

A Wisdom That Transcends All Times and Places

An Introduction to the Perennial Philosophy

SAMUEL BENDECK SOTILLOS

There is a unanimous recognition, encompassing the diverse cultures of the world across time, that the human being is inseparable from the Absolute and that there are many paths to realising this Truth. To be human is to exist in both the horizontal and vertical domains; that is, in time and in what is timeless, both in the physical and metaphysical realms. Yet we require a spiritual path to partake of the Divine and thus realise the full potential of our human condition. A defining symbol that is used to describe the perennial philosophy and the diverse spiritual paths is the *circumference and the centre* of a circle, and correspondingly the *mountain and the summit*.

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Regarding the circumference and the centre, the outer dimensions of the religions are situated along the points of the circumference, while the inner or mystical dimensions of the religions are the radii leading from the circumference to the centre. From this schema, it logically follows that in aligning oneself with an authentic spiritual form, one can by similitude know other traditions and where they converge—as radii travelling from the periphery of the circle to its centre. The centre, being the Ultimate Reality or the Absolute as Truth, is one.

The symbol of the mountain and the summit illustrates the diverse religions and at the same time the ‘transcendent unity of religions’ or ‘paths that lead to the same summit.’ At the bottom or the base of the mountain the distances between the various religions or paths up the mountain appear to be wide and incompatible, yet at the summit there is the unanimity of the One or Ultimate Reality. There are many other names for this universal and timeless wisdom known as the perennial philosophy. Aldous Huxley (1894–1963) is responsible for popularising the term in recent times with his anthology *The Perennial Philosophy* (first published in 1944).

It was in the early twentieth century that several key figures, later regarded as the Perennialist or Traditionalist school of comparative religious thought, became associated with the perennial philosophy. Among the most prominent of these luminaries are René Guénon (1886–1951), Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), and Titus Burckhardt (1908–1984). Other noteworthy individuals are Marco Pallis (1895–1989), Lord Northbourne (1896–1982), Martin Lings (1909–2005), Leo Schaya (1916–1985), Whitall N. Perry (1920–2005), Joseph Epes Brown (1920–2000), William Stoddart (b. 1925), and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933).

Although the perennial philosophy is not a monolith and has innumerable variations and expressions, this does not mean that there are multiple or divergent forms of the perennial philosophy. To suggest the existence of perennial philosophies in the plural is erroneous and contradicts the very principle of its underlying transcendent Unity. It is also of paramount importance to clarify that the existence of a single perennial philosophy means neither that all religions are the same nor that one religion or spiritual path is superior to another.



René Guénon (1886–1951)

The perennial philosophy, like metaphysics, cannot be the exclusive property of any individual or school.

Philosophy as it is associated with the perennial philosophy, pertains to the ancient understanding of *philo-sophia*, or the ‘love of wisdom’ that grounds a way of life devoted to the primacy of truth. The central pillars of the perennial philosophy have been underscored as Truth, Prayer, Virtue, and Beauty; and all these integral elements of the perennial philosophy are situated within an authentic religion.

Truth is essential here, as without it there would be no way to discern between the Real and the unreal, the Absolute and the relative, or *Ātmā* and *Māyā*. *Prayer* is a bridge to the Divine and provides the means to access our transpersonal dimension. There are three basic modes of prayer: *personal prayer*, which is free and spontaneous; *canonical prayer*, which involves prayers that are common to believers of all faiths; and *invocatory prayer*, its highest form, which connects us to the inner dimension of religion through repetition of a Divine Name. Examples of invocatory prayer include *japa-yoga* in Hinduism, *nembutsu* in Buddhism, the Jesus Prayer in Christianity, and *dhikr* in Islam. Prayer is what gradually transforms our nature and brings us closer to our source. For this reason, St. Paul urges us to “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). *Virtue* pertains to intrinsic morality, which requires humility and impartiality toward oneself and one’s neighbour along with service. *Beauty* is vital to the human condition, as it encompasses all forms, our surroundings, our clothing, and how we live our lives. We recall Plato’s dictum here that summarises the role of beauty and our conformity to the Absolute: “Beauty is the splendour of the True.”

This approach recognises that there exists a divine Reality that the religions express differently, yet each human being needs to practise one of these religions. To embark upon and travel the spiritual path requires both doctrine (theory) and method (practice): doctrine provides Truth, and method provides a way of practising and assimilating this metaphysical Truth.

Metaphysics refers to a way of knowing that is the direct apprehension of the Real pertaining to a universal order of reality, particularly as it is actualised in the human realm as a realisation of our true identity. What can be known through the five senses pertains

to the corporeal realm and cannot transcend it. Empirical perception is only one way of knowing, just as reason is another. The Intellect (*intellectus*), as traditionally understood, is a transpersonal faculty that grasps things in themselves. It relies on unmediated intuition, not on the senses or rationality, which are much more restricted in their capacity to discern reality as it is.

One Truth, Many Religions

Perhaps no theme is more perplexing to the contemporary mind than religion and how to understand religious pluralism in today's world amidst all of the confusion that surrounds it. Due to the militant secularism and skepticism of these times, an integral framework for building bridges between the religions is imperative. Without the integral framework of the perennial philosophy, authentic bridge-building between the religions cannot take place. As the Real is both absolute and infinite, it provides *upāyas* (or 'saving means'), which allow for diverse religions to emerge. This plurality satisfies the great variety of spiritual needs and temperaments to be found among human beings.

While the word 'religion' has become off-putting and is less used today than 'spirituality,' it is necessary to remember that the etymological root of the English word 'religion' is the Latin *religare*, meaning to 'to re-link,' or 'to bind back' to the Divine or the Supreme Identity that is at once transcendent and immanent, or to that which is beyond the human and at the same time resides within us. There is a timeless and universal recognition found across the religions, as emphasised in the Hindu tradition, when the Divine speaks in the first person through Krishna: "I am ... seated in the heart[s] of all. (Śrī Bhagavad Gītā 10:20); however, this presupposes a prior recognition of transcendence. The etymology itself alludes to religion's role in restoring the integral human condition, which has in large part been forgotten in the present day. Originally, religion was understood to be essential for both the individual and the human collectivity, as it was seen as the unitive force of humanity.

All of the religions establish that there is an inseparable link between the human and the Divine. The task of the world's religions and their inner dimension is to awaken or reintegrate into our

primordial nature (*fiṭrah*), the ‘image of God’ (*imago Dei*), Buddha-nature (*Buddha-dhātu*), or Self (*Ātmā*), our true identity *in divinis*. The traditional doctrine of identity that can be found across the religions is closely related to the image one has of Reality itself. It is the metaphysical order that restores harmony to a consciousness that has been bifurcated into mind and matter or subject and object.

The human being exists in both the horizontal and vertical domains, in both time and what is timeless, in both the corporeal and the spiritual. The human being is therefore a bridge between these two domains, and this is why religion is imperative for understanding what it means to be human and consequently for the realisation of the human condition.

The Perennial Philosophy and the Perennialists

Despite some noteworthy selections, Huxley’s work is incomplete because of its adoption of an individualistic pick-and-choose approach, rather than letting the wisdom traditions speak for themselves. Very different from Huxley’s anthology is Whitall N. Perry’s work *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* (1971 – later republished as *The Spiritual Ascent: A Compendium of the World’s Wisdom*, 2008), consisting of more than a thousand pages; this work has been praised as the ‘Summa of the Philosophia Perennis.’ Perry came into close personal contact with Coomaraswamy in 1946, and it was through this contact that Perry first conceived of the idea of compiling an anthology underscoring the world’s religions and spiritual traditions, both in their universality through their esoteric (or inner) dimensions and in their necessary differences in their exoteric (or outer) dimensions. In 1943, Coomaraswamy had written of the pressing need for an authentic portrayal of the *philosophia perennis* or perennial philosophy. After seventeen years, Perry’s labour of love bore fruit; unfortunately, Coomaraswamy was not alive to see its publication.

Tradition as it is understood through the perennial philosophy in its fullest sense pertains to the supra-formal order which includes all that can be known by the human being through revelation as it applies to all dimensions of human existence and cannot be in any way reduced to the observance of customs, habits, or the transitory events of history. Tradition is therefore the infusion of the sacred into

an entire civilisation and its culture. This said, Tradition is in a sense ineffable like the notion expressed in the *Tao Te Ching*: “The Tao that can be expressed is not the eternal Tao.”

Huxley attributed the initial use of the Latin term *philosophia perennis* or ‘perennial philosophy’ to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716). Leibniz used the term in a letter that he wrote on August 26, 1714 to Nicolas-François Rémond de Montmort, yet the term was employed earlier by the Vatican librarian and theologian Agostino Steuco (1497–1548). However, careful research indicates that the idea dates even further back, to the Middle Ages. The influential philosopher and priest Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) termed it the *philosophia priscorum* or *prisca theologia* (ancient or venerable philosophy). The leading Byzantine scholar and philosopher Gemistus Plethon (1355–1452) used the term *vera philosophia* (true philosophy). Within Hinduism this teaching is known as the *sanātana dharma* (eternal religion) and in Islam as *al-ḥikmat al-khālīdah* (eternal wisdom; *jāwīdān-khirad* in Persian) or *al-dīn al-ḥanīf* (primordial religion). Other phrases that are also used to articulate the perennial philosophy are *sophia perennis* (perennial wisdom), *religio perennis* (perennial religion), and *religio cordis* (religion of the heart). It is sometimes known as the transcendent unity of religions, the underlying religion, the Great Chain of Being, the Primordial Tradition, or simply Tradition.

One Truth, Many Truth Claims

A fundamental question remains as to how to make sense of the world’s different religions, when each asserts its own exclusive validity and truth claims. How can all of the religions be true? And if they are all true, does this then suggest that one religion cannot possess the fullness of Truth? The integral framework of the perennial philosophy is able to reconcile these apparent differences.

The main criticism of the perennial philosophy is that the affirmation of the universality of religion comes at the expense of the loss of the distinctions between the faith traditions. Yet it is the metaphysical framework of the perennial philosophy, especially its ability to reconcile and discern vital differences between the religions, which is necessary and providential. From one point of view the

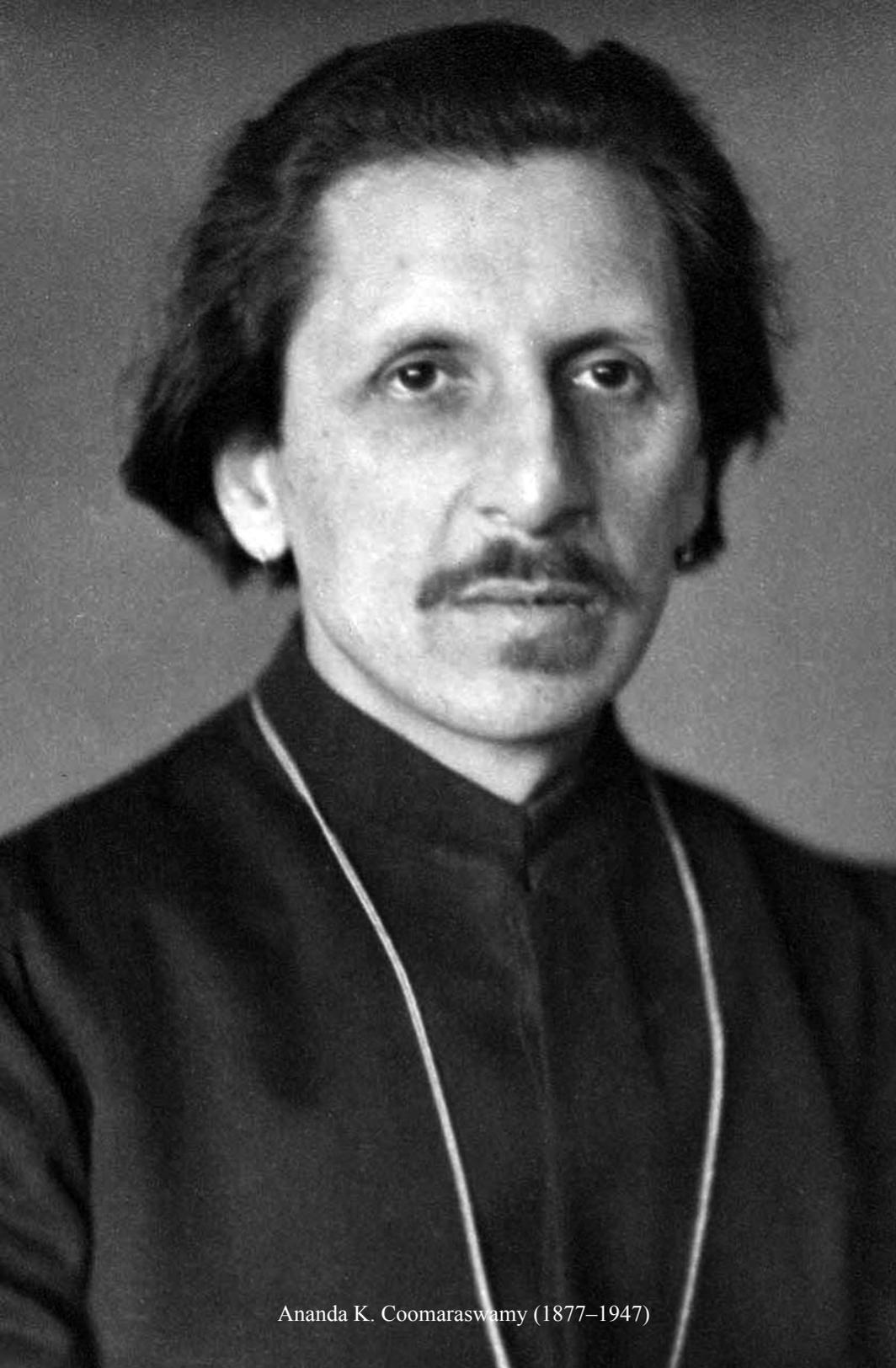
validity and truth of a given religion appears to contradict the validity and truth of the other; yet when viewed through the metaphysics of the perennial philosophy, their inner dimensions illuminate the validity and truth of each faith or tradition without falling into religious exclusivism or syncretism.

Numerous passages from the world's religions can be found demonstrating the formal incongruities among their theological perspectives. We recall the Latin phrase *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, 'outside the Church there is no salvation,' which is the dogma of the Catholic Church. Yet within every religion, similar exclusivist claims can be identified, as the founder of each faith tradition represents the eternal Logos. According to the Christian tradition, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6); in Islam, "No man shall meet God who has not first met the Prophet" (*ḥadīth*); a corresponding principle, although not exclusivist in its outlook, can be found within the Buddhist tradition: "He who sees the *Dhamma* [Dharma] sees me, and he who sees me sees the *Dhamma* [Dharma]" (*Samyutta Nikāya* 3.120).

While passages expressing religious exclusivism are to be found, it is also vital to balance these passages with the abundant examples of statements exemplifying universality to obtain a fuller understanding of the perennial philosophy. In the Hindu tradition, the Bhagavad Gītā declares, "They worship me as One and as many, because they see that all is in me" (9:15).

Within the Christian tradition, we need to recall that Jesus declared that "In my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2), and that there are "other sheep who are not of this fold" (John 10:16); Jesus also emphasised that "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). All of these passages allude to Jesus as the Logos. The manifestation of the Logos in Christianity does not therefore suggest that it is in anyway limited to a single religion, for the principle of the Logos can manifest in other religions as well. We recall the often-cited passage with reference to this idea: "The wind [or Spirit] bloweth where it listeth" (John 3:8).

According to the Islamic tradition, "We never sent a messenger save with the language of his folk, that he might make the message clear for them" (Qur'ān 14:4). The validity of the diverse religious



Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947)

paths is also illustrated in the following Qur'ānic passage: "Truly those who believe, and the Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabaeans — whoever believeth in God and the Last Day and performeth virtuous deeds — surely their reward is with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve" (2:62). The metaphysical reality of the Prophet of Islam is expressed in the *ḥadīth* that attributes to Muḥammad the words "I was a Prophet when Adam was between water and clay." Another point regarding religion is that one's religion is often determined by the family that one is born into and not necessarily by one's own choice. According to a famous *ḥadīth*: "Every child is born according to primordial nature (*fiṭrah*); then his parents make him into a Jew, a Christian, or a Zoroastrian."

To go beyond the exclusivist or formalistic interpretations of religion requires the vantage point of metaphysics to realise the common ground among the religions, without which the 'transcendent unity of religions' or 'paths that lead to the same summit' is indiscernible. This point of view provides a higher or more inclusive perspective than exclusivist or formulaic interpretations of religion.

While a deep immersion in the sapiential traditions is needed to comprehend what they say about each other, to recognise their uniqueness and even the necessary and providential nature of these differences, the goal is simultaneously to realise their multiplicity-in-unity and unity-in-multiplicity.

This does not in anyway minimise the formal practise of religion, as each orthodox faith tradition provides the fullness of truth through its doctrines and methods, which contain truth sufficient for salvation. When the religions are understood through metaphysics, they are no longer viewed as a limitation, but rather as a necessity leading to the doorway of the supra-formal.

The Religions and the Absolute

The notion of religious exclusivity can be understood and even reconciled with pluralism if we recognise the 'relatively Absolute,' a term established by Frithjof Schuon that signifies the existence of the Absolute within the relative that is each religion. Each religion derives from the Absolute, yet each religious form is relative in and of itself. The Divine expresses itself in absolute terms because it alone

is Absolute, yet the distinct religious forms are not absolute; they are relatively absolute.

All of these exclusive truth claims, while necessarily differing from each other in their exoteric or outer dimensions, do not present contradictions or irreconcilable differences within their esoteric or inner dimension.

If each Revelation differentiates itself from others, it is because of its supra-formal essence, which cannot be reduced to its formal manifestation. Without the perennial philosophy, the complexities of how the religions differ on the formal level and where they meet on the supra-formal level cannot be fully understood.

We are reminded to approach the spiritual path on the terms of the Divine and not on our own terms: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). As it has been pointed out, we should “enter houses through their proper doors” (Qur’ān 2:189). The inner dimension of religion is only accessible through the outer dimension. The inner and outer dimensions of religion are inseparable from one another and are complementary, since both are revealed by God alone.

The Inner and Outer Dimensions of Religion

The particular forms of religion and spirituality become intelligible through understanding the relationship and interdependence of the exoteric and esoteric. Again, in order to participate in the inner or mystical dimension of a religion, the outer dimension needs to be present; religion cannot be discarded in an attempt to solely practise its inner dimension. While the saints and sages transcended the formal limitations of their respective religions, this does not mean that they therefore abandoned the doctrines and methods of these faith traditions; they in fact conserved the outer dimension or exoteric elements while practising the inner or esoteric dimension.

The perennial philosophy, while timeless and universal, does not in anyway advocate a religion or tradition of its own: that it does so is a common misconception. There cannot be a ‘supra-religion’ or ‘meta-religion’ that places one religion above all others, as the diverse religions correspond to the diverse human beings and derive from the Absolute. Each faith tradition is sufficient for the return or reintegration into the Divine and requires diverse means of facilitating this function.

An *ad hoc* all-encompassing construction of religion is erroneous, as no such formation can exist that replaces all the sapiential traditions. This would distort the intrinsic tenet of the perennial philosophy that all the religions are fundamentally unique manifestations of the Absolute. As the perennial philosophy acknowledges the ‘transcendent unity of religions’ or ‘paths that lead to the same summit,’ it can sometimes be confused with New Age pseudo-spirituality, which is syncretic in nature and is a parody of integral spirituality. Let us be clear: the perennial philosophy has nothing to do with this counterfeit spirituality. Although it is certainly true that “The wind [or Spirit] bloweth where it listeth” (John 3:8), every human person must travel one of the timeworn paths that have been travelled since time immemorial by the distinct saints and sages of the religions.

One Truth, Many Paths

This recognition of many paths leading to the unanimous Truth differs from endless dabbling in the various religions or mystical practices, as it is decisive that one path be taken and traveled until its end. The non-committal way of approaching religion is very deceptive and ultimately goes nowhere. There are exemplars, like Śrī Rāmakrishna (1836–1886), who have demonstrated the unique ability to remain firmly rooted within a single religion (in his case that of Hinduism) and at the same time to be universal in their orientation, allowing them to simultaneously travel other spiritual paths. In fact, Rāmakrishna spent time devoutly practising both Christianity and Islam to verify these religions from within.

Rāmakrishna in no way repudiated or brought into question his participation in Hinduism but rather affirmed the universality of all sapiential traditions, while abiding within the fold of his own faith tradition. It goes without saying that Rāmakrishna is unique and a rather remarkable embodiment of the perennial philosophy, yet it needs to be remembered that the universality of religion can be realised by practising a single religion; and that one need not attempt, nor is it recommended that one attempt, to travel multiple spiritual paths. It is important to point out that the ‘transcendent unity of religions’ does not absolve one from the responsibility of following the moral precepts of a chosen path. All the traditions have prescribed codes of

conduct, as morality is an important dimension of any religion. Each human being has a choice in the matter, as the Qur'an asserts: "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256). With that said, morality is not prescribed just to induce fear, even though some individuals may require it. Rather, it allows wayfarers to remain on a straight path towards the Divine, which is our sole good. This demands humility, generosity, vigilance and gratitude, along with the patience and trust required to efface the ego. We recall the saying of Christ, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God" (Matthew 19:17). Here we need to make a distinction between moral virtues and 'social' morality. The first pertains to the divine qualities inherent in the spirit, and the second relates to the conformity of actions to this morality. Ultimately, however, no virtues are ours— they belong to God alone. The saints and sages of the world's religions never ignored the importance of moral precepts. Some demonstrated unconventional behaviour or paradoxical teaching methods, but this cannot be confused with antinomianism or a repudiation of morality as a whole.

Truth Both Beyond and Within

Attempted revisions of the religions or their mystical counterparts of the perennial philosophy essentially lead to relativistic pluralism that cannot go anywhere and ends in a cul-de-sac. Privileging immanence at the cost of transcendence is not only a reduction, but a fundamental error, for it must be remembered that transcendence is prior to immanence and there can be no immanence without transcendence. In the same way, the horizontal dimension cannot access the vertical dimension, as the former is of time and contingent, whereas the latter is timeless and Absolute.

We are first called to recognise that "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), yet this is coupled with the second recognition that "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). Within Islamic spirituality, we are reminded of God's transcendence: "Eyes do not perceive Him" (Qur'an 6:103) or "There is nothing like Him" (Qur'an 42:11) and yet also of God's immanence: "Wherever you turn, there is the face of God" (Qur'an 2:115) or "We are nearer to him than the jugular vein" (Qur'an 50:16). In the Divine, both can exist simultaneously without contradiction, as there are distinct

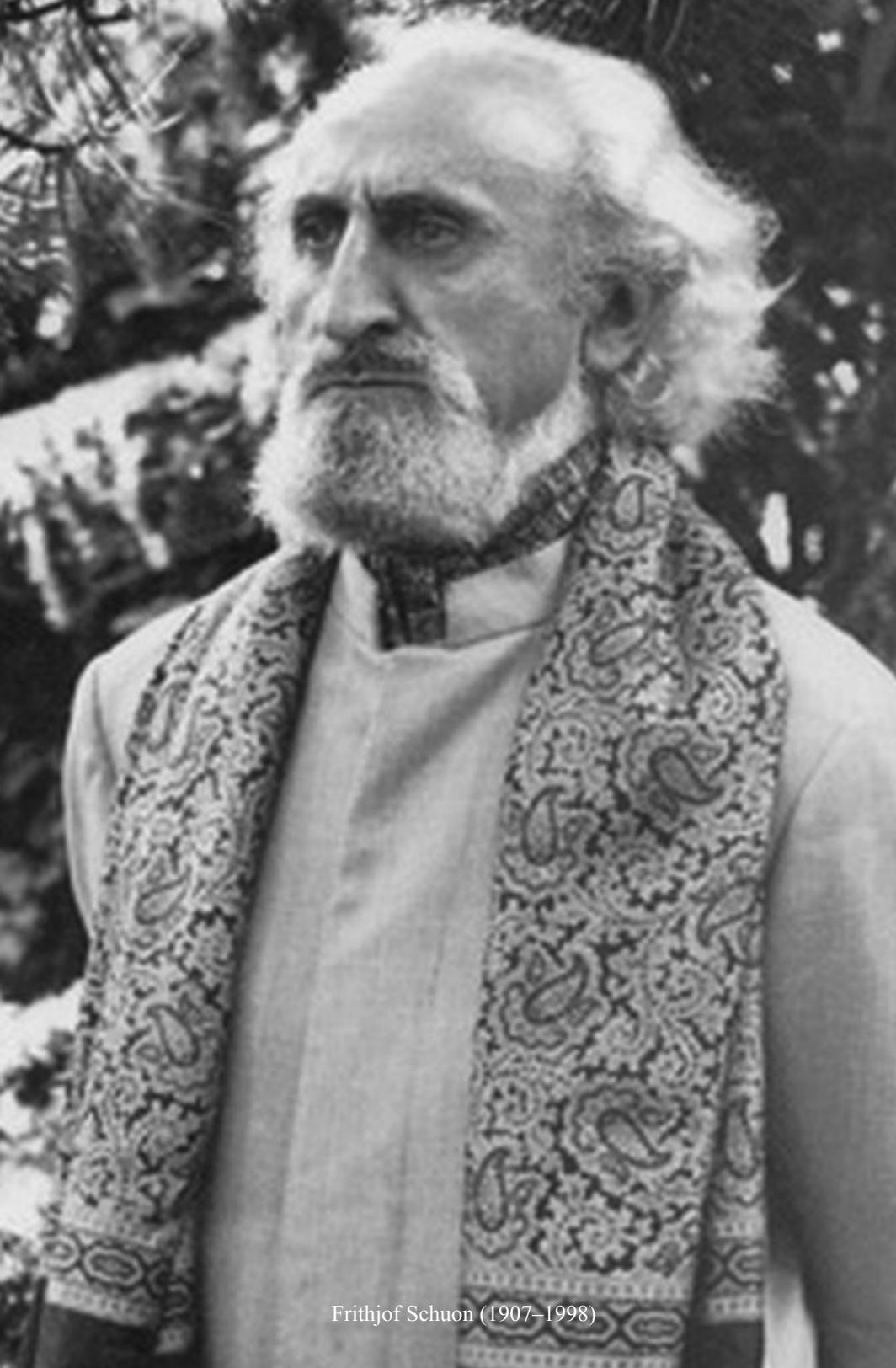
levels of perception and modes of knowing depending on the diverse understanding of human beings. Metaphysics pertains to the domain of immutable principles, to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken away. As stated earlier, there is only a single metaphysics and a single perennial philosophy — which is timeless and universal, originating in the supra-formal reality.

The relative and the Absolute characterise two distinct domains of knowing; however, the perennial philosophy also includes all contingent modes of knowing and levels of reality that connect them. The perennial philosophy provides a framework that remedies the Cartesian dualism between mind and matter, which has plagued the mindset of the West since the seventeenth century. Rather than asserting that matter is the origin of all things as modern science does, the perennial philosophy upholds that, in the beginning, was consciousness itself or the Absolute.

The One and the Many

Some have criticised the perennial philosophy as it privileges a purely metaphysical perspective in keeping with the teachings of Ādi Śāṅkara, the great eighth-century exponent of *Advaita Vedānta*. Such a view overlooks the fact that his doctrine of Unity, or Nonduality, is the essence of metaphysics. It is universal and timeless and can be found within all the world's religions and their mystical dimensions, including the religions of the First Peoples and their Shamanic traditions. This view does not deny that each of the religions provides the fullness of truth through its doctrines and methods, which is sufficient for salvation. Through metaphysics, the religions are not seen as limitations but, rather, understood as a necessary path to the supra-formal or Absolute.

Ultimate Reality transcends linguistic limitations and the rational mind's definitions and conceptualisations; it is beyond all categorisation. The cataphatic way, also known as affirmative theology (*via affirmativa*), concerns what can be articulated about the Divine or God. By contrast, the apophatic approach, also known as negative theology (*via negativa*), pertains to the unknowable nature of the Divine Essence or Godhead. These are both valid ways of approaching spiritual reality.



Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998)

The correlation between human diversity and religious pluralism is made evident in the application of the perennial philosophy to psychology or the ‘science of the soul.’ Each religion originates in the Absolute and requires the integral metaphysics of the perennial philosophy to discern and reconcile human diversity and the corresponding diversity of religions. It is the perennial psychology rooted in metaphysics that provides integration of the human being consisting of Spirit, soul, and body and its diverse modes of knowing and treatment.

Esoterism as a Basis for Ecumenical Dialogue

Contemporary ecumenical or interfaith dialogue, although often well-intentioned in accepting other faiths as legitimate and advocating tolerance towards other religions, does not truly plumb the depths of the religions and radically falls short of understanding how authentic bridges may be established between them. Without necessarily realising it, such dialogue ends up concluding that no one religion can possibly possess the fullness of the Truth: since they are thought of as all being the same and each facilitating a part of the Truth, it is implied that each religion is an imperfect receptacle of Truth. Paradoxically, concluding that no religion is true contradicts the very rationale of ecumenical dialogue. It goes without saying that no amount of tolerance is the same as understanding, and, while tolerance is much needed, it is limited, to say the least. Again, while we need to be cautious and critical of religious exclusivism, the same applies to ecumenical or interfaith movements.

Most ecumenical dialogue unequivocally restricts the full scope of what religion signifies, and therefore it cannot facilitate a true understanding and authentic meeting between the diverse religions. What is needed is to build bridges between the religions based on an ‘esoteric ecumenicism,’ as Schuon noted, which transcends sectarian boundaries, is rooted in metaphysics, and is an expression of the universal and timeless wisdom of the perennial philosophy that is “neither of the East nor of the West” (Qur’ān 24:35).

The expositors of the perennial philosophy in no way attempt to alter or update the religions and their mystical dimensions, as this would be unnecessary and even mistaken, but rather allow the

traditional sources and their saints and sages to speak for themselves on their own terms, in order to present the universal and timeless wisdom to contemporaries seeking the one Truth hidden in all the forms. From this perspective, each human being praises the Divine in accordance with his or her own essence. Likewise, each human being is a receptacle with distinctive and unique beliefs and traits that assimilates one and the same transpersonal Essence.

The Necessity of Living One's Religion

What is of essential importance in this topsy-turvy and radically confused time is to adhere to an authentic religious form and to practise it with all of one's heart and mind. Yet this commitment cannot be imposed from without and needs to come directly from the individual, as we are reminded: "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'ān 2:256).

While religion derives from a supra-formal order, human beings need forms to travel the spiritual path in order to return to the Spirit. Forms themselves are the disclosure of the supra-formal order. Human beings live in the world of forms and analogously require them for their return to the Divine: Spiritual forms correspond to both human diversity and religious pluralism.

The resolution to the confrontation between the plurality of religions and their transcendental unity is none other than the universal metaphysics that has existed at all times and in all places, known as the perennial philosophy. Yet it needs to be made clear that the recognition of the perennial philosophy is not a prerequisite for a human being's salvation or for spiritual realisation and should not serve as a substitute for a divinely revealed tradition.

What any serious seeker on the path must understand is that not all facets of religion will be comprehended at once and that these matters are not dependent on the human (for "He guides whomsoever He will to a straight path" [Qur'ān 10:25]), but derive from a higher source, from what is above. We cannot ask God, along with the Psalmist, to "take off the veil from mine eyes" (119:18) without first adhering to an authentic religious form. The veil exists for the protection of the seeker and cannot be lifted prematurely without grave consequences, and this is articulated in various ways through the traditional exegeses.

MOUNTAIN PATH

In the same way that we give common courtesy to a friend by entering the house through the front and not the back door, we must likewise embark on the spiritual path through one of the revealed traditions and not attempt to access its precinct without the consent and blessing of the religion. Travelling the spiritual path requires defending the True and the Real within the heart and mind in order not to be diverted away from the “one thing needful” (Luke 10:42), which is none other than the remembrance of the Divine. Each human being again is a reflection of the diverse and unique religions and spiritual paths that lead to the same summit. In the same way, each of the religions is a path of return. ▲

What’s the Chemistry?

Suresh Kailash

A billion, zillion photons,
gently bounce off
your form and face,
fall on a strip of acetate,
(or photographic plate)
coated with halide salts
of sodium, potassium
and silver nitrate,
where they react and create
a replica of your image.
How this happens,
any chemist can illustrate.

But, the chemistry
between your devotees
and your portrait?
This, Ramana,
is a mystery.