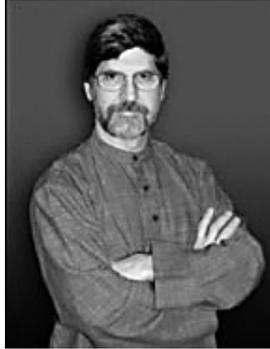


IN MEMORIAM
JAMES S. CUTSINGER
(May 4, 1953 – February 19, 2020)



‘A Serious Seeker and Socratic Teacher’

A gifted and compassionate teacher of the perennial wisdom, Professor Cutsinger possessed a penetrating insight that he brought to bear on issues of faith and modernity, challenging false assumptions prevalent within academia about the nature of man and the limits of knowledge.

He was the author of *The Form of Transformed Vision: Coleridge and the Knowledge of God* (1986) (Owen Barfield, who wrote the book’s foreword, praised Cutsinger’s ‘meticulous, unhurried, superabundantly documented exegesis of what Coleridge thought’); *Advice to the Serious Seeker: Meditations on the Teaching of Frithjof Schuon* (1997) (the book, which has influenced many a ‘serious seeker,’ explored the ideas of Frithjof Schuon and the perennialists); and three anthologies of Schuon’s writings: *The Fullness of God: Frithjof Schuon on Christianity* (2004), *Prayer Fashions Man: Frithjof Schuon on the Spiritual Life* (2005), and *Splendor of the True: A Frithjof Schuon Reader* (2013). Besides editing several of Schuon’s books and letters, he has also edited and produced several anthologies, notably the proceedings of two conferences that he organized [*Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox in Dialogue* (1997) and *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East* (2002)] as well as *Not of This World: A Treasury of Christian Mysticism* (2003).

Lessons from a Socratic Teacher

By Michael S. Allen

My studies with Dr. Cutsinger began at a reading group he hosted in his home some twenty-five years ago. The text was St. Athanasius's *On the Incarnation*, and I still remember the session vividly: we spent close to two hours reading just the first paragraph—with no digressions! I was fortunate to take several classes with him over the next few years, and I owe him a greater debt than I could ever hope to repay. He taught me how to read; he taught me how to write; he taught me how to think. Most importantly, he taught me that true knowledge (as opposed to mere opinion) requires not just an operation of the mind but a commitment of our whole being. As St. Athanasius wrote at the end of *On the Incarnation*: 'One cannot possibly understand the teachings of the saints unless one has a pure mind and is trying to imitate their life' (trans. Lawson).

As I once told Dr. Cutsinger in mock complaint, the only thing he *didn't* teach me was how to teach. Only now that I have become a teacher myself do I realize that what he made seem so effortless is in fact very, very hard. I am not referring to Dr. Cutsinger's lectures, engaging as they were, but to his use of the Socratic method: he was a master at guiding students, gently but rigorously, with logic and often with humor, wherever the argument might lead. He taught us to recognize and question our assumptions, to define our terms, to clarify our thinking, and, not infrequently, to glimpse the Unthinkable. For a long time, I believed it was the Socratic *method* that made my classes with Dr. Cutsinger so valuable; now I see that the Socratic method requires a *Socrates*. I wish I could go back and take one of his classes again—not for the content, but as a master-class in teaching. Unfortunately, my students instead will have to settle for a pale imitation, as well as be contented with the stories I tell them of my mentor, my friend, and my guide, Dr. James Cutsinger, the wisest and best man I know.