

Letters to the Editor

A Reply to José Segura concerning Dualism

José Segura's response (*Sacred Web 4*, 131) to my article on Dualism (*Sacred Web 4*, 111) begins with the assumption that my dualist conception has no traditional credentials, possibly because I did not try to state them. In fact, its theoretical roots are in man's independent possession of a divine principle, and in the *Cogito* argument originally used by St. Augustine. The Cartesian *Cogito* argument was only a revival of this one for different purposes, so we need not doubt its place in tradition.

Segura goes on to discuss the issue of Dualism in a way which passes over the theoretical difference between the contents of tradition and the universal concepts we employ for understanding them. Such a method hides the fact that what we find in Scripture and tradition has to be affected by the concepts we bring to bear on it. Philosophical concepts, like those of Plato or Aristotle, or of Dualism and Monism, logically precede for us everything in the phenomenal world, including revealed religion. If we could not distinguish our first principles from their realms of application, it would be as though we could not distinguish the laws of optics from the particular uses we make of our eyesight. If we ignore this, we will simply philosophize while denying that that is what we are doing.

The greater part of his reply is devoted to providing examples to prove, if proof were needed, that for every duality there is a third entity which in some sense transcends it. This point is heavily emphasized in the apparent belief that the third or transcending entity must always be of so much greater a reality that the duality must fade into insignificance. But why should it? The duality of Man and Woman is transcended by the

larger (and more abstract) category of Humanity, but Humanity is not more real than men and women. Even in cases where the unity actually produces the duality, it is by no means obvious whether the duality exists for the sake of the unity or vice-versa. Dualities seem to be what some unities are designed to produce. Even the Trinity is a system of dual relations, and that should be enough to establish the ultimate reality of such relations. The relation between the soul and God is in effect pre-formed in the relations of the Trinity.

It seems that Segura betrays no doubts as to his religious orthodoxy, and yet Monism inevitably means a massive devaluation of a reality which the orthodox believe to have been created by God. This belongs with a state of mind (that of Guénon?) which has a problem with Redemption, or a redeemed creation, and so will see things only in terms either of absolute Divinity or absolute perdition. In Segura's own words, all that is short of the former must be "destroyed by God with man's cooperation."

His objection that philosophers do not agree is only too similar to the unbeliever's objection, (usually insincere), that religions all contradict one another. In either case the answer is the same: it is points of difference that make all the noise, even when they are unimportant, while the deeper levels of agreement are silent. The claim that I reject mysticism could only be made by those who ignore the distinction between mysticism as such and monistic mysticism.

Even if Monism had all the truth that some people wish to find in it, it would still only amount to a correct description of reality, and not the substantial reality it speaks of. In other words, there would still be a duality. So little is this paradigm a guarantee of traditional orthodoxy that nearly all the main movements of secular thought in modern times have been monistic, whether in rational or non-rational terms. It could well be called "the Modernist ideology." In respect of this concept, at least, Guénon and Schuon were too like most other modern intellectuals, and for this reason we should be selective in the ways in which we follow them. This is why I think the association with systematic Monism weakens the coherence of traditionalism, rather than strengthens it.

Robert Bolton
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Comments on Bolton's Reply

In his reply to our article in *Sacred Web 4*, Robert Bolton expresses his disagreement with some of the corrections we made to his "philosophical dualism." It is in the nature of a debate that disagreement is a given, and therefore we want to make it clear that we take Bolton's objections to our critique as a natural development of an encounter of ideas which in our case happened to be opposed by definition. Bolton argues for his philosophical dualism; we analyze his dualism by the rules pre-defined in the Non-dualistic position of Vedanta and other traditional sources. A positive conception of any encounter of ideas invites us to see it, though, not so much as a conflictive meeting but rather as a dialogue.

It is from this standpoint that we would like to address some of Bolton's objections to our critique. The first, we believe, is founded on a misunderstanding, for he states that our "Segura's response begins with the assumption that (Bolton's) dualist conception has no traditional credentials, possibly because (Bolton) did not try to state them." In our view we were simply limiting our analysis to what Bolton actually stated, since no one can properly respond to a position that is not stated. We did, however, touched upon what Bolton left out of his paper when we remarked that he had "chosen to disregard any traditional authority on which to base his case for dualism," from which we concluded that the sole support for his case was his reason, and secular philosophy (*Sacred Web 4*, 132).

Bolton's second objection is related to the epistemological aspect of our discussion, for he argues that in our critique we passed over "the theoretical difference between the contents of tradition and the universal concepts we employ for understanding them." This however ignores the preliminary remarks of our article in which we declared that—in the Platonic system—traditional knowledge is something which lies in a blurred state within the individual. For traditionalists, the process of retrieving this blurred knowledge begins when one applies one's faith to the task of understanding it. We certainly did emphasize that "mere rational thinking does not facilitate the comprehension of traditional ideas" (*Sacred Web 4*, 132). Why, then, would Bolton state that "what we find in Scripture and tradition has to be affected by the concepts we bring to bear on it"? To be sure, as humans, we all are conditioned, and even preconditioned, to see things in our own particular ways. Yet, apart from that inescapable disposition, we must trust in something higher than

ourselves to grasp the “contents of tradition.”

In his third objection Bolton touches upon one of the most crucial aspects of our topic. In his opinion we have overemphasized the importance we concede to the reality of the “third entity which in some sense transcends” the duality; and to make his point, he argues that Humanity, the third entity posited with respect to the Man/Woman duality, “is not more real than men and women.” We are glad that Bolton himself has afforded us a good example of how difficult a dialogue can be, for it is in his own illustration that Bolton shows that he is not following our traditional exposition of the problem at hand. The problem which, with all due respect, Bolton has with the *crucial* aspect of our topic is that he insists in seeing a definite opposition where—once we go deeper—there is rather apposition or correlation. In the case adduced by him, we can certainly speak of a relative degree of *opposition* in the Man/Woman duality; but can we really say that, metaphysically regarded, this same pair of elements are opposed? Would it not be more correct to declare that in their essential nature they are very much the same—different aspects of the same identity—and that therefore we could view them as having entered a state of *apposition* or, if you will, correlation? As for Humanity, its higher degree of reality is secured when we consider that such a term is to be taken as the archetype of both Man and Woman.

If we could indulge for a moment in this most central issue of our whole discussion, we would suggest that while in this case Bolton has perhaps inadvertently confused opposition with apposition, in the matter of his general conception of dualism he has engaged his argument in a wider net of confusion. His confusion is clear: he takes a series of pairs, such as God and man, and proceeds to thinking that because there are reasons to view them as opposed there is none at all to regard them as correlated. In manifestations of any kind there are units which can also be multi-faceted realities. If we take the human realm, for instance, we observe that if humanity’s physical and worldly nature is opposed to God, is it not equally true that a redeemed humanity is God-like? It is a matter, then, of making distinctions: what is our real notion of Man? what kind of dualism are we talking about, and at what level does it really exist? We may remember that in *Genesis 3: 5* we are told that: “God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

In point of fact, Bolton's fourth objection brings us to the need of making distinctions, for he charges now that traditionalists have "a problem with Redemption, or a redeemed creation." Bolton believes that we maintain that "all that is short of the former ["absolute Divinity"] must be destroyed by God with man's cooperation." He seems to understand that we have in mind the destruction of the physical creation. The reader will find that what we are saying (in *Sacred Web 4*, 139) is that, in relation to "rebirth," the individual is to undertake the destruction of his impure soul and body, a destruction which is possible by a cooperation between man and God.

These, in our opinion, are important distinctions which, together with our previous suggestions, we deemed it opportune to bring to Bolton's attention in the spirit of a dialogue where ideas are enriched by their positive opposition.

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A Rejoinder to Lynn Bauman

Lynn Bauman's Response to my article "Towards a Deeper Ecumenism" (*Sacred Web 4*, 77) is much appreciated. The Editor is to be thanked for permitting such an exchange to take place. However, a response to the Response is called for, if only to place several important aspects of the debate in sharper relief.

First, it would be a serious distortion of my position to say (as Lynn Bauman seems to do) that I hold as a "core premise" that non-Christians (let alone non-Catholics) cannot be saved. Not only am I well aware that this is a Catholic heresy, but I explicitly state the exact opposite in my Conclusion: "Certainly Love—the Holy Spirit—is omnipresent in the religions, "blowing where it wills", and saving multitudes by making them invisibly a part of the Catholic Church" (*Sacred Web 4*, 93-94). The documents of Vatican II are well known to me, and I accept them happily. I even suggest, with Balthasar, who goes further than the Council, that *all* may be saved. My claim is only that whoever is saved is saved by being incorporated—knowingly or unknowingly—into the Catholic Church. Salvation, to me, *means* incorporation within the life of the Trinity through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Son and makes

us “sons in the Son”. The Church is the extension of the Incarnation, even if its visible structure is only the tip of the iceberg (or, to use another metaphor, the “bones” of a supernatural organism whose “flesh” includes every person of good will).

Bauman quotes Schuon as saying that “The Redemption is an eternal act that cannot be situated in either time or space...” This is precisely the point: for the genuine Christian tradition, esoteric *or* exoteric, the Redemption is precisely an event situated in time and space. It is the eternal Act of the Trinity which is beyond time and space, and while the Redemption as a divine act of self-giving love participates in this eternal sacrifice, its own temporal reality is none the less for that. If there had been no *temporal* act of Redemption, there would have been no salvation of anything temporal, no salvation of human personality in particular. There would, of course, have been many *images and reflections* of eternal love on the earth; but these would have been destined to melt away in the great Return. Lacking would have been the one thing that makes possible the eternal salvation of individually distinct human persons, the Resurrection of the Body and the existence of the Church in the sense defined above.

Bauman appeals to the apophatic tradition of the East, but in fact Aquinas is as clear as Dionysius (on whom he relies throughout the *Summa* more than he does on Aristotle) concerning the ultimate unknowability of God. “Neither Christian nor pagan grasps the meaning of what God is in himself.” The justification for speaking of God in the way that we do is that the Son has made him known. Our concepts cannot grasp God; but we have the Word that does describe him, for he has spoken this himself. It is a sacramental Word, a Word that contains the truth without limiting it. My impression is that Balthasar rejects the Palamite distinction of the divine Essence and Energies (as he rejected the Eckhartian distinction between God and Godhead) because he saw that it undermines the sacramentality of the Word almost in the way Kant was to do in the West, with his distinction between the phenomena and the inaccessible *noumenon*. There is no need to preserve the unknowability of God in this way once we realize that in giving himself to the world in Christ, without restraint or reservation (total self-giving love), God remains both infinite and unknowable to anyone but himself. It is by participating in him—deification by grace—that we come to

“know even as we are known”.

My article attempted to show that Balthasar—though no doubt limited in his own way—is not only a more powerful metaphysician, but also a more interesting and helpful guide to the mind of the Church than Rahner, whom Bauman quotes so approvingly, for the very reason that Rahner (who was, after all, a very modern thinker) seems to have had a much less secure grasp of the essential distinctiveness of Christianity. Balthasar had immersed himself in the writings of Plotinus, of Dionysius, of Gregory of Nyssa and of Maximus: you cannot accuse him of not appreciating or understanding the Eastern Fathers. Among more recent theologians it is worth noting that he is particularly impressed by Vladimir Solovyov (whom he sets against Teilhard) and Sergii Bulgakov (from whom he takes much of his theology of the Trinity). Traditionalist thinkers should also observe the extremely interesting relationship between Balthasar’s work and that of the visionary Adrienne von Speyr, which I did not have time to touch upon in my article. Here was a partnership surely made in heaven for the renewal of the Church. Von Speyr’s writings are extraordinary: just her commentary on the “153 fishes” of the Gospel and the mystical numerology that underlies this story is worthy of careful study. (A place to start might be the book Balthasar wrote about her called *First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr*, published by Ignatius Press.)

In short, I remain convinced, even after reading Bauman, that the breadth and balance of the tradition is more evident in Maximus Confessor than Gregory Palamas, in Ruysbroeck than Eckhart, and in Balthasar than Rahner (but God knows best). It seems to me that there is great truth in the writings of Schuon and those associated with him. It was they who started me on my quest for a tradition I could call my own, and led to my conversion to Christianity, so that I owe them an immeasurable debt. Many other Catholics I know are beginning to consider these writings with interest, and the time may be ripe for a renaissance of Catholic intellectuality. But the issues I tried to raise in my article will not go away, and need to be faced and discussed at a high level. Balthasar has had an enormous influence on Pope John Paul II and the whole generation of bishops appointed by him. Anyone who is interested in fostering the redressment would be well advised to try to understand his work, if only to show where it falls short of the truth. In this way they

would receive much more serious attention in Catholic circles. Once again, I do appreciate the opportunity to bring this point of view to the attention of your readers.

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Debating the Status of the Christian Trinity

Sacred Web has done a great service in publishing “A Debate on the Primacy of Theology and Metaphysics” (*Sacred Web* 4, 77-110). The participants, Stratford Caldecott and Lynn C. Bauman, rightly remark on the importance of a dialogue between the “traditionalist school of metaphysics” and orthodox Christianity. I wish to consider only one of the debated issues: is the Christian Trinity to be identified with the Absolute as Caldecott avers (pp.85-6) or is it to be construed as the first procession out of the Absolute as Bauman claims (pp.104-107)? If Caldecott is correct, then orthodox Christianity cannot accept traditionalist metaphysics; if Bauman is correct, then the Trinity presents no barriers to the acceptance of traditionalist metaphysics by orthodox Christians. A review of Christian doctrine shows that the *prima facie* case is clearly on Caldecott’s side. What does Bauman offer on the opposing side?

Bauman provides quotations from St. John Damascene, St. Gregory Palamas, and Nicholas of Cusa in support of the distinction between cataphatic theology and apophatic theology. Cataphatic theology deals with that which is relative, “the essence or nature of God (*ousia, phusis*); apophatic theology deals with (as much as it can be dealt with at all) that which is absolute, “the unknowable, absolutely inaccessible Divine Reality” (p.104; see also the subsection entitled “Theological Contingency,” pp. 101-104). Bauman then provides several quotations from the important twentieth-century Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, passages in which Rahner affirms that the truth of the Trinity is accessible only through the self-communication of God. This is the evidence that Bauman marshals for his claim that “many traditional theologians disagree [with Caldecott’s position], and have made a strong case” that the Trinity should “be understood (along with all other dogmas) under the aegis of cataphatic theology, and therefore, it too, [is] an approximation of unknowable Reality transcendent to itself” (p.104). But for the

inference from his evidence to this claim to be valid, Bauman must employ an assumption that he never makes explicit: i.e., *if* there is a distinction between apophatic theology and cataphatic theology, *then* the Trinity falls on the side of cataphatic theology and thus pertains to what is relative rather than to the Absolute. Is this assumption correct? No, it is not, as we can see from this passage written by Fr. John Meyendorff, one of the preeminent Orthodox scholars of the twentieth century:

Greek patristic thought, and particularly that of the Cappadocians, always presupposed the starting point of apophatic theology: that God's being and, consequently, the ultimate meaning of hypostatic relations were understood to be totally above comprehension, definition, or argument. The very notion of God's being both Unity and Trinity was a *revelation* illustrating this incomprehensibility; for no reality accessible to the mind could be both "one" and "three." As Vladimir Lossky puts it: "the Incomprehensible reveals Himself in the very fact of His being incomprehensible, for His incomprehensibility is rooted in the fact that God is not only Nature but also Three Persons." (Emphasis in original, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1979, p. 184-185. For a Catholic affirmation that the Trinity pertains to apophatic theology see Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Many Religions-One Covenant*, p. 108).

Thus the distinction between cataphatic and apophatic is accepted by the great Eastern Fathers. However, *contra* Bauman, these Fathers affirm that the revealed truth of the Trinity must be put on the apophatic side; for them, the Trinity is not merely a relative truth, but a truth concerning the Absolute. And so it is for all orthodox Christians.

Why does traditionalist metaphysics reject the idea that the Christian Trinity pertains to the Absolute? The rejection of Frithjof Schuon, perhaps the preeminent of the twentieth century traditionalists, is based on his acceptance of the principle that the Absolute excludes any multiplicity, such as the three Persons of the Trinity (see *Logic and Transcendence*, p. 107). The orthodox Christian will surely admit that this "principle" reflects some metaphysical insight, i.e., the insight that God is one, just as it reflects the fact that we experience the world around us as a unified whole, i.e., as a universe and cosmos. But to claim that this is an ultimate metaphysical principle is to elevate what is relative to an absolute status. From the Christian perspective, this is what one might call a "natural" mistake. For the Christian tradition claims that careful human

reflection on the nature of reality comes to the conclusion that there is one God (*Romans* 1:19-20; also see the discussion of this issue in sections 31-38 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*). But the weight of the Christian tradition also affirms that humans unassisted by divine revelation *cannot* come to realize the truth that God is Three persons as well as one God. As Meyendorff in the passage above said: “The very notion of God’s being both Unity and Trinity was a *revelation*.” In sum, Schuon errs in his argument against the absolute status of the Christian Trinity because he mistakenly elevates a partial metaphysical insight to the status of an absolute principle.

I suspect few traditionalist metaphysicians will be convinced by the above remarks. Indeed, they probably will assert that the principle on which Schuon relies is a deliverance of the uncreated Intellect, the ultimate source of supernatural knowledge and metaphysical principles (see Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, 55-60). Perhaps the next step in a dialogue between traditionalist metaphysicians and orthodox Christians will focus on the central issue of the sources of metaphysical knowledge.

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Bauman Responds

I am honored by the considered responses to the debate between Stratford Caldecott and myself expressed first in his reply to my article and in the response of others. At the outset let me say with Caldecott that I want to acknowledge my personal debt of gratitude to such authors and theologians as von Balthasar, Lossky, Meyendorf (and many others who have been mentioned in previous forms of this discussion). Their efforts to understand the entire Christian tradition, to recover its fruits from the past, and to gain metaphysical ground, as well as their dedication to a clearer, more comprehensive communication of Christian truth has been considerable and undeniable. A searching discussion which includes these gifted individuals in this debate, but which critiques their perspectives according to traditionalist criteria, does not deny or denigrate their contribution, though it may disagree with any number of their conclusions.

What is entirely clear from Caldecott's response (and the response of others) is that there are multiple viewpoints within the larger orthodoxy of Christianity which differ on these and many other issues. Caldecott expresses well one particular perspective in regard to Christian Trinitarian doctrine and understands it to be the only perspective possible (as do others who have responded to this debate). As I believe I have demonstrated, a strong case can be made that other viewpoints alongside the one represented by Caldecott exist within the Christian tradition and have been present as legitimate positions throughout its history, demonstrating that orthodoxy is not (and need not be) a monolithic structure in every instance.

However, I do not believe that it is possible to resolve these issues satisfactorily in the forum of *Sacred Web*, which is devoted to the communication of traditionalist metaphysics in the contemporary world. Frankly, this journal is not the place for members of one particular tradition to carry out a protracted debate at the expense of other issues, as worthy as these topics may be. Nevertheless, to bring a degree of closure to this important discussion, let me offer the following considerations.

In his initial article as well as in his subsequent response, Caldecott and others raise important challenges that go straight to the heart of this journal and all traditionalist teachings whose purpose is to shape and express a comprehensive metaphysic that will stand up to the harsh climate of the modern world. Ours is a struggle in which we must deal with the complexities of a modern civilization that has forced a theological re-evaluation of our traditional stances towards other faiths. If truth is one, then in some fundamental way we must express a coherent theory of truth that does not do violence or injustice to the truths of the respective traditions, but discovers precisely where that coherence lies.

Again the challenge raised by Caldecott is whether or not it is possible to hold to an expression of truth in such a way that honors each tradition and yet expounds a vision of the integrity of all traditions without destroying or denigrating their orthodoxy. Certainly traditionalist metaphysics can be a challenge to certain aspects of the Christian tradition (as has been ably demonstrated by Caldecott), but it need not prevent Christian men and women who hold orthodox positions and honor their centrality, from recognizing the wider cosmological perspectives of the traditionalists. It is precisely the viewpoint of traditionalist metaphysics that provides

support both for orthodoxy as well as for the possibility of multiple religious traditions. This support is based upon a cosmology that is missing today from most modern Christian theologies. Because it is able to step outside the closed hermeneutical circle of any one sacred tradition, it is able to explain coherently the truth of multiple religious traditions.

Ours is a search to find a way of conserving the treasury held in trust for us by the sacred orthodoxies while at the same time, recognizing that some of their “formulations” may indeed be limiting precisely because they veil us from seeing the possibility of the whole. This may mean that there is indeed a need for mental or theological adjustment to that possibility due to greater metaphysical demands – a need, in other words, for metaphysical transparency. As representatives of the various traditions we might ask ourselves, could we have been wrong (or mistaken) about a particular aspect of orthodoxy, or its expression? If the answer is “yes,” then in humility we need to re-evaluate the way in which we present our various orthodoxies, and not insist on the superiority of one position over all others. Nor must we demand that one viewpoint within an orthodoxy “win out” when the paradox and ambiguity of multiple manifestations of reality are, in fact, a part of the original understanding. Within Christianity the post-Reformation tendency to reduce all ambiguities to a single, monolithic form has become the norm, which, I believe, has left us vulnerable, rigid, and bereft of possible growth where we need it most. (Growth, here however, does not mean “innovation,” but “originality,” in its etymological sense of a reconnection with our Origin.)

For those of us who are representatives of a sacred orthodoxy, but who are also interested in and supportive of traditionalist metaphysics, the desire is not so much to win arguments by resorting to polemics, but rather to discern how the first principles of metaphysics work vis-à-vis the highest standards of each sacred tradition, and to support one another in that position. Indeed, one of the gifts of the traditionalist’s perspective is its ability to bring to this discussion a fraternal spirit that offers seekers from each tradition a form of companionship and support in a world which devalues the sacred. It is a spirit that has been absent far too long.

Without recapitulating the entire discussion, in summary then, and as clearly as possible, let me outline the traditionalist perspective as it has come to be expressed by Schuon and others. The purpose here is to

demonstrate metaphysical coherence. First, grounded in the patristic understanding of *apophasis*, the divine Reality is ultimately a mysterious abyss of infinite proportion, and nothing that can be said in human language (even by divine revelation) will ultimately plumb that depth. St. Maximus the Confessor in the *Ambigua* (Patrologia Graeca 91, 1224) says for example, “The infinite is without doubt something of God, but not God himself, who is infinitely beyond even that.” Gregory of Nyssa in the *Life of Moses* (Patrologia Graeca 44, 377) says, “Every concept formed by the intellect in an attempt to comprehend and circumscribe the divine nature can succeed only in fashioning an idol, not in making God known.”

Nevertheless, the essential concept of traditionalist metaphysics is to provide a way of seeing the various orthodox (and seemingly contradictory) religious expressions in a more comprehensive and coherent way. Each is a distinctive ray of divine illumination that, in its own unique fashion, not only brings understanding, but more importantly provides humanity with a safe means of making the journey of return to the one Source. Both traditional and traditionalist metaphysics, therefore, engage in transmitting a cosmological and metaphysical vision which can contextualize and support the orthodoxies of the various sacred traditions within a larger whole without stigmatizing one position against another.

The means of doing this is to consider individual doctrines within a larger metaphysical context concerning the infinite and divine Mystery that can be told. If it is possible to conceive of the divine Reality as an inner unfolding of itself, then God who is infinite mind and self-understanding, may be considered first to see or know “Himself” as One in “His” own central all-sufficiency beyond distinction or expression. Next, God knows “Himself” “in distinction” as “essential” Reality which indeed reflects ternary and trinitarian delineations understood by many traditions, not just in Christianity. For example Vedantic Hinduism expresses the ternary in one formulation as *sat, chit, ananda*. In Islam, Unity itself is understood in a manifold way as *sirr, dbat, sifāt* or *abiddiyah, wahdat* and *wahiddiyah*. Judaism knows divine distinction under the aspects of *Ein Sof, YHVH*, and *Shekinah*. In Christianity God knows “Himself” in the “Son,” who is “His” Express Image and eternally generated wisdom. Next in the unfolding, God sees or knows all-possibility and all-possible beings in their Ideal Forms through the eternal

Logos (God as generated—in Vedantic terms, “*maya*”) as if in an infinite and omni-form mirror which may be called the “Ideal Wisdom” or the “Ideal World.” Yet, all that been said here is not anything other than or distinct from God. Metaphysically it is considered to be the essential self-understanding of divinity.

From a metaphysical perspective, the Trinity, then, may be understood to be God as an eternal opening, a self-disclosure of the infinite and eternal Abyss of perfection contained in divine unity who eternally wills, lives and delights in “Himself.” This trinitarian reality eternally exists in the depths of “divine being” as a “super-structure” of Ultimate Reality-in-relationship (what Schuon refers to as “*maya in divinis*”). When it manifests it is distinctively expressed in Christian trinitarian doctrine as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Such an understanding acknowledges Caldecott’s orthodox criteria for recognizing Trinity as deep within the God-head, yet it also recognizes that the relative-Absolute expression of that Reality is a disclosure of the Infinite which both reveals and at the same moment conceals other realities and possibilities (as do other relative-Absolute expressions at the same level such as the doctrine of the divine Unity). Not everything is expressed therefore by any one revelation. They all remain contingent in relationship to Ultimate Reality itself.

Furthermore, this metaphysical understanding allows for different theological possibilities to exist side-by-side, not only when traditions meet and interact, but also within traditions themselves, such as in the Johannine expression that the Logos was both “God,” and “with God” (John 1:1-2). Something is being expressed here at the heart of Christianity that is at once rationally paradoxical but also metaphysically signifying a distinction *in divinis*. Its cogency can be clarified by the metaphysical understanding of traditionalists which I have outlined. It is my conviction that this perspective can be of immense value to any contemporary orthodox believer inside and outside the Christian tradition, as well as provide a context for fruitful conversation with modernity.

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Response to William W. Quinn, Jr.

Thanks, apologies, and a word of explanation are in order: thanks to *Sacred Web* Editor, M. Ali Lakhani, for the opportunity to respond to Mr. Quinn and to delineate more precisely the abyss separating our perspectives; and apologies to those readers who may think this discussion has become too protracted—in their consideration we shall try to be as brief as possible. And a word of explanation: we have no wish to debate Mr. Quinn nor to score easy victories; but our position is immeasurably stronger, for our side is that of Truth and it is our duty to affirm the True, along with the Good and the Beautiful, “in season, out of season,” for their own sake and for the benefit of the innocent and the unwary.

Mr. Quinn argues that our criticisms of his book, *The Only Tradition*, and of certain of his essays ¹ are compromised because, he says, these criticisms are *ad hominem* in character. Not so: they can be considered *ad hominem* only in the degree that Mr. Quinn chooses to identify himself with the errors discussed. Let us note in passing that Mr. Quinn himself argues *ad hominem* even while assuring his readers that he intends to do no such thing.

A more fundamental issue between Mr. Quinn and traditionalists (among whom I count myself) is whether or not one adheres to one of the orthodox, Heaven-initiated Traditions; and whether or not one accepts the fundamental data of the Revelation from which the Tradition originates (remembering always that it is the Tradition that chooses the man, not man the Tradition). It is not good form to hurl emotional epithets in lieu of cogent argument. And it is disingenuous to trot out the bogey of “traditionalist fundamentalism” when it is a question only of simple disagreement. It is not “traditionalist fundamentalism” at least in any pejorative sense, to deal as objectively and honestly as possible when the given data of a Tradition, and to respect the integrity of these data. The real fundamentalists, whether of the left or of the right, are those who restrict themselves to literal meanings—as if traditional teaching could be understood in the univocal manner one understands a technical manual.

In the present essay, “The Polemics of Parousia...,” Mr. Quinn makes a

1. Those in *Sacred Web*, numbers 3 and 5, respectively, “Slouching Towards Bethelhem: Notes on the First Days After the End of the Kaliyuga” and “The Polemics of Parousia: Further Notes on the First Days After the End of the Kaliyuga.”

number of insupportable statements, one of these being that Rene Guénon led a *tariqab*. As a matter of record, he did not; indeed, he counted it one of his blessings that he had no disciples in the sense that a shaikh has *fuqara* or that a *guru* has *chellas*. Guénon's vocation lay elsewhere: a pioneering voice sent by Heaven to a decadent West, an *Athanasius contra mundum*. Of course, a factual error is not in itself decisive; but as this particular point is so widely known it makes one wonder just how familiar Mr. Quinn really is with this man or with Ananda Coomaraswamy—both of whom he tries to appropriate.

On the same page, Mr. Quinn speaks in polemical vein of “necrotic Traditions, of lifeless ecclesiastical forms” and of “a spiritually intellectual (sic) xenophobia that leads to an exclusivity...of the worst type.” He implies that there are other routes to spiritual realization than those established by Heaven, one of these being Theosophy, or perhaps the so-called “theosophical movement,” for Mr. Quinn carries much Theosophical baggage. But in the real world, where there actually *are* possibilities of spiritual realization, there is this to keep in mind: “No man comes to the Father but by Me,” and “I am the door: by Me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and he shall go in and out and find pasture.” *Mutatis mutandis*, this is true in every traditional ambience; or, effecting a metaphysical transposition: no one can come to metaphysical realization apart from the Logos nor without the aid and favor of the Logos. In effect, this means going through a human manifestation of the Logos as proffered by Heaven in an orthodox Tradition. The man (or woman, obviously) who realizes his Archetype in the Logos (the doctrine of *exemplarism* is fully implicit) becomes a Comprehensor, a Mover-at-Will, knowing all there is to be known. This is the secret of Dante and Beatrice, for Beatrice was the poetic representation of Dante's archetype *in divinis*.

There is no way to achieve spiritual realization other than through those ways established by Heaven. Leaving aside more sinister possibilities, he who believes otherwise and pursues such beliefs is very likely to move in a direction opposite to that involved in genuine realization, towards a fate described by Guénon as awaiting those who fatally confuse the Upper and the Lower Waters:

Instead of raising themselves to the Ocean above, they plunge into the abyss of the Ocean below; instead of concentrating all their powers so as to direct them towards the formless world, which alone can be called 'spir-

itual', they disperse them in the endlessly changeable and fugitive diversity of the forms of subtle manifestation [which Dante characterized as the "lying waves"]...with no suspicion that they are mistaking for the 'fullness of life' something that is in truth the realm of death and of a dissolution without hope of a return.²

Mr. Quinn says that in the face of a common and ubiquitous enemy, internecine quarrels among traditionalists are "wasteful and stupid." Mr. Quinn's views on the great traditions (in effect, that they are defunct), plus his acceptance of Theosophy (which Guénon characterized as a man-made "pseudo-religion"), place him not in the traditionalist camp but among the enemies of Tradition. This is the fundamental issue between Mr. Quinn and traditionalists, and we can thank him for clarifying his position. Nor is it stupid to defend Tradition against its counterfeits; in these last times attacks can be expected from every quarter. As for the Traditions themselves, no one can doubt that over the course of time they have been diminished and grown sclerotic; but this is in concert with the whole of mankind in this terminal phase of the *kaliyuga*. The founding and perpetuation of the several Traditions, however, is the work of Heaven; and Heaven has laid down the ancient landmarks. The Traditions have yet to run their course and nothing man can do can alter Heaven's fundamental design; not even Theosophy's attempt to put forward a false Messiah, a "Great Instructor," a "World Teacher"—than which a greater hubris would be difficult to imagine. "They plotted and Allah plotted, and lo! Allah is the best of plotters," the Holy Qur'an tells us.

Though he borrows the jargon of eschatology, Mr. Quinn tells us he is really speaking of "culture." He says that men of the new Golden Age will need to live in community, to be governed, to have public institutions—social, economic, religious. In all this he is really speaking neither of the Golden Age nor of "culture," but of a continuing attempt to advance non-traditional ideas in the guise of Tradition. It seems Mr. Quinn is singularly lacking in imagination and in a sense of proportion, for he extrapolates from present experience of the *kaliyuga* to conditions he wrongfully assumes will pertain in the new Golden Age wherein there will be a new humanity: one far less material, less engrossed in the corporeal order, less passionate, more apathetic (in an entirely positive sense), more objective and realist. The new humanity will be governed

2. The Reign of Quantity, pp 289, 290.

directly by the “Light that enlightens every man that comes into this world,” without the need for complex institutional arrangements. Each *yuga* has its appropriate *dharmā*, and the *dharmā* of the new *krytayuga* will be far more intrinsic and interior—something of this is the true meaning of the apparent simplicity of early epochs. Thus in the Golden Age cultural institutions as we presently know them will have no function or place; in Hindu doctrine, for example, the first men to come forth from the hand of Ishvara were *avarṇa*, “without color,” which is to say they were without caste distinctions or functions. Not only will the Uncreated Light be reflected in interpersonal relations, but worship will be in the intimate Presence of this Light in which man will recognize the image of his true identity, his veritable and transcendent Self.

A further citation is appropriate here, from Frithjof Schuon in a study entitled “*Nature et Arguments de la Foi*.”

What Revelation is in regard to ‘a humanity’ [that is, the sector of humanity for which a particular Revelation is destined] intellection will analogically be with regard to an individual, and inversely. If every man possessed Intellect, not only in a fragmentary or virtual state, but as a fully developed faculty, there would be no Revelation, for total intellection would be something natural. But as it has not been thus since the end of the Golden Age, Revelation is not only necessary but even normative as regards particular intellection, or rather as regards its formal expression.³

And this, precisely, is why “culture” in the sense used by Mr. Quinn will be an irrelevance in the new *krytayuga*.

When informed by doctrinal truth, speculation (which does not mean whimsy but rather seeing things objectively, in the light of the transpersonal Intellect) can indeed be a great good; but as in logic, if one starts from false premises all that follows will be false.

In the fourth footnote of his article, Mr. Quinn credits a so-called theosophical movement with providing the “factually accurate historical links of esotericism from H.P. Blavatsky to Coomaraswamy through Annie Besant and to René Guénon through Gerard Encausse and Abdul Hadi.” This is a kind of insinuating statement which a reader might accept reflexively and in dim awareness of its implications because of the way it is presented (in a footnote) and because of difficulties arising from lack of general or contrary information. There are, however, several inflated

assumptions involved which must be noted. First it is implied that there is in fact a unified “theosophical movement.” That each generation has produced spiritual, even realized men is not in dispute; what is disputed is that all these can be considered as forming any kind of undivided unitary “apostolic succession” or *silsilah*, a conception that Mr. Quinn implicitly advances to serve his own ends. It is the conjunction of a specific Tradition, the will of Heaven, and a Providential economia that produces saints and sages. Since the advent of differing Traditions (symbolized in the Judeo-Christian Tradition by the Tower of Babel), the several Traditions have developed largely in isolation from one another, though in these end times there have been tentative and provisional convergences, this resulting from the conditions of the late *kaliyuga*. In short, the claim that there is a unitary “theosophical movement” stretching back down the ages answers neither to the facts nor to the “way things work.” Such a claim can only be advanced in the hope of benefiting a particular agenda.

As for Coomaraswamy receiving his esoterism via H. P. Blavatsky and Annie Besant, and Guénon receiving his via Gerard Encausse and Abdul Hadi/Ivan Aguéli—the claim is too ridiculous to consider seriously. The facts do not support this claim in either case, no do the written works of either author.

Towards the end of “the Polemics of Parousia...,” Mr. Quinn weighs in for the defense of Frithjof Schuon, mentioning especially the passion-driven charges that surfaced in the early nineteen-nineties and also the continuing scurrilous charges on the internet. It all seems a bit inconsequential until one realizes that this defense is not altogether disinterested. Certainly defending someone against any injustice can be a noble endeavour; but it appears that Mr. Quinn seeks to prescind from his defense of Schuon by way of a “big tent perennialism” to an appeal for tolerance towards all who might be called traditionalists, however defined and however doubtful the pedigree. Theosophists, of course, would be included: among them Helena Petrovna Blavatsky whom the London-based Society for Psychical Research characterized as a vulgar adventuress and imposter; and Jiddu Krishnamurti who was to be the false *avatara* but who had the good grace to reject the whole “messiah”

3. Etudes Traditionnelles (Paris), no. 312, p. 348.

project, though he also rejected all religion as well.

The works of William W. Quinn, Jr., which we have touched upon in these remarks are, unfortunately, “distinguishable from the true wisdom.” “Do not be deceived by such reasonings; evil talk corrupts good manners,” said St. Paul. We regret the necessary severity vis-à-vis Mr. Quinn’s writings, but we would be greatly amiss if we did not bear witness for traditional Truth which, for its part, certainly allows for degrees of information and for degrees in expression, but not for duality or ambiguity in intention.

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