

# Letters to the Editor: An Exchange on Tradition and Sufism

## **The Malamatiyya, Sufism, and Traditionalist Orthodoxy: A Response to Samuel Bendeck Sotillos' review of "Sufism and the Way of Blame by Yannis Toussulis" (*Sacred Web*, Volume 27)**

*By Yannis Toussulis*

**S***acred Web* is a prestigious journal that has accumulated accolades from a number of distinguished scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Karen Armstrong, and Huston Smith. The journal's contributors have included luminaries such as Frithjof Schuon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, William C. Chittick, and a host of others. One would expect that a review of one's book in such a journal would be non-prejudicial, but, sadly, I do not find this in Mr. Sotillos' review.

Sotillos does not confine himself to a factual critique of the history presented in my book, nor does he point out any logical inconsistencies in my arguments, nor does he offer a penetrating critique of the paradigm that I explore. Instead, the latter is dismissed out-of-hand as an "admixture of humanism and modern psychology." This allegation is odd to me since I am known elsewhere as a critic of both of these intellectual movements despite the fact that I am trained as an academic psychologist.

The only reason given for his preemptory dismissal of my work as humanistic and (presumably) psychologistic is that Sotillos disagrees with my conclusions that "the purpose of the malamati path is not perfection in the attainment of the superhuman, but rather a greater human relatedness, greater transparency, and a deeper relationship to the divine" (p. 200, *Sufism and the Way of Blame*—quoted at pp. 191-2 of the Sotillos review). Whether or not this quote betrays "humanistic" concerns, rather than those of Sufism is never examined. Moreover, whether or

not these propositions obscure or contradict Sufi psychology is never addressed in any detail by the reviewer. This is the case even though I take great pains to show that I have arrived at my conclusions through a reading of classical Sufi sources.

Had Sotillos focused more on noting factual errors in my book, or had he indicated how the evidence that I cite does not support my paradigmatic conclusions I would presently be responding in kind. Instead, he concludes that I “*appear* to have strayed in [my] views of Tradition and Sufism” (p.194 – emphasis mine). Perplexingly, I could not have possibly departed from Traditionalism since I have never adhered to it in the first place. In fact, I critique Traditionalism in my book and I will continue to do so at present since I find many—though not all—of its fundamental assumptions to be flawed.

To begin with, I find it grandiose that a philosophical (or quasi-philosophical) movement would entitle itself the “Tradition.” By capitalizing the term “Tradition” one implies that there is only one (valid) tradition that subsumes all other traditions of religious or philosophical thought. I object to the hubris inherent in this strongly implied position. Although Traditionalism is not posited as another religion in its own right, some of its adherents seem to consider it to be a meta-religion. As meta-religionists, some of the spokespersons of Traditionalism seem to have appointed themselves to be the guardians of every (other) religious tradition. By what right, and by what criteria?

According to Mr. Sotillos, what is “fundamental to Tradition” is “its emphasis on orthodoxy and its rejection of syncretism” (p.182). Leaving aside for now Mr. Sotillos’ objection to syncretism, he argues that only an “orthodox” expression of Sufism is valid. This raises the question of which form of “right opinion” (*ortho doxia*) is acceptable to Traditionalists. The assumption seems to be that all orthodoxies conform to a single Orthodoxy which is clearly discernable to the self-same Traditionalists. This is highly debatable since not all orthodoxies offer the same opinions and none of them subscribe to the same over-arching worldview.

More germane is whether or not all Muslims (including Sufis) adhere to any “orthodoxy” *per se*. My answer would be fully in accord with William C. Chittick who states, “Orthodoxy in particular is highly problematic, given the lack of a central authority in the Islamic tradition... each Muslim has a duty to establish his or her own understanding of

who God is, what the angels are, how to understand the teachings of the prophets and scriptures, what is the significance of the Last Day.”<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, one might ask, isn't the *shari'ah*—the ethical guidelines to which most Muslims subscribe—a form of orthodoxy? My simple answer would be no, although many people accept the *shari'ah* as implicitly so. The term *shari'ah* itself is problematic because its interpretations are many and varied. One can argue for a consensus of opinion as to what constitutes the *shari'ah* in its past or present forms, but it is hard to establish the *ijima* or “consensus” of the religious scholars outside of a particular school or historical setting. Over time, overlapping agreements among many *fuqaha*, or “legal scholars” can be discerned throughout the “domain of Islam” (*dar ul-Islam*), but according to most traditionalists, interpretations of the *shari'ah* can never be fixed, nor are such interpretations held to be equivalent to holy writ.

Mr. Sotillos seems to believe that I might be “proposing a Sufism void of *shari'ah*” (p.184). What I propose, instead, is that there are multiple interpretations of the *shari'ah* that are adhered to by Sufis in differing ways. Sufism is a social, as well as a spiritual phenomenon; and in both cases it has manifested multiple forms, some of them seemingly “orthodox” and others less so. For example, there are Sufis who adhere to one or another of the various Sunni *madhahib* or “schools of canonical law,” while there are others who adhere to the Ja'fari or Imami Shi'a *madhah*. Still others, like the Alevi-Bektashis, adhere to their own interpretation of the *shari'ah*.

A few Sufis appear to be *bi-shar*, or outside the *shari'ah* altogether but they remain in a minority. Whatever their position on the *shari'ah*, I have argued, all such Sufis self-identify themselves as such and they exist within the historically identifiable, socio-historical framework of Sufism. One would be hard pressed to find a Sufi who actively denies the validity of the *shari'ah*, even though Bektashis markedly contrast their views on the *shari'ah* with those of the Sunnis. Are Bektashis profligate because they do not conform to the mainstream? Certainly, they have not been excluded by most Sufis in Turkey and the Balkans as “Sufi.”

Given that I adopt a socio-historical perspective, Sotillos, suggests that I am adopting a “materialist mindset”. In response, I find the Traditional-

<sup>1</sup> “Interview with Ustadh Chittick.” *Traditional Studies Forum: Tradition, Religion, and Modernity*. <http://www.traditionalstudies.freeforum.org>. Posted 09/22/2010.

ist position on “modernity” and “materialism” to be naïve at best. I cite the cases of logical positivism and continental philosophy as examples. While the former can be rightly judged as materialistic, the other cannot be rightly held to be so. An anti-modern bias is evident when the reviewer states, Nur al-Arabi “...incorporated modern thought into his outlook, which appears to be antithetical to any authentic, sapiential tradition” (p.191). This seems to be an absurd over-generalization, since “modern” (rather than modernist) can be taken to mean “contemporary.”

Does Sotillos mean to suggest that the incorporation of Neo-Platonic ideas in ninth century Islamic thought was similarly antithetical? Does the reviewer also wish to claim that democratic reforms introduced to the Islamic world from the outside are also contra-sapiential? If so, what form of sapience or “wisdom” does the reviewer suggest is valid, a static and unchanging form that supports a single absolutist point of view? The answer seems to be yes, and this is where I take issue with Mr. Sotillos’ rigid concepts about traditionalism. A tradition is a social vehicle that “hands down” a series of ideas and practices, but being a member of a tradition does not require adopting a fixed, imitative approach. In fact, many Sufis are on record as decrying *taqlid* (imitation) as opposed to *tasdiq*, experiential knowledge which facilitates *tabqiq* (verification).<sup>2</sup>

It appears that defending a Traditionalist orthodoxy is most important for the reviewer, for whom the perennial philosophy and modern Traditionalism are one and the same. Are these equivalents, as Sotillos seems to assume? Another scholar who has published in these pages has noted that there are differences between René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Mr. Sotillos obscures and conflates these differences. To quote Patrick Laude, “it could be argued that Frithjof Schuon was, in a sense, more interested in *religio perennis* than in *sophia perennis* or tradition.”<sup>3</sup>

Traditionalists seem to believe that “the *philosophia perennis* by no means is ‘a’ philosophy, that is to say one particular concept more or less limited and systematic ... [but rather] the common foundation from which proceeds whatever is truly valid in all philosophies” (Guénon, quoted by Sotillos, p.182).

<sup>2</sup> Leonard Lewisohn. *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Mahmud Shabistari*. Richmond Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Laude. “Seyyed Hossein Nasr in the Context of the Perennialist School.” *Religio Perennis*, <http://www.religioperennis.com>, 10.

Guénon strongly implies that there is an over-arching metaphysics (by its very nature philosophical) that overrides and subsumes all other valid philosophies—an extraordinary claim, indeed! By this non-philosophy—that still manages to be a form of metaphysics—Guénon and his followers are convinced we can judge all other systems of thought. By what criteria? The only answer that Mr. Sotillos seems to suggest is by the criteria of Traditionalist orthodoxy. This is a clearly a species of tautological thinking.

Given the reviewer's approach, we could easily conclude that Traditionalism is form of intellectual absolutism. As anyone who reads Guénon can discern, what the founder of Traditionalism had in mind is not a "philosophy" *per se*, but a theosophy that requires a particular form of religious faith or better yet, a particular type of religious intellectual conviction.

Intellectual conviction is not the same as the Islamic faith of Sufis who commonly support pluralism and who reasonably suspect all forms of intellectual absolutism. To quote William Chittick again, "...my belief in God will never be identical to your belief in God, my understanding of God cannot be the same as your understanding of God. ...Even for a single person, there will never be 'one understanding' and 'one belief.' Anyone who is honest with himself knows that his understanding of things—not least of his own beliefs—is changing all the time, hopefully for the better—that is, more in conformity with *tawhîd*." The hope for *tawhîd* (or "unity") cited by Chittick precludes that any such unity has already been established by any one form of orthodoxy, or "right opinion."

Citing Guénon, Mr. Sotillos takes issue with my proposition that Sufism is the result of syncretism (p.183). In my book, I specifically state, "This syncretism reconciled disparate or contradictory beliefs." Does the reviewer wish to challenge the historical evidence that Hermetic and Neo-Platonic ideas entered the fold of Sufism, or that Neo-Platonism itself was originally a non-Islamic (pagan) philosophical movement? Does the reviewer deny that this philosophical approach was discovered anew in the ninth century, and that, therefore, this innovation was considered a "modern" or contemporary innovation at the time?

How were Neo-Platonism and Sufism reconciled since they were originally disparate or (at times) contradictory" belief-systems? Citing

Guénon, Sotillos would answer through a process of “synthesis,” and for once I would agree. In fact, I state in my book that “Sufism, in its classical form, was not... simply an eclectic form of mysticism” (p.30). In thought and in practice, Sufism has readily drawn from other traditions without losing its inner unity, but this has not been accomplished through the imposition of any particular orthodoxy.

Sotillos exclaims that Traditionalism does not accept syncretism, but promotes orthodoxy (p.182). In contradistinction, British historian Mark Sedgwick writes, “By the time of Schuon’s death in 1984, Sufism had become almost incidental to a wider enterprise that involved Christians, Red Indian [i.e. Native American] dances and—according to some reports—sacred nudity”<sup>4</sup> Sotillos responds, “That Schuon provided guidance to Christians and was interested in Native American Indians is well documented and the same with his reflections on sacred nudity ...this needs to be understood within the framework of the sacredness of revealed forms and orthodoxy” (p.182). What Sotillos does not clarify is which “orthodoxy” Schuon (purportedly) had in mind.

One should note that Sotillos limits Schuon to providing “guidance to Christians,” and that he was only “interested” in Native American Indians, while providing “reflections on sacred nudity” (p.182). Why does the reviewer not put to rest several reports that Schuon actually conducted rituals that employed an admixture of varying religious traditions? If Sedgwick is correct, Schuon’s approach was syncretistic in the fullest meaning of that term. Sotillos simply states, “Sedgwick’s limited grasp of traditionalism which as we have already commented has been thoroughly critiqued and exposed” (p.182). Falsifying information or relying on spurious accounts or second-hand reports is not the same as having a “limited grasp” of traditionalist knowledge

Moreover, by what “orthodoxy” did Schuon establish a Sufi *tariqa* called the Maryamiyyah? Did Schuon obtain the traditional permission of Shaykh Ahmad al-Alawi to establish a branch of the Shadiliyya? If so, Schuon and his followers would be in possession of a *kehalifa nama* (a written authorization of succession) as is customary among all Sufi orders. If Schuon did not receive the blessing of al-Alawi to form his own *tariqa*, then by what traditional norms did Schuon establish and

<sup>4</sup> Mark Sedgwick. “Western Sufism and Traditionalism.” <http://www.traditionalist.org>

promote the Maryamiyyah? Was the Maryamiyyah formed by Schuon through divine guidance alone as he appears to have claimed?<sup>5</sup> Once again, the only acceptable “orthodoxy” that Sotillos claims to uphold is that of the Traditionalists.

The reviewer’s style of reviewing reminds one of the attitudes of heresiologists. While raising the specter of my lack of orthodoxy, Sotillos introduces his suspicions with a softer prelude: “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 (this point)” (p.194). In other words—and even though I have been given the benefit of the doubt—readers should beware that I might be a possible heretic who appears to have strayed from Sufism.

Since these suspicions have been raised, one might question whether I have truly strayed from the Malamati tradition or whether the later tradition—as epitomized by Pir Nur al-Arabi (d. 1888)—has departed from Sufism as whole. As I detail in Chapter Eight of my book, the Pir was widely accepted by the *ulema* and other Sufis of his day. One of his immediate successors, Haci Maksud Hulusi (d. 1929) was nearly appointed to serve as the Shaykh al-Islam in Istanbul. His son, Mahmut Sadettin Blginer (d. 1983) was widely accepted as a legitimate Malamati Murshid by all of the leading Sufis of his day. Finally, Mehmet Selim Ozic (b. 1932) has been accorded a similar respect by one of the last Grand-Shaykhs of the Jerrahi-Halveti order (Sefer Dal), by Shaykh Hasan Sari of the Qadiri-Rifa’i order, as well as by one of the late Grand-Shaykhs of the Mevleviyya (Sefik Can). The lineage (*silsila*) of Pir Nur al-Arabi is well established and it extends through a chain of Naqshbandi, Uwaysi, and Halveti Shaykhs that link back to the Prophet Muhammad. Bilginer and Ozic, who are inheritors of Nur al-Arabi, are also “grafted upon the same tree.”

Exponents of Traditionalism certainly have a right to critique any work they choose to review. They also have the right to raise questions of whatever kind, including those raised by Sotillos. Traditionalists have not, however, been granted the right to act as the guardians of Sufi legitimacy as he seems to infer.

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<sup>5</sup> Such second-hand reports have been published, for example in Ibn al-Rawandi. *Islamic Mysticism: a Secular Perspective*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000, 181-183.

Despite any errors that I might have made, *Sufism and the Way of Blame* passed the review of Mehmet Selim Ozic before it was published. In addition, the book has been endorsed by several leading Sufis in the United States who hold valid *ijazas* in several *turuq* (sing. *tariqa*)—and all of these organizations are widely recognized as legitimate Sufi orders. Let me suggest that the consensus of Sufis, both living and dead, is of far greater consequence than the opinion of any one author like Mr. Sotillos. It is authoritative Sufis, and not the reviewer, who can offer the best opinion as to whether or not the lineage of Pir Nur al-Arabi has been compromised by “modern” innovations.

While taking umbrage at my critique of Traditionalism, the reviewer writes, “We challenge the author to present us a more ‘universal’ expression of orthodox Sufism than is presented via the Traditionalists” (p.185). First of all, one cannot confuse orthodoxy with Sufism; secondly one should not confuse Traditionalism with Sufism; thirdly the works of classical Sufis like Muhyiddin Ibn al-Arabi and Mawlana Jalauddin Rumi suffice as better representations of the “universal expression” of Sufism. One is not required to access their knowledge “via the Traditionalists.”

Traditionalism, which is only one expression of the *philosophia perennis* is, arguably, a product of European thought. It is therefore, a contemporary movement, despite the fact that it decries all manifestations of modernity. The insights of René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon, and other Traditionalists make a valuable contribution. They should not, however, be taken to be “the common foundation from which proceeds whatever is truly valid in all philosophies.” Such an imperious claim—originally made by René Guénon but echoed by the reviewer—presents us with a neo-orthodoxy.

Mr. Sotillos quotes Frithjof Schuon as follows, “the outward religion proceeds from the inner religion, *but they are in opposition* inasmuch as the inward and essential religion is *independent* of the outward and formal religion” (p.185). Clearly, Schuon privileges the “inner” (*batin*) over the “outward” (*zahir*) form of any spiritual tradition, including Sufism; orthodoxies, of whatever kind, actually reverse this approach. This is not to say that the inner and outward forms of religion should not be balanced, but Sufis have typically employed *kufriyyat*, “the symbolism of



infidelity”<sup>6</sup> to challenge rigid formalism. I would suggest that one can employ modern concepts and metaphors in the same way, without necessarily advancing “New Age parodies masquerading as Sufism” (pp.184-5). Concerning syncretism, Patrick Laude has written, “It could be said that Guenon’s metaphysical position was Hindu, his view of initiation and its relationship to exotericism Islamic, and his symbolist vision Taoist or Far Eastern.” In short, Mr. Sotillos, one person’s “synthesis” is another person’s “syncretism.” I rest my case.

*Yannis Toussulis*

### **Illuminating the Elephant in the Dark: A Response to Yannis Toussulis**

*By Samuel Bendeck Sotillos*

Some Hindus had brought an elephant for exhibition and placed it in a dark house. Crowds of people were going into that dark place to see the beast. Finding that ocular inspection was impossible, each visitor felt it with his palm in the darkness. The palm of one fell on the trunk. ‘This creature is like a water-spout,’ he said. The hand of another lighted on the elephant’s ear. To him the beast was evidently like a fan. ‘I found the elephant’s shape is like a pillar,’ he said. Another laid his hand on its back. ‘Certainly this elephant was like a throne,’ he said.<sup>7</sup>—Rūmī

In response to Yannis Toussulis’ letter regarding the review of his book, *Sufism and the Way of Blame* (2011), published in the previous issue of *Sacred Web*<sup>8</sup>, we would like to take this opportunity to respond to, and clarify our position with regard to many of the important points and concerns which the author raises.

While we can understand why the author has not taken favourably to the review of his book and although he does not agree that it was written in a “non-prejudicial” manner, we are again not interested in *ad hominem* or personal attacks—however, what is of interest are the doctrinal issues, especially as they apply to the integral metaphysics of the perennial philosophy. Sufism plays a decisive role in articulating a

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Lewisohn. *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Mahmud Shabistari*. Richmond Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1995, p. 278.

<sup>7</sup> A.J. Arberry, “The Elephant in the Dark” in *Tales from the Masnavi* (Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1994), p. 208.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, “Book Review: Sufism and the Way of Blame: Hidden Sources of a Sacred Psychology”, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 27 (Summer 2011), pp. 175-194.

middle way—one situated between extremes such as rigid formalism and that of New Age parodies such as pseudo-Sufism or neo-Sufism.<sup>9</sup> By analogy we need to emphasize that the Traditionalist or Perennialist framework offers a similar role yet not limited to Sufism or Islam but includes all plenary revelations in their fullness.<sup>10</sup>

Given the inherent limitations of any review including essay reviews for that matter, it hardly needs to be emphasized that although we exceeded the typical length allotted, the author has neglected to mention the twenty pages allocated to his book. Be it as it may, we will attempt to address Toussulis' concerns in this supplementary response, very well aware that we cannot present a conclusive or exhaustive response as these issues are complex in nature and demand more detailed explanations. That said, we will attempt to include as much documentation as is possible in this brief space so that interested readers can explore these matters further (and we also suggest that readers read our initial review of the book in question).

### ***Who are the Traditionalists?***

Before we enter into specifics, we wanted to first note that Toussulis speaks of the Traditionalist or Perennialist authors in a belittling, somewhat irreverent tone, which is certainly his prerogative, but it does reflect poorly upon his judgment and motive, not to mention a lack

<sup>9</sup> "On a formalist level, the so-called fundamentalist movements are an attempt at fostering a 'universal Islam' based on a literal, formal interpretation of the religion, claiming to restore the religion to its full universal horizon beyond sectarian and 'innovative' deviations or accretions. At the other end of the spectrum, the last decades have seen the development, particularly in the West, of a neo-Sufism that has argued for the severance of Sufism from its Islamic framework, thereby advocating a full development of its universal scope. Both movements, as contrary as they may appear on the level of their immediate positions, reflect in fact the type of reversal of principles that Guénon had in view when describing the way in which 'counter-spirituality' would present itself as a return to authentic tradition." [Patrick Laude, "The Universal Horizon of Islam" in *Pathways to an inner Islam: Massignon, Corbin, Guénon, and Schuon* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010), p. 135]; See also William C. Chittick, "Spiritual Mastery" in *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), pp. 270-274.

<sup>10</sup> "Unique amid all this interest in Sufism are the studies emanating at present from...Frithjof Schuon, Titus Burckhardt, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and others. The vivifying quality of thought in these books—which deal with all the great religious traditions of mankind—is a stunning reminder that the intellect of man can be a liberating force when rooted in genuine orthodoxy." [Jacob Needleman, "In Search of a Central Question" in *The New Religions* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1970), pp. 213-214]

of awareness as to the intellectual stature of some of the pre-eminent figures whose views he disparages.<sup>11</sup>

That Toussulis does not comprehend the remarkable personages of the Traditionalist or Perennialist school of comparative religion, is of little consequence in light of those keen intellects that have. For example Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), a spiritual paragon of the twentieth century, reverently referred to René Guénon (1886-1951) as “the great Sufi”.<sup>12</sup> The world renowned historian of religion, Professor Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), stated the following regarding Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947)<sup>13</sup>: “[Ananda K. Coomaraswamy] is one

<sup>11</sup> One of the authors who not only endorsed Toussulis’s book but, “provided valuable editing input, especially through his knowledge of some of the primary sources.” [Yannis Toussulis, “Preface” to *Sufism and the Way of Blame: Hidden Sources of a Sacred Psychology* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2011), p. xx], elsewhere confirms with another colleague the relevance of the Traditionalists: “No survey of contemporary Sufism is complete without a mention of one of the most influential currents in esoteric spiritual studies: Traditionalism.” [Richard Smoley and Jay Kinney, “In Defence of Tradition” in *Hidden Wisdom: A Guide to the Western Inner Traditions* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2006), p. 245]. Interesting that this input provided to Toussulis did not deter or broaden his perspective with regard to the Traditionalists. For a definitive anthology which represents the breadth and depth of the Traditionalist perspective we recommend: Whittal N. Perry, *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971); See also Harry Oldmeadow, *Traditionalism: Religion in the Light of the Perennial Philosophy* (Colombo: The Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies, 2000); Carl W. Ernst, “Traditionalism, the Perennial Philosophy, and Islamic Studies (review article)”, *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (December 1994), pp. 176-181.

<sup>12</sup> Roger Maridot, “Foreword” to René Guénon, *Miscellanea*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, Cecil Bethell, Patrick Moore and Hubert Schiff (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), p. xviii; “One may cite in this regard the high regard in which the late and much revered Shaykh of Al-Azhar, ‘Abd al-‘alim Ma’mūd, held the person and the writings of René Guénon, one of the founders of the school of *sophia perennis*, to which Nasr belongs. This paragon of Muslim ‘orthodoxy’ went so far as to say that Guénon was one of those personalities who have rightfully taken up their place in history, and that ‘Muslims place him close to al-Ghazālī and his like (*ya’u’ubu al-muslimūn bi-jiwār al-imām al-Ghazālīwa-amthālihi*)’. It is interesting to note also that Frithjof Schuon is mentioned by Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘alim as a ‘formidable scholar (*‘alim ‘alī*)’; and he refers also to Schuon’s important exposition of the *sophia perennis* entitled *L’Œil du Coeur*.” [Reza Shah-Kazemi, “Dialogue, Diatribe, or Da’wa?” in *The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Qur’an and Interfaith Dialogue* (London: Islamic Texts Society, 2006), pp. 264-265]; “Certainly no other writer [René Guénon] has so effectively communicated the absoluteness of truth...” [Jacob Needleman (ed.), “Foreword” to *The Sword of Gnosis: Metaphysics, Cosmology, Tradition, Symbolism* (London: Arkana, 1986), p. 12]; See also Jean Borella, “René Guénon and the Traditionalist School” in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, eds. Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 330-358; Patrick Laude, “René Guénon: Traditional Sources and Contemporary Contexts”, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 21 (Summer 2008), pp. 129-149.

<sup>13</sup> Brian Keeble, “Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: Scholar of the Spirit” in *The Essential Sophia*, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Katherine O’Brien (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006), pp. 274-287.

of the most learned and creative scholars of the century.” Indologist Professor Heinrich Zimmer’s (1890-1943) assessment contextualizes this remarkable scholar: “[Ananda K. Coomaraswamy is] that noble scholar upon whose shoulders we are still standing.” Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998)<sup>14</sup> was regarded by Swami Ramdas (1884-1963), as “a very prince among saints.”<sup>15</sup> Doyen of the world’s religions Professor Huston Smith (b. 1919) offers Frithjof Schuon his highest praise: “[Schuon is] the most important religious thinker of our century.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Annemarie Schimmel (1922-2003), one of the great authorities in Islamic Studies, wrote this about Schuon’s book *Understanding Islam*: “Schuon’s book shows the essence of Islam, compares its world view with that of Christianity and often brings examples from other religious traditions, all of which his vast erudition comprises. The style of the work reminds the reader sometimes of crystalline pure forms, and yet one often finds passages which touch the heart.” [Annemarie Schimmel, “Foreword” to Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 1998), p. vii]; “Nothing is perhaps more significant or has climaxed this effort in amore befitting manner than the fact that His Holiness Śrī Śankarācārya, Jagadguru on the Kāñcī Kāmakoti Pitha, has been pleased to accept the dedication of this book to him; the orthodoxy and authenticity of Schuon’s exposition stand in need of no further testimony.” [Venkataraman Raghavan, “Foreword” to Frithjof Schuon, *Language of the Self*, trans. Marco Pallis and Macleod Matheson (Madras: Ganesh, 1959), p. x]; See also Thomas Yellowtail, “Introduction” to Frithjof Schuon, *The Feathered Sun: Plains Indians in Art and Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1990), pp. xiii-xv; William Stoddart, “Frithjof Schuon and the Perennialist School” and “Spirituality in Hinduism: A Visit to the Jagadguru” in *Remembering in a World of Forgetting: Thoughts on Tradition and Postmodernism*, eds. Mateus Soares de Azevedo and Alberto Vasconcellos Queiroz (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), pp. 51-66, 118-119; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Influence of Schuon” in *The Essential Frithjof Schuon*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005), pp. 55-56; Seyyed Hossein Nasr and William Stoddart (eds.), *Religion of the Heart: Essays Presented to Frithjof Schuon on His Eightieth Birthday* (Washington, DC: Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1991); Mateus Soares de Azevedo, “Frithjof Schuon and Sri Ramana Maharshi: A Survey of the Spiritual Masters of the 20th Century”, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 10 (Winter 2002), pp. 185-195.

<sup>15</sup> See Swami Ramdas, “Visit To Sufi Saint” and “Hindus at Heart” in *World is God* (Kanhagad, Kerala: Anandashram, 1955), pp. 103-105.

<sup>16</sup> Huston Smith’s endorsement for Michael Oren Fitzgerald, *Frithjof Schuon: Messenger of the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010); See also Huston Smith, “Providence Perceived: In Memory of Frithjof Schuon”, *Sophia: The Journal of Traditional Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Winter 1998), pp. 29-31; Huston Smith, “Introduction” to Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1993), pp. ix-xxvii; Huston Smith, “Foreword” to Frithjof Schuon, *The Eye of the Heart: Metaphysics, Cosmology, Spiritual Life* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1997), pp. ix-xi; Huston Smith, “Perennial Philosophy, Primordial Tradition” in *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp. 32-57; Huston Smith with Jeffery Paine, *Tales of Wonder: Adventures Chasing the Divine, an Autobiography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), pp. 144-149.

It is evident from even this limited sampling of comments, by individuals from a broad range of spiritual traditions, that the Traditionalist metaphysicians are held in high regard and accorded the legitimacy that Toussulis would deny them.<sup>17</sup>

Toussulis states that the Traditionalists “have appointed themselves to be the guardians of every (other) religious tradition”, yet the reality is that many seekers from diverse traditions have greatly benefited from the Traditionalist writings. Many of these seekers have either been guided back to their respective traditions of birth or have discovered for the first time the relevance of religion in their lives. In both cases the Traditionalists writings have provided a great service in clarifying what it is to be truly human and the essential role religion plays in illuminating the fullness of the human condition.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Some might be inclined to mention the following article which challenges the Traditionalist perspective: Hajj Muhammad Legenhausen, “Why I Am Not a Traditionalist” (2002), available at the Religioscope website: <http://www.religioscope.com/pdf/esotrad/legenhausen.pdf>; See the following response to Legenhausen’s article: Charles Upton, “What is a ‘Traditionalist’?—Some Clarifications”, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 17 (Summer 2006), pp. 49-99. In a similar vein we could mention the following articles: Joscelyn Godwin, “Facing the Traditionalists: An Approach to René Guénon and His Successors” in *The Inner West: An Introduction to the Hidden Wisdom of the West* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 2004), pp. 292-303; Brannon Ingram, “René Guénon and the Traditionalist Polemic” in *Polemical Encounters: Esoteric Discourse and Its Others*, eds. Olav Hammer and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007), pp. 201-226. In response we would again like to draw attention to the following article which helps contextualize these critiques in light of principal knowledge: 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.

<sup>18</sup> “René Guénon was the chief influence in the formation of my own intellectual outlook (quite apart from the question of Orthodox Christianity)... It was René Guénon who taught me to seek and love the truth above all else, and to be unsatisfied with anything else.” [Seraphim Rose quoted in Hieromonk Damascene, “Truth Above All Else” in *Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2005), p. 63; revised version of: Monk Damascene Christensen, *Not of This World: The Life and Teaching of Fr. Seraphim Rose, Pathfinder to the Heart of Ancient Christianity* (Forestville, CA: Father Seraphim Rose Foundation, 1993), the above quote is taken from an undated letter of Fr. Seraphim Rose to Ken, which is published in full in, Hieromonk Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1999); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Appendix III: Western Interpreters of the Islamic Tradition: Academic Scholars” in *Islam in the Modern World: Challenged by the West, Threatened by Fundamentalism, Keeping Faith with Tradition* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), pp. 323-360; Larry Rinehart, “Letters to the Editor: Confessions of a Lutheran Perennialist”, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 27 (Summer 2011), pp. 195-200.

### ***What is Tradition?***

While “tradition” and everything that it is commonly associated with is highly disregarded or scorned in the contemporary era, the Perennialist usage of this term is very distinct from its common one. We have to be vigilant of attempts to define Tradition or any of its given expressions, Sufism for example, via a “socio-historical perspective” as Toussulis adopts, as there is a danger of ending up with a relativistic historicism which misses the mark altogether.<sup>19</sup> Tradition we must emphasize is not a “social vehicle” or a “social construct”, it is rather the sacred transmission of a Divine Revelation to a specific human collectivity. When Tradition is contextualized within the Islamic tradition it can be underscored by two distinct ways of knowing, one based on direct apprehension or “intellectual” (*‘aqli*) and the other that is indirect or “transmitted” (*naqli*).<sup>20</sup> Blind imitation is not what is intended by the usage of the term Tradition: as we have noted, “without *tahqiq* (direct internalized knowledge) one is left with the limitations of *taqlid* (knowing through assimilation from secondhand sources), but both forms of knowledge are part and parcel of any plenary revelation.”<sup>21</sup> Tradition encapsulates the entirety of what is normative and completely human which offers equilibrium and social cohesion via its sacred education,

<sup>19</sup> See Seyyed Hossein Nasr with Ramin Jahanbegloo, “Tradition’s Answer to Historicism” in *In Search of the Sacred: A Conversation with Seyyed Hossein Nasr on His Life and Thought* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), pp. 182-184; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Meaning of the History of Sufism” in *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam’s Mystical Tradition* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), pp. 164-166. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Knowledge and Its Desacralization” in *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), p. 63; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Religion and Religions” in *Religion and the Order of Nature* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 11-15.

<sup>20</sup> See William C. Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2009); M. Ali Lakhani, “Book Review: Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul” in *The Timeless Relevance of Traditional Wisdom* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010), pp. 263-269.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, “Book Review: Sufism and the Way of Blame: Hidden Sources of a Sacred Psychology”, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 27 (Summer 2011), p. 179. While Toussulis quotes from the following work: Leonard Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Mahmud Shabistari* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1995), we would like it to be known that to the best of our knowledge there is nothing noted within its pages that contradicts the Traditionalist perspective, in fact if anything it verifies it. See also Leonard Lewisohn, “Sufism in the Thought of S.H. Nasr” in *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, eds. Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier and Lucian W. Stone, Jr. (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2001), pp. 669-678.

psychology, science, art, architecture and so on. One Traditionalist has defined it as follows:

Tradition is the continuity of Revelation: an uninterrupted transmission, through innumerable generations, of the spiritual and cosmological principles, sciences, and laws resulting from a revealed religion: nothing is neglected, from the establishment of social orders and codes of conduct to the canons regulating the arts and architecture, ornamentation and dress; it includes the mathematical, physical, medical, and psychological sciences, encompassing moreover those deriving from celestial movements. What contrasts it totally with our modern learning, which is a closed system materially, is its reference of all things back to superior planes of being, and eventually to ultimate Principles; considerations entirely unknown to modern man.<sup>22</sup>

Quite contrary to the author's mistaken assertion, Tradition is not an invention of modernism as this would delegitimize its very *raison d'être*; while Tradition as such became known in the context of the modern world through its contemporary exponents, it is not a modern innovation. Tradition originated *in divinis*, which is to say, it is non-human or supra-individual and is not a derivative of human imagination or thought.<sup>23</sup> The usage of the term Tradition with a capital "T" speaks to pure or uncoloured Truth in its universal context, also known as the Primordial Tradition or the "transcendent unity of religions", whereas the lower case "t" addresses a specific tradition such as Hinduism or Buddhism.<sup>24</sup> Although the author emphasizes the differences within the Traditionalist perspective, these so-called differences are not on the level of doctrinal metaphysics but on their application and are therefore secondary and not primary.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Whitall N. Perry, "The Revival of Interest in Tradition" in *The Unanimous Tradition: Essays on the Essential Unity of All Religions*, ed. Ranjit Fernando (Colombo: The Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies, 1999), p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> René Guénon, "Eastern Metaphysics" in *Studies in Hinduism*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), p. 100.

<sup>24</sup> See René Guénon, "What is Meant by Tradition" in *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, trans. Marco Pallis (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp. 54-57; Marco Pallis, "Preface" to *The Way and the Mountain* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), pp. xxvii-xxviii; Lord Northbourne, "Religion and Tradition" in *Religion in the Modern World*, ed. Christopher James 5th Lord Northbourne (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp. 3-11; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "What is Tradition?" in *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), pp. 65-92; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Recovery of the Sacred: Tradition and Perennialism in the Contemporary World", *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 19 (Summer 2007), pp. 15-37; M. Ali Lakhani, "What is 'Tradition?'" in *The Timeless Relevance of Traditional Wisdom* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010), pp. 3-4.

<sup>25</sup> See Patrick Laude, "Seyyed Hossein Nasr in the Context of the Perennialist School" in *Beacon of Knowledge: Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. Mohammad H. Faghfoory (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2003), pp. 245-260.

Lastly, “Traditionalism” is not a “new religion” or a “meta-religion” as Toussulis mistakenly puts forward; in fact the Traditionalists themselves are the first to acknowledge the dangers in this false assumption.<sup>26</sup>

### **What is Orthodoxy?**

The interdependence of Tradition and orthodoxy is apparent in the following declaration: “There is no possibility of tradition without orthodoxy nor of orthodoxy outside of tradition.”<sup>27</sup> Contrary to its pejorative connotations, often based on blind conformity or even extremist views, the term orthodoxy has its etymological roots in the Greek *orthodoxia*, which is a combination of two words *orthos* or “right” and *doxa* or “belief”. Orthodoxy is far from being narrow-minded; it offers the sole criteria in the discernment of authentic spiritual forms from their counterfeits. We might quote from Rūmī who to the surprise of many speaks of orthodoxy and is far from ever being accused of being narrow-minded: “The (right) thought is that which opens a way: the (right) way is that on which a (spiritual) king advances”<sup>28</sup> The Traditionalist use of this term not only applies to the formal or outward aspects of orthodoxy but their metaphysical and inner significance.<sup>29</sup> Regardless, the author’s notions of Traditionalist “neo-orthodoxy” has nothing to do with traditional orthodoxy as this designation of “neo” would *a priori* disqualify it from being both orthodox and traditional.

As regards Toussulis’ own view of orthodoxy, he informs us in his response to our review that “My answer would be fully in accord with

<sup>26</sup> See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Recovery of the Sacred: Tradition and Perennialism in the Contemporary World”, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 19 (Summer 2007), pp. 15-37; Clinton Minnar, “Introduction” to *The Underlying Religion: An Introduction to the Perennial Philosophy*, eds. Martin Lings and Clinton Minnar (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), pp. xii-xiii; René Guénon, “Eastern Metaphysics” in *Studies in Hinduism*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp. 86-102.

<sup>27</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “What is Tradition?” in *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> William C. Chittick, “Knowledge and Method” in *The Sufi Doctrine of Rami: Illustrated Edition* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005), p. 88; The following is another poetic articulation of Rūmī’s orthodoxy: “Alter yourself, not the Traditions: abuse your (dull) brain, not the rose-garden (the true sense which you cannot apprehend)” [William C. Chittick, “Knowledge and Method” in *The Sufi Doctrine of Rami: Illustrated Edition* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005), p. 89]

<sup>29</sup> William Stoddart, “What is Orthodoxy?” in *Remembering in a World of Forgetting: Thoughts on Tradition and Postmodernism*, eds. Mateus Soares de Azevedo and Alberto Vasconcellos Queiroz (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), pp. 43-44.



William C. Chittick”.<sup>30</sup> We can briefly state that Professor Chittick is closely affiliated with the Traditionalist school if not a Traditionalist himself.<sup>31</sup> Professor Chittick discusses orthodoxy in a manner that is synonymous with the Traditionalist perspective:

Sufism, in spite of its constant emphasis upon “breaking forms,” stresses the importance of orthodoxy: only if a doctrine or method is orthodox, or in other words, only if on its own level it is an adequate reflection of truth, can it lead to the Truth. For someone to

<sup>30</sup> See “Interview with Ustadh Chittick”, *Traditional Studies Forum: Tradition, Religion, and Modernity*, available online at: <http://traditionalstudies.freeforums.org/sacred-web-journal-t204.html>, posted on 09/22/2010.

<sup>31</sup> “In short, without the help of the traditional school, it is extremely difficult for a Westerner to understand what Islam [or any other religious tradition] is all about. And those few Westerners who do find authentic Islam in all three dimensions [*islam* or practice, *imān* or faith and understanding, and *ihṣān* or “living in both inner and outer harmony with God”]—for example, by spending years in a Muslim country—are, in a way, simply discovering ‘traditional Islam,’ the Islam that the traditional school has described as authentic and full Islam.” [See “Interview with Ustadh Chittick”, *Traditional Studies Forum: Tradition, Religion, and Modernity*, available online at: <http://traditionalstudies.freeforums.org/sacred-web-journal-t204.html>, posted on 09/22/2010]. Professor Chittick presented the following lecture, “The Traditional Approach to Learning” at the Sacred Web Conference held at the University of Alberta, in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, on September 23rd and 24th, 2006, and has also contributed essays, introductions, forwards and even edited important Traditionalist’s works, in example see: William C. Chittick, “Foreword” to Titus Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, trans. D.M. Matheson (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), pp. ix-xii; William C. Chittick, “Introduction” to *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. William C. Chittick (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), pp. ix-xiv; William C. Chittick, “A Sufi Approach to Religious Diversity: Ibn al-‘Arabī on the Metaphysics of Revelation” in *Religion of the Heart: Essays Presented to Frithjof Schuon on His Eightieth Birthday*, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and William Stoddart (Washington, DC: Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1991), pp. 50-90; William C. Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Benefit of Knowledge” in *The Essential Sophia*, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Katherine O’Brien (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006), pp. 126-143; William C. Chittick, “On the Cosmology of *Dhikr*” in *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2002), pp. 48-63; William C. Chittick, “Sufism and Islam” in *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*, eds. Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006), pp. 21-32; William C. Chittick, “The Goal of Islamic Philosophy: Reflections on the Works of Afdal al-Din Kashani”, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 5 (Summer 2000), pp. 17-29; William C. Chittick, “The Unseen Men” in *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2009), pp. 75-108; William C. Chittick, “Navigating the Ocean of the Soul”, *Sophia: The Journal of Tradition*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2010); “Nasr’s interpretation of the implications of the Islamic tradition for the contemporary world are firmly grounded in the classical texts, much more so than many of his critics want to acknowledge.” [William C. Chittick, “The Absent Men in Islamic Cosmology” in *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, eds. Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier and Lucian W. Stone, Jr. (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2001), p. 687]

alter the doctrine in terms of his own personal opinion (*ẓann*) is to destroy its value as a symbol and therefore its ability to reflect the Truth.<sup>32</sup>

### **No Esoterism without Exoterism**

While the Traditionalists make use of Meister Eckhart's well-known formula, "If you would have the Kernel, you must break the husk."<sup>33</sup>—it should not therefore be assumed that Traditionalists disregard the outer or exoteric dimensions of spirituality. The Traditionalists do not "privilege" esoterism over exoterism *per se*, rather it is acknowledged that the esoteric or inner dimension illuminates the breadth and depth of the exoteric or outer dimension of religion. In order to understand the inner and outer dimensions of religion it is essential to view them as two complementary facets of both Tradition and orthodoxy: "Authentic esoterism, far from being heterodox, lies at the heart of orthodoxy and orthopraxy ["right practice"] in their most universal sense."<sup>34</sup> Traditional *tasawwuf* or Islamic spirituality, when understood in the light of the perennial philosophy does not disavow the exoteric or outer (*ẓāhir*) observances in favour of the esoteric or inner (*bātin*): "All early mystics are firmly grounded in the *shari'a*, whose rules and commands they took extremely seriously, while at the same time seeking to discover the deeper meaning of the words. For it is the broad road, *shari'a*, from which the narrow path, *tariqa*, the path trod by the chosen few, can branch out, and it is the Koran in which every wisdom can be found."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> William C. Chittick, "Knowledge and Method" in *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi: Illustrated Edition* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005), p. 88; "Sufi teachings are often looked upon as a departure from 'orthodox' Islam, but this view typically rests upon a misuse of the term *orthodox* and an ignorance of the exact contents of the teachings in question. More careful examination suggests that the specifically Sufi explanations of Islamic teachings are not made to subvert the dogma but to support it and to open the way to faith for those individuals who find the unidimensional explanations offered by theologians and jurists intellectually and spiritually stultifying." [William C. Chittick, "Revelation and Reason" in *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), p. 97]

<sup>33</sup> Frithjof Schuon, "The Limitations of Exoterism" in *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1993), p. 32; See also Patrick Laude, "Quintessential Esoterism and the Wisdom of Forms: Reflections on Frithjof Schuon's Intellectual and Spiritual Legacy", *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 20 (Winter 2007), pp. 159-192.

<sup>34</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Spectrum of Islam: Sunnism, Shi'ism, and Sufism and Traditional, Modernist, and 'Fundamentalist' Interpretations of Islam Today" in *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 87.

<sup>35</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, "Mystical Islam and Sufi Brotherhoods" in *Islam: An Introduction* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 109.

While Toussulis takes issue with Traditionalist exegeses, we can defer to exemplary representatives of Tradition such as Ibn ‘Arabī (1165-1240) in Islam, Shankara (788-820) in Hinduism, and Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) in Western Christianity, all of whom adhered to traditional orthodoxy while fulfilling both the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of religion. We might also mention that the inner and outer dimensions of religion speak to two different and unique types of human individuals.<sup>36</sup>

### ***Spirit/Intellect and Faith***

Toussulis writes in his response: “Intellectual conviction is not the same as the Islamic faith of Sufis who commonly support pluralism and who reasonably suspect all forms of intellectual absolutism.” In this regard, it is well to recall the Prophetic tradition: “There are as many paths to God as there are human souls.” This adage appears to be precisely what the author is missing in his outlook since there is a fundamental distinction between Revelation and Intellect.

Revelation and Intellect represent the transcendent and immanent designations of Spirit, one in the macrocosm or what is “above us” and the other in the microcosm or what is “within us”. While the traditional understanding of the Intellect differs from reason, faith has more to do with Intellect than reason. Faith unlike reason pertains to the spiritual domain because it is sufficient in and of itself for salvation. When the *‘Aql* or Intellect is viewed from this perspective it refers to the noetic faculty within the human microcosm, which is the organ of direct perception and certitude which illuminates the Supreme Reality to the

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<sup>36</sup> “As for the Divine discourse (revealed in the Koran and in other sacred books, where God manifests Himself as a Person), it has been revealed in conformity with the understanding of those to whom it is addressed and in conformity with reason, and not according to the ways of intuition. It is for that, moreover, that there are many believers and few who know intuitively.” [Muhyi-d-Din Ibn ‘Arabi, *The Wisdom of the Prophets (Fusus al-Hikam)*, trans. Titus Burckhardt and Angela Culme-Seymour (Gloucestershire, UK: Beshara Publications, 1975), p. 43]; See also Henry Corbin, “The Seven Prophets of Your Being” in *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, trans. Nancy Pearson (New Lebanon, NY: Omega Publications, 1994), p. 122; William C. Chittick, “The Sufi Tradition” in *Sufism: A Beginner’s Guide* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2008), p. 34.

faithful seeker.<sup>37</sup> Although the spiritual domain can be directly intuited by the Intellect it does not allude to any “intellectual absolute” as this would be a contradiction in terms or a good example of the author’s own “tautological thinking”.

### ***Syncretism versus Synthesis***

While the topic of syncretism is complex and requires a significant amount of elaboration we can only affirm that no tradition can *de facto* be the product of assimilating heterogeneous fragments to produce an integral spirituality, for obvious reasons—as the whole is not equal to the sum of its parts—the whole is infinitely greater and cannot be created nor updated by human efforts. To reduce Tradition to the sum of its parts is to disavow the very meaning and purpose of Divine Revelation and Its ability to reveal Truth to the diversity of human individuals.<sup>38</sup> “[I]t is one thing to manufacture a doctrine by assembling scattered ideas as best one can and quite another to recognize, on the basis of

<sup>37</sup> “If ‘no man cometh unto the Father but by Me’, this truth or this principle is equally applicable to the pure Intellect in ourselves: in the sapiential order—and it is only in this order that we may speak of Intellect or intellectuality without making implacable reservations—it is essential to submit all the powers of the soul to the pure Spirit, which is identified, but in a supra-formal and ontological manner, with the fundamental dogma of the Revelation and thereby with the *Sophia Perennis*.” [Frithjof Schuon, “Concerning the phenomenon of Muhammad” in *Dimensions of Islam*, trans. Peter N. Townsend (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), p. 76]; See also Frithjof Schuon, “Orthodoxy and Intellectuality” in *Language of the Self* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1999), pp. 1-18; Frithjof Schuon, “Orthodoxy and Intellectuality” in *Stations of Wisdom* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1995), pp. 1-42; M. Ali Lakhani, “Editorial: On Faith and Intellect”, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 10 (Winter 2002), pp. 9-11.

<sup>38</sup> See René Guénon, “Synthesis and Syncretism” in *Perspectives on Initiation*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp. 38, 41; See also Charles Upton, “Letters to the Editor: On Syncretism”, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 9 (Summer 2002), pp. 147-151; Alvin Moore, Jr., “Letters to the Editor: On Syncretism”, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 9 (Summer 2002), pp. 151-154; Frithjof Schuon, “The Universality and Timeliness of Monasticism” in *Light on the Ancient Worlds: A New Translation with Selected Letters*, trans. Deborah Casey, Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge and James S. Cutsinger, ed. Deborah Casey (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005), p. 104; Frithjof Schuon, “The Ambiguity of Exoterism” in *In the Face of the Absolute* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1994), p. 29; Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude, “Religio Perennis and Syncretism” in *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004), pp. 92-94.

what we willingly call the *Sophia Perennis*, the single Truth contained in various doctrines.”<sup>39</sup>

With regard to Toussulis’ insistence that Sufism is syncretistic in origin we will defer to the growing body of literature that does not rest on the Orientalist bias which seeks to find the seeds of Sufism in everything but the Koranic revelations, the hadith and the Sunnah.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Sacred Psychology versus Modern Psychology***

What we were responding to in our review, as the author points out, is to Chapter Ten, “Human Completeness” when he writes: “Truly the purpose of the malamati path is not human perfection or the attainment of the suprahuman, but rather a greater human relatedness, greater transparency, and a deeper relationship with the Divine.”<sup>41</sup> While all seekers in theory aspire to the above description, it nevertheless appears to be lowering the traditional criteria of what it means to be human. To be human in the truest sense is to be in some way Divine; anything less is to dehumanize the human condition. We might recall the Sufi adage: “Man is a little cosmos, and the cosmos is like a big man”<sup>42</sup> which situates the human microcosm *in divinis*, as it is both transcendent and immanent.

<sup>39</sup> Frithjof Schuon, “Introduction” to *Logic and Transcendence: A New Translation with Selected Letters*, trans. Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge and James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2009), p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> See Martin Lings, “The Origins of Sufism” in *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad Al-'Alawi, His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy* (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), pp. 34-47; Éric Geoffroy, “The Fundamentally Koranic Character of Sufism” in *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam*, trans. Roger Gaetani (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010), p. 33; Titus Burckhardt, “At-Tasawwuf” in *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, trans. D.M. Matheson (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), pp. 4-6; Titus Burckhardt, “Sufi Doctrine and Method” in *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*, eds. Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006), pp. 3-4; Martin Lings, “Sufi Answers to Questions on Ultimate Reality” in *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*, eds. Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006), p. 101; René Guénon, “Islamic Esoterism” in *Insights into Islamic Esoterism and Taoism*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), p. 4; René Guénon, “Haqīqa and Sharī'a in Islam” in *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*, eds. Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006), p. 92; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Appendix III: Western Interpreters of the Islamic Tradition: Academic Scholars” in *Islam in the Modern World: Challenged by the West, Threatened by Fundamentalism, Keeping Faith with Tradition* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), pp. 323-360.

<sup>41</sup> Yannis Toussulis, “Human Completeness” in *Sufism and the Way of Blame: Hidden Sources of a Sacred Psychology* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2011), p. 200.

<sup>42</sup> Muhyi-d-Din Ibn 'Arabi, *The Wisdom of the Prophets (Fusus al-Hikam)*, trans. Titus Burckhardt and Angela Culme-Seymour (Gloucestershire, UK: Beshara Publications, 1975), p. 11.

The theomorphic nature of man does not take away from his uniqueness which is reflected in both microcosm and macrocosm: “Divine Uniqueness by virtue of which every being is unique.”<sup>43</sup> Although Toussulis cites many traditional and exemplary representatives of Sufism in this chapter and appears to have many insightful points to make regarding “Human Completeness”, we thought that Toussulis’ passage above was a curious way to conclude the chapter as his description appears to be more congruent with modern psychology, especially its third and fourth “forces” known as humanistic and transpersonal psychology and not the integral psychology of the perennial philosophy.<sup>44</sup> The primacy of the human state is acknowledged by all spiritual traditions; Islamic spirituality is not alone in this confirmation.<sup>45</sup> The author’s usage of the term “psychology” in the subtitle of his book appears to be applied very liberally; it rather references spirituality and not psychology and while each revealed tradition has an implicit sacred psychology this is not elaborated upon in the book.

***Frithjof Schuon: The Islamic Tradition and the Sophia Perennis***

While so-called “reports” have surfaced in the recent years calling into question certain alleged actions of Frithjof Schuon and the Maryamiyya *tariqa*, it needs to be remembered that the practices within a particular Sufi order like other esoteric or spiritual orders, were in all times and places before the advent of modern world reserved for those who were formally initiated into its inner circle and were never “open” *per se* to the public. These rites and practices were inseparably linked to a spiritual teaching and method which were applied to realizing that particular teaching, and were not for general consumption or for the curious.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Muhyi-d-Din Ibn ‘Arabi, *The Wisdom of the Prophets (Fusus al-Hikam)*, trans. Titus Burckhardt and Angela Culme-Seymour (Gloucestershire, UK: Beshara Publications, 1975), p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> Charles Upton, *The Science of the Greater Jihad: Essays in Principal Psychology* (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2011)

<sup>45</sup> See ‘Abd al-Karim al-Jili, “Of Unity (*al-aHadiyyah*)” in *Universal Man*, trans. Titus Burckhardt and Angela Culme-Seymour (Gloucestershire, UK: Beshara Publications, 1983), p. 23; Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, “Humanistic or Transpersonal? *Homo Spiritualis* and the Perennial Philosophy”, *AHP Perspective*, August/September 2010, pp. 7-11.

<sup>46</sup> René Guénon, “The Hatred of Secrecy” in *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, trans. Lord Northbourne (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), pp. 82-88.

While we provided several key references pertaining to the controversial work of Mark J. Sedgwick (b. 1960), Toussulis apparently has not taken the time to analyze them. If he had, it would not have been necessary for us to pursue this issue further in the limited context of this letter, where we do not have space to explore the issue in its fullness.<sup>47</sup> A few points by way of response will therefore have to suffice. First, Sedgwick, to the best of our knowledge, is not in any way affiliated to Schuon's *tariqa*. Second, he to our knowledge has not procured any first hand "reports" other than those provided by Mark Koslow, which are problematic to say the least.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, Sedgwick had originally sought out the Traditionalists, specifically the late Martin Lings (1909-2005) for counsel regarding the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order<sup>49</sup> which he apparently had some affiliation with, yet he mysteriously neglected to include this in his work. Instead, Sedgwick concealed this detail which makes no sense since the book itself was about Traditionalism. In spite of having received counsel from Lings, Sedgwick oddly chose to reach out to those who ostensibly held an ulterior motive for speaking negatively about Schuon and have attempted to discredit him and the *tariqa*. The fact that Toussulis continues to refer to Sedgwick after being provided by us with references to errors in Sedgwick's book, would seem to indicate that he himself is guilty of a "non-prejudicial" stance with regard to the

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<sup>47</sup> Wilson Eliot Poindexter, "Book Review: Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century", *Sophia: The Journal of Traditional Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 156-173.

<sup>48</sup> Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude (eds.), "A Bibliographical Approach" in *Fritjof Schuon: Life and Teachings* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004), p. 51.

<sup>49</sup> In regards to Traditionalist orthodoxy we recommend the following Foreword written for one of the most widespread Sufi orders, the Naqshbandi, who are no less traditional or orthodox in their perspective: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Foreword" to Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *Classical Islam and the Naqshbandi Sufi Tradition* (Washington, DC: Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2004), pp. iii-vi.

Traditionalists and appears to be committing the very error that he has charged us with: heresiology.<sup>50</sup>

The perennial framework is anything but syncretic and although Schuon refers to “esoteric syncretism” it is much closer to synthesis than anything to do with New Age approaches which are admixtures of incongruent fragments, parodies of the integral spiritual traditions. Schuon, like other Traditionalists, has appeared in the closing of this present cycle of time, which is nothing less than the radical encounter of extremes. It is in the context of the *Kali-Yuga* that this immeasurable gift of the *philosophia perennis* comes to life. Schuon’s contacts with Shamanic traditions<sup>51</sup> originating at the inception of the cycle, the offering of spiritual direction to those outside his spiritual path, which not only

<sup>50</sup> See also Mark J. Sedgwick, “European Neo-Sufi Movements in the Inter-War Period” in *Islam in Inter-War Europe*, eds. Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 183-215. It is also worth making known that Sedgwick was curiously chosen to write a Foreword for a work attempting to capture the essence of Guénon’s *opus*, which highlights the numerous paradoxes of of the times, see: Mark J. Sedgwick, “Foreword” to Graham Rooth, *Prophet for a Dark Age: A Companion to the Works of René Guénon* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2008). Another book which Toussulis makes use of needs to also be mentioned as it has received the bulk of its information from the same source as Sedgwick’s work, Ibn al-Rawandi, “Islam in the Modern World: A Secular Perspective” in *Islamic Mysticism: A Secular Perspective* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), pp. 173-196; Likewise we could also mention: Hugh B. Urban, “A Dance of Masks: The Esoteric Ethics of Frithjof Schuon” in *Crossing Boundaries: Essays on the Ethical Status of Mysticism*, eds. G. William Barnard and Jeffrey J. Kripal (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2002), pp. 406-440; Muhammad Salman Raschid, “Philosophia Perennis Universale Imperium”, *Religion*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (April 1983), pp. 155-171; Ziauddin Sardar, “A Man for All Seasons?”, *Impact International*, No. 23 (December 1993), pp. 33-36. While the following citations do not directly reference Sedgwick’s work or Koslov for that matter they nonetheless bear an interesting semblance in their positions: Peter Lamborn Wilson, “‘The Shaykhs Have Two States’: Loose-strung Meditations on the Problems of Sexuality and Authority in Modern Sufism” in *Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1993), pp. 103-119; Andrew Rawlinson, “Frithjof Schuon” in *The Book of Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1997), pp. 517-524.

<sup>51</sup> See Frithjof Schuon, *The Feathered Sun: Plains Indians in Art and Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1990); Frithjof Schuon, “American Indian Shamanism” in *Light on the Ancient Worlds: A New Translation with Selected Letters*, trans. Deborah Casey, Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge and James S. Cutsinger, ed. Deborah Casey (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006), pp. 59-73; Frithjof Schuon, “The Religions of the American Indians” in *The Essential Frithjof Schuon*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005), pp. 183-189; Renaud Fabbri, “Frithjof Schuon and the American Indian Spirit: Interview with Michael Oren Fitzgerald”, *Vincit Omnia Veritas*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2007), pp. 2-22; Harry Oldmeadow, “The Primordial Message of the Plains Indians” in *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010), pp. 170-184; Michael Oren Fitzgerald, *Frithjof Schuon: The Messenger of the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010)



included Christians, but also Buddhists and Hindus, and also sacred nudity, whose reports we are not in a position to confirm, might be said to reflect the inner dimension of the culmination of the temporal cycle.

It is noted that Schuon entered Islam in 1932 while he was working in Paris and was initiated into traditional Sufism the same year in North Africa via the remarkable twentieth century saintly figure of Sheikh Ahmad Al-‘Alawi (1869-1934). It was at Sheikh Ahmad Al-‘Alawi’s insistence that Sheikh Adda Bentounés (1898-1952), who later became his successor, provided the *ijāza* confirming Schuon as a *muqaddam*, all of which is well documented. I defer to others more knowledgeable to speak on these matters for details of how Schuon became a Sheikh.<sup>52</sup>

While others are more qualified to speak to the specifics of Schuon’s interest and relationship regarding the Native American Indians, we can add that he often stated that these interests were personal and not obligatory for those receiving his spiritual guidance or instruction.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> “Many *faqirs* in various Sufi orders who were not designated as *muqaddams* or *khalifabs* later became shaykhs through the Will of Heaven. The history of classical Sufism is replete with such cases, especially in the earlier centuries when various functions prevalent in later Sufism did not as yet exist. In any case the veritable nature of any *shaykh* or *murshid* can only be gauged by the quality of his disciples. A tree is judged by its fruits.” [Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Frithjof Schuon and the Islamic Tradition” in *The Essential Sophia*, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Katherine O’Brien (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006), p. 260]; See also Martin Lings, “How Did I Come to Put First Things First?” in *A Return to the Spirit: Questions and Answers* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2005), pp. 1-16; Harry Oldmeadow, “Frithjof Schuon: A Sage for the Times” in *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010), pp. 3-20; Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude (eds.), “A Bibliographical Approach” in *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004), pp. 5-54.

<sup>53</sup> “[O]ur Indian dancing is not a rite” [Frithjof Schuon quoted in Michael Oren Fitzgerald, “Notes” in *Frithjof Schuon: The Messenger of the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010), p. 216]; “Now, what does it signify for our spiritual order that the Shaykh was solemnly adopted into a tribe of Red Indians and that, at an Indian Day, the priest of the Sun Dance adopted all those present into his clan? What do our Indian Days signify, where everyone dances and in which, once a year, Indian friends participate? First of all: like every religious tradition that has no historical founder and that has not undergone a serious deviation, the tradition of the Red Indians is a branch of the Primordial Tradition, of which, in its essential elements, it conveys the spiritual perfume or the *barakah*; now, a pure esoterism, non-confessional and untainted by theology, the contacts with such a climate or such a *barakah* can have a meaning, without for that being indispensable to the Method. Usefulness is not necessity, any more than an optional character is uselessness; and in virtue of its transcendence, authentic esoterism allows of much more liberty than does exoterism.” [Frithjof Schuon quoted in Michael Oren Fitzgerald, “Notes” in *Frithjof Schuon: Messenger of the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010), p. 217]; See also Michael Oren Fitzgerald, “Frithjof Schuon: Providence without Paradox”, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 8 (Winter 2001), pp. 19-34.

At Toussulis' insistence to further elaborate on the significance of sacred nudity<sup>54</sup> in Schuon's teaching, we might contextualize the presence of sacred nudity within the early foundations of the Islamic tradition:

Originally there was, for both sexes, an alternative to clothes, namely a return to the nakedness of primordial man. This remained a fully approved mode of *ibram* until, in the last few years of the Prophet's life.... [A]s to the traditional alternative, like certain other already mentioned aspects of the precious legacy of the first of the Patriarchs, sacred nudity

<sup>54</sup> "Sacred nudity—which plays an important role not only with the Hindus but also with the American Indians—is based on the analogical correspondence between the “outermost” and the “inmost”: the body is then seen as the “heart exteriorized,” and the heart for its part “absorbs” as it were the bodily projection; “extremes meet.” It is said in India that nudity favors the irradiation of spiritual influences, and also that feminine nudity in particular manifests Lakshmi and consequently has a beneficial effect on the surroundings. In an altogether general way, nudity expresses and virtually actualizes a return to the essence, the origin, the archetype, thus to the celestial state. “And it is for this that, naked, I dance,” as Lalla Yogishvari, the great Kashmiri saint, said after having found the divine Self in her heart. To be sure, in nudity there is a de facto ambiguity because of the passionate nature of humanity; but there is not only the passionate nature, there is also the gift of contemplativity, which can neutralize it, as is precisely the case with “sacred nudity.” Similarly, there is not only the seduction of appearances, there is also the metaphysical transparency of phenomena which permits one to perceive the archetypal essence through the sensory experience. Saint Nonnos, when he beheld Saint Pelagia entering the baptismal pool naked, praised God for having put into human beauty not only an occasion of fall, but also an occasion of rising toward God.” [Deborah Casey, “The Basis of Religion and Metaphysics: An Interview with Frithjof Schuon”, *The Quest*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Summer 1996), p. 77]; “Given the spiritual degeneration of mankind, the highest possible degree of beauty, that of the human body, plays no role in ordinary piety; but this theophany may be a support in esoteric spirituality, as is shown in Hindu and Buddhist sacred art. Nudity means inwardness, essentiality, primordiality and thus universality; clothing signifies social function, and in this framework the sacerdotal function as well. Nudity means glory, radiation of spiritual substance or energy; the body is the form of the essence and thus the essence of the form.” [Frithjof Schuon, “The Art of Dress and Ambience” in *Art from the Sacred to the Profane: East and West*, ed. Catherine Schuon (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), p. 133]; “A remark is necessary here regarding the symbolism of nudity. It is common knowledge that in Hinduism, as in most other ancient religions—and notably also with American Indians—nudity has a sacred connotation. It manifests both the primordial and the universal, and it is not without reason that one speaks of the ‘paradisaal innocence’ which was before the Fall. Again, there is in hieratic nudity a moral meaning as well as an intellectual one: under the first aspect, nudity—of the Hindu goddesses, in particular—expresses the generosity that welcomes and provides, likewise exemplified in the mystical *lactatio* of the Blessed Virgin; and under the second aspect, nudity indicates the esoteric ‘unveilings’, and it is in this sense that one speaks of the ‘naked truth’. And lastly, let us remember that, according to St. Paul: ‘Unto the pure, all things are pure.’” [Barbara Perry quoted in Michael Oren Fitzgerald, “An Artistic Dimension” in *Frithjof Schuon: Messenger of the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010), p. 110; See also Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude, “Metaphysical and Spiritual Aesthetics” in *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004), p. 123; Harry Oldmeadow, “Sacred Nudity” in *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010), pp. 190-192; Frithjof Schuon, “Lallā” in *Songs for a Spiritual Traveler: Selected Poems* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2002), pp. 128-129. Frithjof Schuon, “The Problem of Sexuality” in *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, trans. William Stoddart (London: Perennial Books, 1990), pp. 129-145; Frithjof Schuon, “The Message of the Human Body” in *From the Divine to the Human*, trans. Gustavo Polit and Deborah Lambert (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1982), pp. 87-101.

presupposes a spiritual development which could not be said to characterize more than a very small minority in any one of those three religions which are, in a sense, Abraham's legatees. There could therefore have been no question of Islam's retaining nakedness as the pilgrimal alternative to clothing.<sup>55</sup>

We do not have sufficient information to delve into the details of Toussulis' own Sufi Brotherhood and truthfully it is not for us to comment or speculate upon; rather we must rely on the information he has provided. In reiterating our position, we are not questioning the authenticity of his Sufi order—on the contrary we are supporters of authentic spirituality wherever it may be found—but wish to illustrate certain details which appear to have more in common with modernism than with traditional Islam or Sufism. Regardless of the atrophied mindset of contemporary man which is upheld by the gravity of the masses, it must not be forgotten that the outlook of modernism and postmodernism for that matter are in principle anti-spiritual and are thus antagonistic to Sufism or any other sapiential tradition.

While Toussulis rests his case by assuring us that “one person's ‘synthesis’ is another person's ‘syncretism,’”<sup>56</sup> we would respond by acknowledging that while this might be the case in relative terms, its fundamental meaning shifts if we take its corollary: one person's spirituality is another person's New Age pseudo-spirituality. Taking the author's proposition at face value, it may initially appear harmless or cunning at best, yet its deeper implications give the go-ahead to mix Truth with error which no authentic spiritual tradition would endorse. We will rest our case by concluding with the following passage, an expression of immeasurable wisdom that has nothing to do with egalitarian and individualistic attempts to water down Truth and thus Tradition in its universality, or to further obscure the elephant in the dark: “Perhaps the greatest thing I

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<sup>55</sup> Martin Lings, *Mecca: From Before Genesis Until Now* (Cambridge, UK: Archetype, 2004), pp. 33-34; “In pre-Islamic times, the circumambulation of the Kaaba was probably performed naked, as sacred nudity is well known in ancient religious traditions.” [Annemarie Schimmel, “Sacred Action” in *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), p. 93]

<sup>56</sup> “One might well reflect on the difference between synthesis and syncretism before recommending the latter. Metaphysically syncretism is vanity, for at best it lacks any intrinsic organizing principle and implies nothing more than human fancy. Synthesis implies the simultaneous presence of all constituent elements and is or can be thoroughly metaphysical.” [Alvin Moore, Jr., “Letters to the Editor: On Syncretism”, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 9 (Summer 2002), p. 153]

have learned is never to think for myself”.<sup>57</sup> While “the Spirit bloweth where it listeth” (John 3:8) and we in no way presume to dictate the details of the All-Possibility of Spirit, it is safe to assume that in these uncertain times of the *Kali-Yuga*, the safest way for a seeker to proceed is to bind him or herself to one of the Divinely revealed traditions.

*Samuel Bendeck Sotillos*

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<sup>57</sup> Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, “The Seventieth Birthday Address” in *Coomaraswamy, Vol. 2, Selected Papers: Metaphysics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 434.