. *Malāmatiyya* developed in Nishapur of Khurasan (now northeastern Iran) during the third/ninth century which attributes to it seminal figures such as Hamdūn al-Qassār (d. 271/884), Abu Hafs al-Haddād (d. 265/879) and Abu ‘Uthmān al-Hīrī (d. 298/910). While these mystics were regarded as the “elect” by providential Sufis, they were misunderstood and scorned by literalist interpretations within the Islamic tradition. Rūmī’s teacher and companion, Shams-i Tabrīzī (d. 1248) referred to the *malāmatiyya* as “those who try to draw people’s contempt upon themselves by outwardly blameworthy actions”.⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240), the Spanish-born

³ While such a psychology presumes to be a sacred or spiritual psychology and in truth is per its foundations *in divinis*, it nonetheless needs to be attached to a spiritual tradition in order to maintain its efficacy. Sacred psychology outside a spiritual form is insufficient unto itself and is a contradiction in terms as it is in reality the handmaiden of any integral spiritual tradition for the simple reason that the psyche or soul and the body for that matter are reliant upon the Spirit for health, equilibrium and normalcy. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Integration of the Soul” in *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. William C. Chittick (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), pp. 73-84; Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, “On the Indian and Traditional Psychology, or Rather Pneumatology” in *Coomaraswamy, Vol. 2, Selected Papers: Metaphysics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 333-378; Annemarie Schimmel, “Some Notes on Sufi Psychology” in *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), pp. 187-193; Patrick Laude, “Malamiyyah Psycho-Spiritual Therapy”, *Sufi: A Journal of Sufism*, Issue 54, (Summer 2002), pp. 30-39; Mohammad Ajmal, “Sufi Science of the Soul” in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, ed. S.H. Nasr (New York: Crossroad, 1991), pp. 294-307; Laleh Bakhtiar, *Moral Healer’s Handbook: Psychology of Spiritual Chivalry* (Chicago, IL: The Institute of Traditional Psychoethics and Guidance, 1994); Charles Upton, *The Science of the Greater Jihad: Essays in Principal Psychology* (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, forthcoming); John Herlihy, *Borderlands of the Spirit: Reflections on a Sacred Science of Mind* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005); Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, “Interview with John Herlihy: The Spiritual Psychology of the Religio Perennis”, *AHP Perspective*, December 2009-January 2010, pp. 8-12; Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, “Humanistic or Transpersonal? *Homo Spiritualis* and the Perennial Philosophy”, *AHP Perspective*, August-September 2010, pp. 7-11.

⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, “The Outward Setting” in *The Triumphant Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalaloddin Rumi* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 20; See also Annemarie Schimmel, “Historical Outlines of Classical Sufism” in *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), pp. 86-87.

mystic known as “the greatest master” (*ash-Shaikh al-akbar*) described their appellation as follows:

They are called “People of Blame” for two reasons. One is that the term is ascribed to their students because they never cease blaming themselves next to God. They never perform a work with which they are happy, as part of their training. For no one can be happy with works until after they have been accepted, and this is unseen by their students. As for the great ones among them, the name is ascribed to them because they conceal their states and their rank with God when they see that people criticize their acts and blame what they do because the people do not see the acts as coming from God. They only see them as coming from him upon whose hand they become manifest. So they blame and criticize the acts. But were the covering to be removed and were they to see that the acts belong to God, no blame would attach to him upon whose hands they appeared. In this state all those acts would be noble and good.⁵

However, it is important to recall that the “way of blame” is not an isolated phenomenon within the world’s religions for it has its corresponding manifestations throughout the diverse spiritual revelations.⁶ *Malāmatiyya* are known in Christianity as “Fools for Christ”⁷, in Hinduism as *Avadhūta*⁸, within the Shamanic traditions of the First Peoples

⁵ William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), pp. 374-375.

⁶ “The figure of the ‘holy fool’ is a quasi-universal phenomenon that manifests itself, in one form or another, in virtually every spiritual quarter of the world.” [Patrick Laude, “Fools for Christ’s Sake” in *Divine Play, Sacred Laughter, and Spiritual Understanding* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 131]. For an interesting text that illustrates both the traditional representations and modern exploits of the “sacred clown” or “holy fool” see Georg Feuerstein, *Holy Madness: The Shock Tactics and Radical Teachings of Crazy-Wise Adepts, Holy Fools, and Rascal Gurus* (New York: Paragon House, 1991). For an interesting account see *The Divine Madman: The Sublime Life and Songs of Drunkpa Kunley*, trans. Keith Dowman and Sonam Paljor (Clearlake, CA: The Dawn Horse Press, 1980). The following summarizes the potential abuses of this spiritual method: “He who abandons the law and commits an irreligious act, and says that he is following the rule of ‘blame,’ is guilty of manifest wrong and wickedness and self-indulgence. There are many in the present age who seek popularity by this means, forgetting that one must already have gained popularity before deliberately acting in such a way as to make the people reject him; otherwise, his making himself unpopular is a mere pretext for winning popularity.” [‘Ali b. ‘Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf al-Mahjub: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism*, trans. R.A. Nicholson (London: Luzac and Company, 1976), p. 65]. See also Shaikh Badruddin of Simawna, *Inspirations: On the Path of Blame* (Putney, VT: Threshold Books, 1993)

⁷ “We are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised.” (1 Corinthians 4:10)

⁸ “The Avadhūta is so called because he is immortal (*akṣara*); he is the greatest (*parenya*); he has discarded worldly ties (*dhūta-samsāra-bandhana*); and he is indicated in the meaning of the sentence ‘Thou art That,’ etc. (*ta-tvam-asyādī-lakṣya*).” [Antonio Rigopoulos, “The Avadhūta-gītā” in *Dattātreyā: The Immortal Guru, Yogin, and Anātara: A Study of the Transformative and Inclusive Character of a Multi-Faceted Hindu Deity* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), p. 214]

they are known as *Heyoka*.⁹

Chapter One, titled “The Sufi Mystique”, is intended, as Toussulis outlines in the Preface, to “critique ‘New Age’ renderings of Sufism” (p. xv). It is quite apparent that Sufism has been all-too-often misunderstood by those inside and outside academia, and the author extrapolates the following two assumptions that contribute to this misunderstanding: “that Sufis have to be either Islamic (in a parochial sense) or universalists who exist outside of any particular religio-cultural context” (p. 1). Both assumptions underlie the misunderstanding that regrettably prevails in the contemporary milieu of today’s seekers. Toussulis highlights many relevant points regarding the post-modern rendering of Jalāluddīn Muhammad Balkhī-Rūmī or known more commonly as Rūmī who is a fine example of someone who dispels many of the false notions about Islam and Sufism. In contrast to the commonly noted observation that Rūmī is the widest read poet in America today, it is barely stressed that he was both a pre-eminently orthodox Sufi and an orthodox Muslim. The author alludes to this fact more loosely, by referring to him as “at the same time a Muslim and a universalizing mystic” (p. 3). Toussulis continues to provide examples of how Rūmī has been co-opted by New Age proponents through translations of his works which have usually been hybrid versions of the primary scholarly translations which are thought to be drier and less interesting to non-specialists. Perhaps no

⁹ “The *heyoka* were men who, having been honored in a dream by the vision of the Thunderbirds, had thereby contracted the obligation, on the one hand, to humble themselves, and, on the other, to dissimulate their consecration. Their case was similar, in certain respects, to that of the dervishes known by the name of the “people of blame” (*malāmātiyah*), who sought to attract the reprobation of the profane and the hypocritical, while realizing inwardly the most perfect spiritual sincerity.... [T]he behavior of the *heyoka* amounts to an initiatory language, comprehensible only to sages, as well as being a sacrificial vocation, that of being a ‘walking dead man’ and called upon to reestablish inwardly the bridge between the world of matter and that of the spirit and immortality.” [Frithjof Schuon, “The Demiurge in North American Mythology” in *The Feathered Sun: Plains Indians in Art and Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1990), p. 88-89]; See also D.M. Dooling, “The Wisdom of the Contrary: A Conversation with Joseph Epes Brown” *Parabola*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1979, pp. 54-65; Patrick Laude, “Humor, Laughter, Trickster and the Ambiguity of Māyā,” *Sophia: The Journal of Traditional Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (Winter 1998), pp. 142-169; John G. Neihardt, “Heyoka Ceremony” in *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), pp. 188-193; John (Fire) Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, “The Upside-Down, Forward-Backward, Icy-Hot Contrary” in *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), pp. 249-260; Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972).

quotation of Rūmī's has been more misunderstood than the following one, which has unfortunately been exploited to support the false notion that he was not a Muslim but a Sufi, and that as a Sufi he had no religion as such:

I am neither Christian nor Jew nor Parsi nor Muslim. I am neither of the East nor of the West, neither of the land nor of the sea.... I have put aside duality and have seen that the two worlds are one. I seek the One, I know the One, I see the One, I invoke the One. He is the First, He is the Last, He is the Outward, He is the Inward.¹⁰

Rūmī's testimony is rather of the "transcendent unity of religions." As an orthodox Muslim, he simultaneously affirms the Divine Unity or *tawhid* at the heart of all sapiential traditions. Such an affirmation cannot fairly support the view that because he confirmed this universal dimension he was not formally attached to a religious tradition.¹¹

The subheading within this chapter—"The Elephant in the Dark"¹²—utilized by the controversial figure Idries Shah, and originally borrowed from a Rūmī poem, is an allusion to how misconstrued Sufism is in the West. While we cannot venture into the fullness of what Rūmī implied by this poem, we can say that without *taḥqīq* (direct internalized knowledge) one is left with the limitations of *taqlīd* (knowing through assimilation from secondhand sources), but both forms of knowledge are part and parcel of any plenary revelation.¹³ What is shrouded by the author is the mistaken notion that the "elephant" of Truth is perceivable as disconnected from Islam. The perception of the "elephant" requires, at least in light of the perennial philosophy, both exoteric and esoteric dimensions in order for it to be fully perceived. In fact all of the parts of the elephant are analogous to the diverse revelations within the "transcendent unity of religions" which is central to the traditionalist perspective.

While Toussulis correctly illustrates that Sufism "remains partly obscured" (p. 8) within its New Age presentation, his lack of discernment

¹⁰ Quoted in William Stoddart, *What Do the Religions Say about Each Other? Christian Attitudes towards Islam, Islamic Attitudes towards Christianity* (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2008), p. 76.

¹¹ See Ibrahim Gamard, *Rumi and Islam: Selections from His Stories, Poems, and Discourses* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2004); William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi: Illustrated Edition* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005)

¹² Idries Shah, *The Elephant in the Dark* (London: Octagon Press, 1974)

¹³ William C. Chittick, "The Rehabilitation of Thought" in *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), pp. 39-57.

exposes itself when he attempts to associate Idries Shah and others¹⁴ with the traditional metaphysics of the perennial philosophy. He questions, "...who among those quoted above is a 'real' Sufi, and who gets to define the parameters of authentic Sufism?" (p. 9), but the 'real' Sufi (the adjective is superfluous as it is implied in the term itself) in the traditional context is the one who bases his or her Islamic esoterism on the firm foundations of Islam.¹⁵ Toussulis, on the same page changes his tone: "however, the perennialist perspective cannot be easily discarded because it is inherent in much of Sufism, as well as being present in much of Islam" (p. 9). As the perennialist perspective is nothing other than what Tradition is *in divinis*, it solely seeks to be what it is and it cannot therefore be "discarded" without ceasing to be the orthodox forms of the tradition at hand. Toussulis references the work of Mark Sedgwick who has been significantly critiqued within perennialist circles and does not stand as a reliable source of information regarding the traditionalist or perennialist school.¹⁶ "Perennialism still poses some notable problems." the author continues: "For one thing, it is not a systematic form of philosophy, but rather a tendency of thought. As such, it doesn't present a unified method of assessment, and as a partial consequence,

¹⁴ Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882-1927) was one of the first individuals to introduce Sufism to the West. While he demonstrated a universal outlook on Sufism, though incorrectly termed "perennialist" by Toussulis, he belonged to several Sufi orders, though his primary connection was with the Chishti or Chishtiya *tariqah*. This order, along with others like that of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya brought to the West by Irina Tweedie (1907-1999), may have allowed students from other spiritual traditions such as Hindus and Zoroastrians to benefit from their instruction, in the same way that Kabir (1440-1518) or Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918) received students of other faiths. This was not necessarily a traditional norm, and when this universalism is exported to the secular modern or postmodern West, distancing itself from both the inner and outer dimensions of the tradition, it cannot be considered to be of the same benefit to the seeker and could even be harmful. See Hugh Talat Halman, "Sufism in the West: Islam in an Interspiritual Age" in *Voices of Islam, Vol. 5, Voices of Change*, eds. Vincent J. Cornell and Omid Safi (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2007), pp. 173-182.

¹⁵ Victor Danner, "The Necessity for the Rise of the Term Sūfī", *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Spring 1972), pp. 71-77.

¹⁶ Mark Sedgwick, "Western Sufism and Traditionalism" available online at www.traditionalists.org; Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). For two valuable reviews of Sedgwick's work regarding the traditionalist or perennialist school see Michael Fitzgerald, "Book Review: Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century", *Vincit Omnia Veritas*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2004, pp. 87-100; Róbert Horváth, "Book Review: Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century", *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Web Edition 2009; See also Charles Upton, "What is a 'Traditionalist'? Some Clarifications" in *Findings in Metaphysic, Path, and Lore: With a Response to the Traditionalist/Perennialist School* (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2009), p. 31.

various perennialist Sufis differ significantly” (p. 11). In fact while Toussulis critiques the traditionalists for not having a so-called “systematic form of philosophy” or a “unified method of assessment” which are so appealing to the materialistic mindset, this very trend is explained: “the *Philosophia Perennis* is by no means ‘a’ philosophy, that is to say one particular conception more or less limited and systematic and having this or that individual as its author, but is rather the common foundation from which proceeds whatever is truly valid in all philosophies”¹⁷ Shortly after, Toussulis makes the following comments: “apart from New Age obscurantism, one must also be wary of more traditionalist approaches to Sufism” (p. 17). If by this statement he is implying that the dangers of the traditionalist are adherence to literalist interpretations of Islam or any exoteric traditional form for that matter, he is radically mistaken as we will explore further. He then underscores his intention for the remainder of the book: “I propose, instead, that a more authentically Islamic form of universalism is waiting to be found by digging deeper into history. The sources of Islamic universalism reach far back into antiquity, yet (as I hope to show) a form of Sufism that is both universalist and traditional still exists today” (p. 17).

This leads us to the most revealing chapter, and consequently in our eyes, the chapter that does the most harm to the author’s general thesis which he has termed “The Traditionalist Critique”. He identifies key figures of the traditionalist or perennialist school, principally Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933), the foremost representative in present-day America as indicated by the author, and also names seminal figures such as René Guénon (1886–1951), Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998) and Martin Lings (1909–2005). While he at times judiciously conveys essential aspects of the perennialist doctrine [for example, “while various traditions unfold in particular spatiotemporal settings, they originate in an ahistorical source” (p. 19)], he at other moments obscures them. For example, the statement that “each religion remains valid by retaining an esoteric core” (p. 19), while not definitively incorrect, is misleading because even though religion has a complementary inner and outer dimension, one must be careful to not imply that the exoteric dimension

¹⁷ René Guénon, “*Sanātana Dharma*” in *Studies in Hinduism*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp. 76-85; Frithjof Schuon, “The Perennial Philosophy” in Harry Oldmeadow, *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010), pp. 312-317; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The *Philosophia Perennis* and the Study of Religion” in *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), pp. 53-68.

is dispensable. This is sufficiently discussed in Guénon's, "The Necessity of Traditional Exoterism":

[W]here exoterism and esoterism are directly linked to the constitution of a traditional form in such a way as to be as it were the two faces, exterior and interior, of one and the same thing, it is immediately comprehensible to everyone that one must first adhere to the exterior in order subsequently to be able to penetrate to the interior, and that there can be no other way than this.¹⁸

Toussulis mistakenly perceives traditionalism to be "hybrid" (p. 20) or syncretist (he refers to it as being "beset by a number of contradictions" (p. 20), and thereby calls its regard for orthodoxy into question. This is to misrepresent a point that is fundamental to Tradition: its emphasis on orthodoxy and its rejection of syncretism.¹⁹ The author attempts to discredit Frithjof Schuon, a paramount representative of the traditionalist school by relying on Sedgwick's limited grasp of traditionalism which as we have already commented has been thoroughly critiqued and exposed. That Schuon provided guidance to Christians²⁰ and was interested in the Native American Indians²¹ has been well documented and the same with his reflections on sacred nudity²²—this was not a secret as some have attempted to assert, and needs to be understood within the framework of the sacredness of revealed forms and of orthodoxy.

The author takes Martin Lings to task for articulating the following: "The foundations of Sufism were laid and its subsequent course irrevocably fixed long before it would have been possible for extraneous and

¹⁸ René Guénon, "The Necessity of Traditional Exoterism" in *Initiation and Spiritual Realization*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), p. 42; See also Frithjof Schuon, "The Limitations of Exoterism" in *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1993), pp. 7-32.

¹⁹ See René Guénon, "Synthesis and Syncretism" in *Perspectives on Initiation*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp. 37-42; René Guénon, "Against Mixing Traditional Forms" in *Perspectives on Initiation*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp. 43-47.

²⁰ Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude, "Esoteric Ecumenicism and Transcendent Unity of Religions" in *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004), pp. 38-40; Michael Oren Fitzgerald, "A Heavenly Gift" in *Frithjof Schuon: Messenger of the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010), pp. 48-51.

²¹ See Frithjof Schuon, *The Feathered Sun: Plains Indians in Art and Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1990); Renaud Fabbri, "Frithjof Schuon and the American Indian Spirit: Interview with Michael Fitzgerald", *Vincit Omnia Veritas*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2007, pp. 2-22; Michael Fitzgerald, *Frithjof Schuon: The Messenger of the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010)

²² Harry Oldmeadow, "Frithjof Schuon's Paintings and Poetry" in *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010), pp. 190-192.

parallel mystical influences to have introduced non-Islamic elements” (p. 22).²³ We are puzzled as to why Toussulis would be so adamant about isolating this statement, for, while Lings acknowledges that other traditions learned from one another, he clearly viewed Sufism as rooted within its own Islamic tradition. Lings was challenging certain prevailing Orientalist biases that disavowed Sufism as the inner dimension of Islam.²⁴ If the author would have taken the time to examine the context of the above sentence which he quoted from it would have been unnecessary to query further.

Toussulis suggests: “one could easily conclude that Sufism, if not the whole of Islam as we know it, developed as a syncretic religious movement.” While Islam is inextricably rooted in the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism and Christianity and is a continuity of these revelations, there is no proper basis to regard this independent faith tradition as syncretic. In the author’s hopes to find a loose brick in the edifice of the traditionalist perspective, he is unavoidably resorting to the portrayal of both Islam and Sufism as products of socio-historical development, and he falsely suggests that Sufism is a result of syncretism. Would the author then suggest that Buddhism is syncretic since it incorporated certain attributes that were found in Taoism and Confucianism when it was brought to China, or when Buddhism encountered the Shamanic and animistic Bön tradition of Tibet for that matter? While some spiritual traditions shared more proximity than others, and some of them had exchanges on profound levels sometimes termed “esoteric ecumenicism”,²⁵ we want to be cautious to not fall into the error of suggesting that they are products of “cross-fertilization”. We need to stress first and foremost that each sapiential tradition did not emerge in a vacuum. Yet this does not also mean that they are not wholly complete unto themselves. The author quotes Professor Nasr: “Islam has considered all the wisdom of traditions before it as in a sense its own and has never been shy of borrowing from them and transforming them into elements of its own world view. Such a characteristic of Islam does not, however, mean in

²³ Martin Lings, “The Originality of Sufism” in *What is Sufism?* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1977), p. 16.

²⁴ See Annemarie Schimmel, “What is Sufism?” in *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), pp. 8-9.

²⁵ Frithjof Schuon, *Christianity/Islam: Essays on Esoteric Ecumenicism*, trans. Gustavo Polit (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1985)

any way that Islam is unoriginal or does not possess its own spiritual genius” (p. 30).²⁶

Many of the mystics of the Abrahamic traditions, let alone other spiritual traditions, have learned from one another [a good example is the case of the Sufi Ibrahim ibn Adham (d. 777)], yet this does not mean that Islam is a hybridization of Christianity or that Christianity is a hybridization of Islam and so on:

I learned gnosis (*ma'rifa*) from a monk called Father Simeon. I visited him in his cell, and said to him: 'Father Simeon, how long hast thou been in thy cell here?' He answered: 'For seventy years.' I asked: 'What is thy food?' He countered: 'O Hanifite, what has caused thee to ask this?' Then he answered, saying: 'Every night one chick-pea.' I said: 'What stirs thee in thy heart, so that this pea suffices thee?' He answered: 'They come to me one day every year, and adorn my cell, and process about it, so doing me reverence; and whenever my spirit wearies of worship, I remind it of that hour, and endure the labors of a year for the sake of an hour. Do thou, O Hanifite, endure the labor of an hour, for the glory of eternity.' Gnosis then descended into my heart.²⁷

Paradoxically the author comes to the aid of the traditionalists: “It [the traditionalist or perennialist perspective] protects Sufis from being attacked from two sources: modern relativism, which denies the validity of revelation, and fanatical fundamentalism, which negates esotericism. It also protects Sufism in the West form being co-opted by dubious occult groups and New Age faddists” (p. 31). And then he wavers again: “It is important to underscore that there are expressions of Sufism contradicting the traditionalist position that were (and still are) more universal in scope” (p. 37). We wonder what exactly the author is getting at here, is it that he is proposing a Sufism void of *shari'ah*, leaving only *tariqah* and *haqiqah*? If so, there certainly are more “universal” expressions, yet they would not be Sufism, but rather more New Age

²⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Islam—the Last Religion and the Primordial Religion—its Universal and Particular Traits” in *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, New Revised Edition (Chicago, IL: ABC International Group, 2000), p. 27; We again quote from Professor Nasr to elaborate on this point, yet if the author had sufficiently read the entire chapter of which he selected the preceding two quoted sentences, he would have noted the following passage to contradict his thesis: “It [the traditional interpretation of the perennial philosophy] opposes historicism by emphasizing the Divine Origin of each tradition and the spiritual genius of each religion, which is original in the deepest sense in that it issues directly from the Origin. It does not deny historical borrowings whether they be of Christian images in Sufi poetry or Sufi symbolism in St. John of the Cross or Taoist influences in Chan Buddhism, but it considers such borrowings as secondary in comparison with the living body of an authentic religion that must of necessity originate from Heaven.” [Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Religion and Religions” in *Religion and the Order of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 13]

²⁷ Quoted in William Stoddart, *What Do the Religions Say about Each Other? Christian Attitudes towards Islam, Islamic Attitudes towards Christianity* (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2008), p. 74; See also *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, trans. R.M. French (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 195.

parodies masquerading as Sufism. We challenge the author to present us a more “universal” expression of orthodox Sufism than is presented *via* the traditionalists. Toussulis lunges his final blow in the form of a question but it reads more like a statement: “To be a Sufi, according to the traditionalists, one must follow an accepted school of Islamic law (*madhab*), and one must also follow an organized *tariqa* (path). Only these specific forms, according to traditionalists, preserve an intact, initiatic chain or hierarchy that leads back to the Prophet Muhammad, and thence to the transcendent unity that underlies both Islam and Sufism. If, however, conformity to Islamic law among Sufis is debatable, and if the form of the *tariqa* has never been entirely fixed, then what remains of the traditionalist argument?” (p. 38)

The author hints at the notion that the inner dimension of Islam remains an effective spiritual *praxis* in absence of the outer dimension which contradicts the Primordial Tradition. The accepted traditionalist euphemism “no esoterism without exoterism” is not a doctrinal innovation of the perennialist school, but rather reflects adherence to the unanimous orthodoxies radiating out from the Primordial Tradition. Schuon outlines how the perennialist framework applies to both the inner and outer dimensions of Islam:

[I]n Islam, two “religions” meet, combine, and sometimes confront one another: the outward religion—that of Revelation and the Law—and the religion of the Heart, of Intellection, of immanent Liberty; they combine inasmuch as the outward religion proceeds from the inward religion, but they are in opposition inasmuch as the inward and essential religion is independent of the outward and formal religion.²⁸

²⁸ Frithjof Schuon, “The Religion of the Heart” in *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, trans. William Stoddart (London: Perennial Books, 1990), p. 230; Al-Hujwiri (d. 1071) articulates the complementary facets of the inner (*bātin*) and outer (*ẓāhir*) dimensions of Islam: “The exoteric aspect of Truth without the esoteric is hypocrisy, and the esoteric without the exoteric is heresy. So, with regard to the Law, mere formality is defective, while mere spirituality is vain.” [Quoted in Cyril Glassé, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, Revised Edition (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), p. 10]; The following articulates how this doctrine applies to the world’s religious and spiritual traditions: “Clearly, there is no Zen without Buddhism, and although the inner or esoteric dimension of every religion necessarily has affinities with those of other religions, there is also no Yoga without Hinduism, no Kabbalism without Judaism, or Sufism without Islam, nor is there true Hesychasm (the last surviving form of Christian esoterism) outside the Orthodox Church.” [Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahid Pallavicini, *A Sufi Master’s Message: In Memoriam René Guénon* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2010), p. 40]. See also Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad Al-Alawi, His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993); Amadou Hampaté Bâ, *A Spirit of Tolerance: The Inspiring Life of Tierno Bokar*, ed. Roger Gaetani, trans. Fatima Jane Casewit (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008); William C. Chittick, “The Way of the Sufi”, *Sufi: A Journal of Sufism*, Issue 14 (Summer 1992), pp. 5-10; William Stoddart, *What does Islam mean in Today’s World?: Religion, Politics, Spirituality* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, forthcoming); Patrick Laude (ed.), *Universal Dimensions of Islam: Studies in Comparative Religion* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2011).

If Toussulis is attempting to make a case that the *malamatiyya* exhibited behaviors which lie outside the parameters of *shari'ah* or intentionally disregarded its observances, we can again turn to a pre-eminent source, Ibn 'Arabī:

The third group [*malamatiyya*] add nothing to the five daily prayers and the supererogatory exercises (*rawātib*). They do not distinguish themselves from the faithful who perform God's obligations by any extra state whereby they might be known. They walk in the markets, they speak to the people, and none of God's creatures sees any of them distinguishing himself from the common people by a single thing; they add nothing to the obligatory works or the Sunna customary among the common folk. They are alone with God, firmly rooted, not wavering from their servanthood for the blink of an eye. They find no favor in leadership, since Lordship has overcome their hearts and they are lowly before it. God has given them knowledge of the places of things and of appropriate works and states. They are veiled from the creatures and stay concealed from them by the covering of the common people. For they are sincere and purely devoted servants of their Master. They witness Him constantly in their eating and drinking, their waking and sleeping, and their speaking with Him among the people.²⁹

It also needs to be pointed out that while Toussulis strives to provide an overarching critique of the traditionalists he only offers nineteen pages to the traditionalists or perennialist school of thought. The simplicity of this appraisal is clear as day when you factor in that he lightly references two books by Frithjof Schuon³⁰, one book by Martin Lings³¹, four books and two articles by Nasr³², one book by Titus Burckhardt³³ and one article by Patrick Laude³⁴. He consequently mentions the illustrious French metaphysician René Guénon, but did not reference any of his *opus*. All of this leaves the reader puzzled as to how the author assumes to put forward an erudite critique of the perennialists.

²⁹ William C. Chittick, "The People of Blame" in *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), pp. 373-374.

³⁰ Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1984); Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.), *The Essential Frithjof Schuon* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005).

³¹ Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1977)

³² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1972); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, New Revised Edition (Chicago, IL: ABC International Group, 2000); William C. Chittick (ed.), *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Sufism and Spirituality in Persia" in *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroads, 1991), pp. 206-222; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Persian Sufi Literature: Its Spiritual and Cultural Significance" in *The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1992), pp. 1-10; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Rise and Development of Persian Sufism" in *The Heritage of Sufism, Vol. 1: Classical Persian Sufism from Its Origins to Rumi (700-1300)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: OneWorld Press, 1999), pp. 1-18; The author cites the preceding article attributed to the following source yet we were not able to track it down: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Rise and Development of Persian Sufism", *Sufi: A Journal of Sufism*, (Winter 1992-1993).

³³ Titus Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, trans. D.M. Matheson (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008)

³⁴ Patrick Laude, "Seyyed Hossein Nasr in the Context of the Perennialist School," obtained by the author online through the Religio Perennis website available at www.religioperenennis.org; See also Patrick Laude, "Seyyed Hossein Nasr in the Context of the Perennialist School" in *Beacon of Knowledge: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. Mohammad H. Faghfoory (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2003), pp.245-260.

In Chapter Three (“Quest for the Hidden Hierarchy”) and Chapter Four (“Further Quests for the Hidden Source”), Toussulis exposes such figures as George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff (1877–1949), Idries Shah (1924–1996) and John Godolphin Bennett (1897–1974), all of whom the author states have “overemphasized the universalistic aspects of Sufism at the expense of its specifically Muslim character” (p. xvi). [All three of these individuals attributed their “teachings” to a common source.] Toussulis compares and contrasts them with the leading representatives of the traditionalist or perennialist school, which is not only extremely misleading, but false, for they have nothing in common. While the author has taken upon himself the task of exposing these three figures who have influenced plentiful seekers in the West to Sufism and other spiritual traditions, he does so by “having one foot in and one foot out,” as if unsure of his own evaluations. To present a detailed overview of all the remaining chapters of this book is outside the scope of this review, but it will suffice to highlight some essential points to convey some concerns.

Toussulis reminds the reader that that P.D. Ouspensky (1878–1947), a well-known disciple of Gurdjieff, who eventually broke away from his teacher, took heavily to drinking and that before dying he regrettably informed his disciples: “There is no System. . . Start again for yourselves” (p. 52).³⁵ This is a curious declaration, as Ouspensky had been teaching this very “System”, also known as the “Fourth Way”, for some twenty-five years. No less consoling, when Gurdjieff died he was reported to have voiced the following: “I’ve left you all in a fine mess!” (p. 52) Toussulis writes: “It is not my purpose to discredit that system in whole or in part. It is clear, however, that two of Gurdjieff’s principal followers [Ouspensky and Bennett] found the system lacking” (p. 64). Some have even suggested that Gurdjieff himself was a *malāmatīyya*, implying that through this lens his unconventional behaviors would become more intelligible.³⁶ Toussulis then informs the reader that in 1978 after reading Bennett, he travelled to Istanbul in search of the source of the “Fourth Way” teachings and

³⁵ See Gary Lachman, “The End of the System” in *In Search of P.D. Ouspensky: The Genius in the Shadow of Gurdjieff* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2006), p. 263; James Moore, “Rites of Passage” in *Gurdjieff and Mansfield* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 216; Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.), *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teaching* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 1996), p. 102.

³⁶ “He [Gurdjieff] put on a mask that would tend to put people off, rather than draw them towards him. Now, this method—which is called by Sufis, the *Way of Malamat*, or the methods of blame—was highly esteemed in old times among the Sufis.” [J.G. Bennett, *Gurdjieff: A Very Great Enigma* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1973), p. 71]; also quoted in Yannis Toussulis, *Sufism and the Way of Blame: Hidden Sources of a Sacred Psychology* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2011), p. 221. See also Michel Random, “The Men of Blame and the Fourth Way” in *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teaching*, eds. Jacob Needleman and George Baker (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 1996), pp. 225-232.

met Hasan Lütüf Şuşud (1901–1988) who the author states was the last principal teacher of Bennett:

In our first (and only) meeting, Şuşud not only verified that the teachings of the Khwajagan were important—perhaps even central—to Sufism, but that “Gurdjieff was a thief of the Tradition.” According to Şuşud, he had personally met Gurdjieff (probably in Istanbul in the 1920s) and was thoroughly convinced that Gurdjieff was *not* an “emissary” of the Work. The implication was that Gurdjieff had probably lifted a part of their system out of its original context. (p. 63)

Gurdjieff is a complicated individual to assess³⁷, given his trickster-like character and keenness to conceal not only his biographical details but also the source of his system.³⁸ With this said, Gurdjieff and his system have been comprehensively explored by Whitall N. Perry, and given that we are limited in our treatment of this subject, for those interested in researching this topic further, see *Gurdjieff in the Light of Tradition* (1978).³⁹

³⁷ “I must warn you that Gurdjieff is far more of an enigma than you can imagine.” [John Godolphin Bennett, “The Return to Gurdjieff” in *Witness* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1962), p. 252].

³⁸ Toussulis mentions that there are noticeable similarities between Gurdjieff’s “Fourth Way” teachings and the teachings of Theosophy. He points out that both Ouspensky and Alfred Richard Orage (1873-1934) who played important roles with the organization of Gurdjieff’s teachings and its dissemination were once leading theosophists. He refers to the following two books as source material for these findings, K. Paul Johnson, *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994); K. Paul Johnson, *Initiates of Theosophical Masters* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995); “about 90 per cent of the occult groups in the Western world today are wholly or partially derivative from Blavatsky or Gurdjieff or Crowley, who together make up the indispensable Big Three of the 20th century occultism.” [Robert Anton Wilson, “The footsteps of the Illuminati” in *Cosmic Trigger I: Final Secret of the Illuminati* (Tempe, AZ: New Falcon Publications, 2002), p. 144]; See also René Guénon, *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion*, trans. Alvin Moore, Jr., Cecil Bethell, Hubert and Rohini Schiff (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001).

³⁹ Although this work was first published in book form in 1978 it first appeared in several issues of the highly regarded English journal *Studies in Comparative Religion* during 1974-1975; Theodore Roszak (b. 1933), who is no stranger to the counter-culture and the New Age movement wrote the following endorsement for this book which was originally taken from a letter to the author on 4 May, 1975 stating: “By far the best independent, critical evaluation of Gurdjieff I’ve come across”; Few Gurdjieffians might be aware that Madame de Salzmann (1889-1990), long term pupil of Gurdjieff for almost thirty years and was considered his deputy by many, after Gurdjieff’s death sought René Guénon in Cairo, Egypt for counsel. The following articulates some of Guénon’s reflections on the man: “This man [Gurdjieff], of Greek extraction, is not purely and simply a charlatan, but this only makes him the more dangerous; he has traveled widely in the East, and he has collected fragments of learning and practices which he arranges after his own fashion, outside of any regular traditional affiliation [orthodoxy].... There is here most certainly nothing authentically spiritual nor initiatic, but the truth is that this Gurdjieff exercises on those who go to him a kind of grip of a psychic order which is quite astonishing and from which few have the strength to escape.” [René Guénon from a letter dated 26 June 1947, quoted in “Correspondence: Gurdjieff in the Light of Tradition: Whitall N. Perry Replies”, *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 11, No 2 (Spring 1977), p. 117]; See also Oscar Ichazo, “Letter to the Transpersonal Community,” which is available online at <http://www.arica.org/articles/trletter.cfm>.

Shortly after Gurdjieff's death, Idries Shah came onto the scene. Bennett, pupil of both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, was still indefatigably seeking for a guide as he was promised by Gurdjieff himself: "After I go, another will come" (p. 53). When Bennett learned that Idries Shah had identified himself as the spiritual Pole or *Qutb* of this age, and that he had claimed to be a representative of the "Guardians of the Tradition" which Bennett assumed to be what Gurdjieff had called "The Inner Circle of Humanity" stemming from the Khwajagan of Central Asia where the Naqshbandi Sufi order is said to originate, Bennett fell under his influence. Shah apparently made much effort to attract Gurdjieff's disciples and took questionable measures to do so. For example, he is reported to have had disciples pen books under pseudonyms fabricating the claim that he was an authentic representative of the Sarmoung Brotherhood. Some have suggested that Shah himself authored these texts.⁴⁰ For some reason Toussulis appears to flip-flop with his admissions of Shah, one moment suggesting that he is a prime example of a pseudo-Sufi and the other reporting that Shah is "hardly an impostor" (56).⁴¹ Internationally acclaimed scholar, Dr. Annemarie Schimmel (1922–2003) emphasizes the following appraisal with regards to Idries Shah:

He has no scholarly background, and his ramblings combine things which can really not be brought together; historical interest is nil, and accuracy very limited ... I am willing to accept a genuine Sufi, who is not a scholar but has a deep experience, if his words radiate truth and honesty, even though he may be unable to express himself in an 'academic' style; that is not the problem; but I cannot accept Idries Shah's claims which are mere pretensions.⁴²

⁴⁰ See Rafael Lefort, *The Teachers of Gurdjieff* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966); O.M. Burke, *Among the Dervishes: An Account of Travels in Asia and Africa, and Four Years Studying the Dervishes, Sufis and Fakirs by Living Among Them* (London: Octagon Press, 1973)

⁴¹ An informative critique of Idries Shah has been prepared by a well-known pupil of Gurdjieff, James Moore, "Neo-Sufism: The Case of Idries Shah," *Religion Today*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1986, pp. 4-8; See also Peter Lamborn Wilson, "The Strange Fate of Sufism in the New Age" in *New Trends and Developments in the World of Islam*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (London: Luzac Oriental Press, 1997), pp. 179-209.

⁴² Quoted from a letter dated 25 May 1985 in Peter Lamborn Wilson, "The Strange Fate of Sufism in the New Age" in *New Trends and Developments in the World of Islam*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (London: Luzac Oriental Press, 1997), pp. 193-194; "Idries Shah, *The Sufis*, as well as his other books, should be avoided by serious students." [Annemarie Schimmel, "What is Sufism?" in *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 9]; See also Martin Lings, "Book Review: The Sufis", *Tomorrow*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter 1965), pp. 56-57; R.N.J.A., "Book Reviews: The Book of the Book by Idries Shah" *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (Summer 1970), pp. 188-190.

Toussulis incorporates further findings about Idries Shah and his family through Robert Abdul Hayy Darr (b. 1951), an ex-student of Shah's who also provided the Foreword to this book. Ikbāl Ali Shah (1894–1969), the father of both Idries Shah and his brother Omar Ali Shah (1922–2005), interestingly wrote the following which contradicts Idries Shah's own views of Sufism: "The Koran is the first and the last textbook of Sufism, and the Prophet Mohammad the greatest Sufi of all times. Whosoever, therefore, does not subscribe to this idea, despite the fact that he may be following an Occult Way, is not Sufi" (p. 61). In summary, the author writes: "In finality, and notwithstanding the positive contributions these popularizers [Gurdjieff, Shah and Bennett] have made, it is regrettable that they have contributed to keeping the elephant in the dark" (p. 68).

Since the subtitle of this book refers to "sacred psychology" it is relevant to then recall that both Gurdjieff and Shah have had a dominant influence not only upon the New Age Movement and the Human Potential Movement, but also within modern psychology especially humanistic and transpersonal Psychology.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Robin Skynner, "Gurdjieff and Modern Psychology" in *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teaching*, eds. Jacob Needleman and George Baker (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 1996), pp. 130-141; P.D. Ouspensky, *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981); Arthur J. Deikman, "Sufism and Psychiatry" in *Transpersonal Psychotherapy*, Second Edition, ed. Seymour Boorstein (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), p. 241-260; Robert E. Ornstein, *The Psychology of Consciousness* (New York: Viking Press, 1972); Robert E. Ornstein "Contemporary Sufism" in *Transpersonal Psychologies*, ed. Charles T. Tart (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 353-388; Robert E. Ornstein (ed.), *The Nature of Human Consciousness: A Book of Readings* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), pp. 271-309; Charles T. Tart, *Waking Up: Overcoming the Obstacles to Human Potential* (Boston, MA: New Science Library, 1986); Kathleen Riordan, "Gurdjieff" in *Transpersonal Psychologies*, ed. Charles T. Tart (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 281-328; Marcia Hermansen, "Literary productions of Western Sufi movements" in *Sufism in the West*, eds. Jamal Malik and John Hinnells (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 41-43. The Enneagram, which has become a household term within humanistic and transpersonal psychology was said to be first popularized in the West by Gurdjieff not to mention Oscar Ichazo (b. 1931), the founder of the Arica School. This traditional Sufi diagram has been usurped by New Age exponents who have grafted their own meanings onto it, or should we say modernized this ancient symbol for mass consumption. That the Enneagram has profound implications upon the human psyche does not signify that it is "psychological" as such, or that it inevitably leads to psychologism—the reduction of the Spirit to the psychic. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Foreword" in Laleh Bakhtiar, *Moral Healer's Handbook: Psychology of Spiritual Chivalry* (Chicago, IL: The Institute of Traditional Psychoethics and Guidance, 1994), pp. vii-viii; Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, "A Meeting with Gurdjieff" in *Classical Islam and the Naqshbandi Sufi Tradition* (Washington, DC: Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2004), pp. 403-405.

In Chapter Five through Chapter Eight, Toussulis presents the *malāmātiyya* in a broad scope dividing them in their early, middle, late and present-day representations. In Chapter Seven, “The Later Malamatiyya”, Toussulis introduces Pir Nur al-Arabi (1813–1888/89), a modern representative of the “way of blame” who openly recognized himself as the Pole (*Qutb*). While little is known about him, he attempted to unify all of the *malāmātiyya* under his direction. Nur al-Arabi also incorporated modern thought into his outlook, which appears to be antithetical to any authentic sapiential tradition: “few Muslim reformers promoted the alignment of Islamic thought with Western philosophy and science—and, in varying degrees, with the political ideas of post-revolutionary Europe. Nur al-Arabi—although he can hardly be called a rationalist—supported modernization, and one can only speculate that he did so because he believed a number of Enlightenment ideals were compatible with Islam. Certainly that would not be out of character for him” (pp. 121–122). The principal representative of Nur al-Arabi in Istanbul, Hacı Maksud Hulusi (1851–1929), “encouraged his son [Mahmut Sadettin Bilginer] to streamline the malamati approach and to teach it to those who did not necessarily belong to a Sufi tariqa. All of these men were admirers of Atatürk’s reforms” (p. 147). We recall that the rise of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938) to power brought about the secularization of Turkey and also the banning of all public manifestations of Sufism.⁴⁴ Chapter Eight reaches its zenith with an interview with Mehmet Selim Öziç Bey, a contemporary representative of the *malāmātiyya* in the lineage of Nur al-Arabi.

The subtitle of Toussulis’s book, “Hidden Sources of a Sacred Psychology”, leaves readers wondering what exactly this “sacred psychology” is, as he does not elaborate. Perhaps he is referring to Chapter Nine, “The Seven Stations of Wisdom”, and Chapter Ten, “Human Completeness”, yet the first speaks to his Sufi order’s spiritual method and the second to what it means to be integrally human, yet it unfortunately sounds more like a mixture of secular humanism and modern psychology than Sufi psychology: “Truly the purpose of the malamati path is not human

⁴⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Islamic Spirituality: Reflections on Conditions Today and Prospects for Tomorrow” in *Islam in the Modern World: Challenged by the West, Threatened by Fundamentalism, Keeping Faith with Tradition* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), p. 102.

perfection or the attainment of the superhuman, but rather a greater human relatedness, greater transparency, and a deeper relationship with the Divine” (p. 200).⁴⁵

The author has taken upon himself a challenging task to elucidate this rather unknown dimension of Islamic spirituality. Given the topsy-turvy era where everything is viewed as a commodity and placed for sale, which even the Sacred has not escaped, we cannot be too vigilant in our efforts to not yield to these disintegrating forces.

The author has wanted to give voice to his own spiritual lineage, directly linked to the *malāmatīyya*, and to expose New Age proponents of Sufism or pseudo-Sufis, but he would have been better off solely focusing on the material at hand and deleting the references to the traditionalist or perennialist school including the chapter “The Traditionalist Critique”. It is unfortunate that Toussulis, looking for a more universal application of the Islamic revelation and its inner dimension, has not properly understood the traditionalist perspective, for if he had, it is quite probable that he would have been much more its proponent rather than at odds with it, as Tradition, properly understood, is essential for the preservation and integrity of the world’s religions and corresponding spiritualities.

Another troubling aspect is that Toussulis appears to be attempting to modernize or update Sufism and the *malāmatīyya* in order to make the “way of blame” available to all, regardless of individual capacity or qualification. Though time and place contextualize the manner in which spiritual traditions apply their methods, this does not mean that they can be changed or amended indiscriminately to accommodate this entropic era.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, “Humanistic or Transpersonal? *Homo Spiritualis* and the Perennial Philosophy”, *AHP Perspective*, August-September 2010, pp. 7-11.

⁴⁶ “The real traditional outlook is always and everywhere essentially the same, whatever outward form it may take; the various forms that are specially suited to different mental conditions and different circumstances of time and place are merely expressions of one and the same truth.... It should be added that knowledge of principles is essential knowledge, or metaphysical knowledge, in the true sense of the world, and is as universal as are the principles themselves” [René Guénon, “The Opposition Between East and West” in *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Arthur Osborne, Marco Pallis, Richard C. Nicholson (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), p. 30]

This attempt is not realistic or congruent with the original intent of the pre-modern *malāmāṭiyya*.⁴⁷

In closing, we are reminded of the urgent need of “vigilance at the eleventh hour”⁴⁸ and while Toussulis is far from claiming to be a traditionalist, he is none the less a practitioner of Sufism and therefore an insider to a certain extent. It is unfortunate that while certain parts of

⁴⁷ It is also worth noting that Toussulis was advised by his spiritual mentor that the “way of blame” or *malāmāṭiyya* would become known in the West through modern psychology, and Toussulis himself is a psychologist. The author discloses further: “Before his death, Bilginer instructed Öziç to find a psychiatrist or psychologist trained in the West—as well as one trained in Sufism—to help him convey the teachings in more human-scientific terms. It was because of these stipulations that Mehmet Selim Öziç chose the present author to collaborate on this book.” [Yannis Toussulis, “Twentieth-Century Representatives” in *Sufism and the Way of Blame: Hidden Sources of a Sacred Psychology* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2011), p. 148]. It is also stated: “translating the malamati teachings into a psychological vernacular more relevant to modern societies.” [Yannis Toussulis, “Twentieth-Century Representatives” in *Sufism and the Way of Blame: Hidden Sources of a Sacred Psychology* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2011), p. 149]. The same was suggested by one of the early teachers of Vajrayāna or Tibetan Buddhism in the West, Chögyam Trungpa (1939-1987) who emphasized: “Buddhism will come to the West as a psychology.” [Chögyam Trungpa, *The Sanity We Are Born With: A Buddhist Approach to Psychology*, ed. Carolyn Rose Gimian (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 2005), p. VII]. While Sufi psychology or “science of the soul”, like Buddhist psychology, has increased in its popularity, both have had attempts to distil them from their esoteric traditions. In regard to Sufism this is not only unfortunate, but a distortion of its central message which cannot be cut off from Islam as all Sufi Orders are linked through an initiatic succession back to the Prophet Muhammad. Within Buddhism, some of the highest level teachings and or practices are often offered to Western audiences with little or no commitment or even assessment of individual qualification. Analogously the appeal to co-opt Sufism or Buddhism or any of the divinely revealed traditions and solely acknowledge them as a psychology is erroneous. While each spiritual tradition has a corresponding sacred psychology they are integral so long as they are contextualized within the given spiritual tradition. It is all too often forgotten by contemporaries that the psyche or soul is subservient to the Spirit and this is why many are duped by New Age views suggesting that that they are synonymous with each other. The following diagram presents the tripartite structure of the human microcosm in light of the perennial philosophy:

| English | Latin | Greek | Arabic |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Spirit (Intellect) | <i>Spiritus (Intellectus)</i> | <i>Pneuma (Nous)</i> | <i>Rūh ('Aql)</i> |
| soul | <i>anima</i> | <i>psyché</i> | <i>nafs</i> |
| body | <i>corpus</i> | <i>soma (hylé)</i> | <i>jism</i> |

The above table is found in William Stoddart, “What is the Intellect?” in *Remembering in a World of Forgetting: Thoughts on Tradition and Postmodernism*, eds. Mateus Soares de Azevedo and Alberto Vasconcelos Queiroz (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), p. 46.

⁴⁸ Charles Upton, “Vigilance at the Eleventh Hour: A Refutation of *The Only Tradition*”, in *The System of Antichrist: Truth and Falsehood in Postmodernism and the New Age* (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp. 387-423; See also Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, “Book Review: The Return of the Perennial Philosophy: The Supreme Vision of Western Esotericism”, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 25 (Summer 2010), pp. 175-184.

the book illuminate important points, others in turn further obscure them. While we are respectful of the author's intentions, and want to give him the benefit of the doubt where we might have misunderstood his presentation, it is important to clarify where he appears to have strayed in his views of Tradition and of Sufism.