



# Human Diversity in the Mirror of Religious Pluralism

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"It is the one truth, which *jnānins* call by different names."

*Rigveda* 1:164:46

For each among you We have appointed a [different] law and a way. And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise], that He might try you in that which He has given you. So vie with one another in good deeds. Unto God shall be your

return all together, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ...

*Qur'ān* 5:48<sup>1</sup>

The many faces of xenophobia threaten not only the national secu-

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<sup>1</sup> See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner K. Dagli, Maria Massi Dakake, Joseph E.B. Lombard and Mohammed Rustom (eds.), *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2015).

rity of a particular country, state or region, but the stability of the entire world and fundamentally undermine the possibility of enduring peace for all people. The rise of xenophobia, analogous to the violence and chaos that have become normalized today are a symptom or a projection of the imbalance and lack of peace found within the contemporary *psyche*. Given that very little positive news is covered in the mainstream media on religion, it will appear to be counter-intuitive and even paradoxical to assert the need to return to religion for an answer to the numerous persistent and escalating problems of the day, as religion is all-too-often assumed to be the primary cause of these conflicts. Even though it goes against the current mindset, religion could be the only way out of this predicament. Yet what is radically needed is to re-envision what religion is and to clarify what it is not because misinformation dominates the mass media which does little to present the merits of religion.

Because of the interconnected nature of the human and the Divine, there is a sacred origin of human diversity which is seldom recognized or understood in today's secular world. The assertion that there is an essential connection between them could be viewed with trepidation given the prevalence of secularism and its desacralized outlook. In this context, the perennial question of—

“Who am I?”—like religion itself, is reduced to socially constructed phenomena devoid of any transcendent criteria. For some the mention of religion itself provokes a negative reaction, which is a reflection of present-day and how estranged we have become from religion and the transcendent norms that were associated with it that inform what it means to be integrally human.

How can religion contribute to peace when it appears to be the leading culprit of a world in crisis? This question can be answered directly and has been answered by

**“Truth does not deny forms from the outside, but transcends them from within.”**

saints and sages across the cultures who have repeatedly instructed this: It is through returning to the original meaning of religion, especially its spiritual or inner dimension and living in accordance with these teachings, that right relationship can be established throughout the web of life. What is urgently needed is to increase spiritual literacy on a mass scale in order to foster genuine interfaith dialogue which can establish peace. Yet how can this be accomplished given the myriad issues and magnitude of today's problems?

One way to do this would be to return to the perennial philosophy, the essential truths found at the heart of all of the world's religions,

including the First Peoples and their Shamanic traditions. The timeless and universal message which captures the essence of how peace can be established in these topsy-turvy times is expressed here: “[P]eace... comes within the souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness, with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize that at the center of the universe dwells Wakan-Tanka [the Great Mystery or Great Spirit], and that this center is really everywhere, it is within each of us.”<sup>2</sup> Defined slightly differently, “[P]eace...is ultimately nothing else but order, equilibrium, or harmony...denoting...the reflection of unity in multiplicity.”<sup>3</sup>

It is imperative to recall that the etymological root of the English word “religion” is from the Latin *re-ligare*, meaning to “to re-bind” or “to bind back” by implication to the Divine or a transcendent Reality. Across the traditional civilizations, the human state was considered to be inherently connected with the transpersonal and could be said to be *Homo religiosus* or *Homo spir-*



*itualis*. “The man of the traditional societies [and civilizations] is admittedly a *homo religiosus*”.<sup>4</sup> The connection between the human and the transpersonal was known since earliest times, “In one manner or another all life is seen to participate in the sacred, all cultural forms express the sacred, so that inevitably within this context the lives of those peoples who live close to their sacred traditions may be called religious, and they are thus beings who are religiously human.”<sup>5</sup> Yet deprived of the transcendent, true human identity is disfigured and unintelligible. It is a precondition that being human requires what is beyond the human state, what is transpersonal, in

2 Black Elk, quoted in Joseph Epes Brown, *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), p. 115.

3 René Guénon, “War and Peace,” in *The Symbolism of the Cross*, trans. Angus Macnab (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis et Universalis, 1996), p. 43.

4 Mircea Eliade, “Introduction,” to *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), p. 15.

5 Joseph Epes Brown, “On Being Human,” in *The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian: Commemorative Edition with Letters While Living with Black Elk*, eds. Marina Brown Weatherly, Elenita Brown and Michael Oren Fitzgerald (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), p. 93.

order to make it human.

In the same way that human diversity requires a metaphysical framework to accurately situate the dialectic between differences and similarities, and what unifies them at their innermost core, the same is true for religious pluralism. This is made evident in the following: “Truth does not deny forms from the outside, but transcends them from within.”<sup>6</sup> What is critically needed is not a shallow or docile tolerance toward understanding the diverse human collectivities and religions, rather a quality of receptivity and way of seeing that recognizes the necessity of these differences and what is beyond them. “That which is lacking in the present world is a profound knowledge of the nature of things; the fundamental truths are always there, but they do not impose themselves because they cannot impose themselves on those unwilling to listen.”<sup>7</sup> Due to the imbalance that dominates this era, the religions themselves are not impermeable to these conflicts as they too are facing myriad challenges from within. With this said, there is a certain shortsightedness or spiritual illiteracy with regards to those who identify themselves as being religious, while well intended, they often do not adequately understand what this means: “[E]ven those who

6 Frithjof Schuon, “The Vedanta,” in *Language of the Self* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1999), p. 40.

7 Frithjof Schuon, “No Activity Without Truth,” *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Autumn 1969), p. 195.

sincerely believe themselves to be religious have for the most part a greatly diminished idea of religion: it has hardly any effective influence on their thoughts or actions and is as if separated from the rest of their life. Practically, believers and unbelievers alike act in almost the same way”<sup>8</sup>.

An essential stumbling block in comprehending human diversity, not unlike religious pluralism, is due to the prevailing *weltanschauung* of modernism and postmodernism and its entrenched assumptions about the nature of reality. “[M]odern man has desacralized his world and assumed a profane existence.”<sup>9</sup> So diametrically opposed is the worldview of secularism with that of the sapiential traditions that the following needs to be kept in mind: “[N]onreligious man has been formed by opposing his predecessor, by attempting to ‘empty’ himself of all religion and all transhuman meaning.”<sup>10</sup> It is in this context that we can better understand the psychological mechanisms underlying the attack waged on religion: “‘Religion has failed’ say its critics. They do not understand

8 René Guénon, “The Reform of the Modern Mentality,” in *Symbols of Sacred Science*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), p. 2.

9 Mircea Eliade, “Introduction,” to *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), p. 13.

10 Mircea Eliade, “Human Existence and Sanctified Life,” in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), p. 204.



that it is not religion but those who analyze, criticize, and neglect it who have failed in the first duty of humanity which is precisely to be religious (since no other creature can be) and that humanity has through its fault lost its sense of direction."<sup>11</sup> In order to understand the more nuanced aspects of diversity, it is required an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the contemporary West and its development, "The truth is that there are many civilizations, developing along very different lines, and that, among these, that of the modern West is strangely exceptional, as some of its characteristics show."<sup>12</sup> Without

11 Lord Northbourne, "The Ineluctable Alternative: A Letter to My Descendants" in *Of the Land and the Spirit: The Essential Lord Northbourne on Ecology and Religion*, eds. Christopher James, the 5th Lord Northbourne and Joseph A. Fitzgerald (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), p. 220.

12 René Guénon, "Preface," to *East and West*,

analyzing these underlying assumptions or rather fundamental biases, we are limited to a surface level of understanding of human diversity and religious pluralism. "When we use the term "modern" we mean neither contemporary nor up-to-date.... Rather, for us "modern" means that which is cut off from the transcendent, from the immutable principles which in reality govern all things".<sup>13</sup>

Approaches such as multiculturalism, cultural diversity, cultural awareness, cultural competence, race relations and so on attempt to guide contemporaries through the murky waters of this pluralistic age, where one encounters the "other" or individuals from different cultures, races, ethnicities and religions dis-

trans. Martin Lings (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), p. 2.

13 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Reflections on Islam and Modern Thought," *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 15, Nos. 3 & 4 (Summer-Autumn 1983), p. 164.

tinct from one's own on a regular basis. Even though these approaches deem to rectify the apparatuses of oppression that began with colonialism and the horrors of slavery, they do not contain the substance to address the complexity of human diversity including its connection to religious pluralism. Addressing human diversity and its relationship with religious pluralism is one of the most vital responsibilities of our times, one that cannot be postponed or ignored as human existence on earth is in increasingly in jeopardy. Contemporary approaches generally tend to assert a polarized portrayal of human diversity, one that either affirms or denies it, rarely taking into account the deeper dimensions. Multiculturalism is a generic term that is not easily defined because it has different meanings in different contexts. In general, terms such as multiculturalism assert the co-existence of diverse populations and challenge the "melting pot" theory that ultimately assimilates individuals into the dominant culture. The "melting pot" or "salad bowl" theory does not foster human diversity, but will inevitably destroy all diversity. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, emphasizes equality of each distinct group within society and celebrates these differences.

While multiculturalism attempts to honor human differences in a way that is true to all races and ethnicities, the phenomenon of color-blindness allegedly overlooks

human differences or ignores the relevance of race and ethnicity. In emphasizing the uniqueness of each distinct human group, multiculturalism tends to lose sight of what is beyond human differences. In the same way, the color-blind approach emphasizes similarity overlooking what is beyond human similarities. To solely emphasize one of these positions leads to a polarized portrayal of what is truly human and misses the mark in comprehending the necessary facets of human uniqueness and similarity.

Before the popularization of the term multiculturalism, we recall the well-known verse by Rudyard Kipling published in 1889 that illustrates a widely held belief in a polarized vision of human identity, "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet".<sup>14</sup> This outlook culminates in the now famous phrase, yet a false thesis of the so-called "Clash of Civilizations"<sup>15</sup> which appropriately has been debunked as the "Clash of Ignorance".

<sup>16</sup>The "clash" is in many ways polarized by the extremism of anti-religious secularism and religious

<sup>14</sup> Rudyard Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West," in *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses* (Leipzig, Germany: Heinemann and Balestier, 1892), p. 85.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Lewis coined the term "clash of civilizations" before Samuel P. Huntington, see Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 266, No. 3 (September 1990), pp. 47-60; Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 22-49.

<sup>16</sup> See Edward W. Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *The Nation*, Vol. 273, No. 12 (October 22, 2001), pp. 11-14.



fundamentalism. When considered in a larger context, the rise of modernism that gave birth to secularism has created a void in the human collectivity heavily impacting the religions themselves. This vacuum has created an imbalance which religious fundamentalism, and New Age spirituality for that matter, attempt to fill. Although religious fundamentalism emerged to defend itself from the threats of anti-religious secularism, it has totally lost sight of what religion is and has become in fact a betrayal to religion.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, beyond these divergent portrayals is an entire way of seeing and perceiving human identity, which the modern secular

<sup>17</sup> See Joseph E.B. Lumbard (ed.), *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition: Essays by Western Muslim Scholars* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2009).

mindset has discarded in cutting itself off from the sacred. It is in rediscovering the perennial psychology found within the world's religions that we can understand both diversity and similarity and what bridges them. Apart from this approach we are left in a precarious and very limited, if not dehumanizing portrayal of what it means to be human. It is essential to recall anew, especially in a globalizing world, "So long as Westerners imagine that there only exists a single type of humanity, that there is only one 'civilization,' at different stages of development, no mutual understanding will be possible."<sup>18</sup> It was not that the existence of diverse peoples or other religions was un-

<sup>18</sup> René Guénon, "Preface," to *East and West*, trans. Martin Lings (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), p. 2.

known in earlier times, but it was not existentially threatening to the practitioners of other faiths as it has become today.

An unprecedented phenomenon has emerged today where diverse beliefs now find themselves living beside one another, unlike any other time before, which is indicative of the urgent need for a deeper religious pluralism with better delineated bridges between faiths. This is epitomized by the ensuing: “[T]he outward and readily exaggerated incompatibility of the different religious forms greatly discredits, in the minds of most of our contemporaries, all religion.”<sup>19</sup> A natural outcome of religious pluralism is reflected in the similarities and differences with regard to their faith traditions. “The multiplicity of races, nations, and tribes necessitates the diversity of revelations.”<sup>20</sup> It is insufficient to know that people have different faiths and differ among themselves; one must know why they differ and simultaneously what unifies them at their metaphysical roots.

In surveying traditional cosmology and psychology we can glean many insights about the way time impacts the human *psyche* and its relationship to Spirit. The nature of time across the cultures is understood to be cyclical moving progres-

sively from wholeness to greater degrees of fragmentation. This process has a tremendous influence on how human beings understand themselves and their relationship to the whole of life. “Originally man saw the diverse in the One, then the One in the diverse. Man must infer the One from the diverse, and to the extent that he grasps the One, know the diverse through the One and dissolve the diverse in Unity.”<sup>21</sup> There are two identifiable poles of the Primordial Tradition that manifested at the inception of this temporal cycle, one is the First Peoples and the Shamanic traditions and the other is Hinduism, also known as the *sanātana dharma* or “the eternal and universal code of conduct” which is said to have existed everywhere. According to the Hindu *dharma*, the initial temporal cycle known as the *Krita-Yuga* or *Satya-Yuga* (Golden Age) was described in the following manner: “O child, that *Yuga* is called *Krita* when the one eternal religion was extant. And in that best of *Yugas*, every one had religious perfection, and, therefore, there was no need of religious acts.”<sup>22</sup> In the descriptions provided by the Primordial Tradition we have examples of the earliest human collectivities living in peace, harmony and in remembrance of

19 Frithjof Schuon, “Preface,” to *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1993), pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

20 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “One God, Many Prophets,” in *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 16.

21 Frithjof Schuon, “Fourth Collection,” in *Primordial Meditation: Contemplating the Real*, trans. Gillian Harris and Angela Schwartz (London, UK: Matheson Trust, 2015), p. 143.

22 “*Tirtha-yātrā Parva*,” in *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa Translated Into English Prose*, trans. Kisari Mohan Ganguli (Calcutta: Bharata Press, 1884), p. 446.

the Divine. “And during that [*Krita-*] *Yuga*, there was neither disease, nor decay of the senses. And there was neither malice, nor pride, nor hypocrisy, nor discord, nor ill-will, nor cunning, nor fear, nor misery, nor envy, nor covetousness. And for this, that prime refuge of *Yogis*, even the Supreme *Brahma*, was attainable to all.”<sup>23</sup> Another account reads, “I have created these First People... ..gave them speech, a different language to each color, with respect for each other’s difference.”<sup>24</sup> We can also find insinuations of this unity in the Abrahamic monotheisms, such as Judaism: “And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.” (*Genesis* 11:1)

The early peoples that inhabited the earth were given clear instructions about how to live in right relationship with the whole of creation, which continues to this day: “There is only one thing I ask you. To respect the Creator at all times.”<sup>25</sup> The consequences of not adhering to this Divine injunction ruptured the Unity among the human collectivity and the repercussions were as follows: “[T]he Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.” (*Genesis* 11:9) From the beginning of the temporal cycle until its close with the revelation of Islam,

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 446.

<sup>24</sup> Hopi Elders, quoted in Frank Waters, *Book of the Hopi: The First Revelation of the Hopi’s Historical and Religious Worldview of Life* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

we see clear examples of the relationship of unity in diversity and diversity in unity. Human diversity has been reflected in religious pluralism in distinct ways since time immemorial. It was also known that through the dissociation from the sacred human beings become estranged from their own nature as beings created “in God’s image,” and from their common spiritual heritage. This is illustrated here:

[H]uman unity, initially traditional, by raising such a revolt against the divine Unity, compelled the latter to break it into ethnic fragments, dispersed over the entire earth and henceforth opposed one to another; and this through a lack of understanding caused by the confusion, or more precisely by the differentiation of their ‘language’ or single tradition into several ‘languages’ or divergent traditions, but with a foundation that remains unanimous thanks to its divine essence.<sup>26</sup>

It is in returning to what is unanimous across the faiths of all times and places that we can properly situate the theme of religious pluralism and human diversity. Prior to the modern and postmodern world and the emergence of secularism, the linkage between religion and the human collectivities was more explicit due to their isolation from one another, which sharply contrasts with the scenario that we find today.

<sup>26</sup> Leo Schaya, “Some Universal Aspects of Judaism,” in *Universal Aspects of the Kabbalah and Judaism*, ed. Roger Gaetani (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2014), p. 10.

A common misnomer is that race suggests uniformity within a specific cultural or ethnic group. Nevertheless, race itself does not automatically imply psychological homogeneity within a human collectivity, for race allows for certain psychological dissimilarities to also exist. To indiscriminately lump different races and ethnicities together assuming that they are all the same is to do them a grave injustice.

For thousands of years already, humanity has been divided into several fundamentally different branches, which constitute so many complete humanities, more or less closed in on themselves ... [T]his is not always a question of race, but more often of human groups, very diverse perhaps, but none the less subject to mental conditions which, taken as a whole, make of them sufficiently homogeneous spiritual recipients.<sup>27</sup>

At its core we must realize that the “other” or “otherness” is an encounter with both the mystery of human existence and the Divine. “Otherness’ is a veil over our eyes woven by our own imagination. Neither we ourselves nor the things we perceive outside of ourselves are truly other than God.”<sup>28</sup> In solely identifying with our horizontal or relative identity, this mystery is ob-

27 Frithjof Schuon, “Diversity of Revelation,” in *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*, trans. G.E.H. Palmer (Bedfont, Middlesex, UK: Perennial Books, 1990), p. 25.

28 Rūmī, quoted in William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 304.



scured, yet through the Intellect or the Eye of the Heart, both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of human identity in divinis, the “other” or “otherness” can be understood. “[T]he mystery is a mystery solely for the reason that there is ‘otherness’; it is this, the creature, which hides the divine unity and asks the question: ‘who’ and ‘what’ am I? Without this ‘otherness’ there

is neither 'who' nor 'what', neither search nor mystery: there is nothing but the only reality in its non-dual and absolute selfness."<sup>29</sup> By taking an integral approach informed by the spiritual hermeneutics of the perennial philosophy we can view the interrelatedness of all sentient beings past, present and future: "There is not a single being in samsara, this immense ocean of suffering, who in the course of time without beginning has never been our father or mother."<sup>30</sup> Thus, the "other" or "otherness" is our disowned integral nature that cannot be reclaimed devoid of a transpersonal dimension, "[A] man of another race...is like a forgotten aspect of ourselves and thus also like a rediscovered mirror of God."<sup>31</sup>

The completion of the human identity as viewed unanimously, in all times and places, is its reintegration with the Supreme Identity and this is the human birthright accessible to all regardless of sex, race, ethnicity or religion. The *Qur'ān* informs us that, "He created you [humanity] from a single soul" (39:6), which reflects the spiritual message of the First Peoples, "We are all one

in nature."<sup>32</sup> While human individuals have a common origin, this does not undermine their uniqueness in the Divine: "No two individuals are identical."<sup>33</sup> —analogously no two individuals occupy the "same stage of development".<sup>34</sup> The many ways to the Divine belong to the diversity of human types, "Infinite are the *sādhanās*...."<sup>35</sup> Likewise, the Sufi adage points out, "[T]here are as many paths to God as there are human souls".<sup>36</sup> According to a well-known *ḥadīth* human similarity is affirmed: "People are as equal as the teeth of a comb." And yet according to a Qur'ānic verse, human diversity is also emphasized: "And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the [diversity] variation in your tongues and colors. Truly in that are signs for those who know." (30:22) Additionally, important is the role of knowledge and its connection to different human types, "[T]here are as many ways of

29 Leo Schaya, "Contemplation of the Divine Aspects," in *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, trans. Nancy Pearson (Secaucus, NJ: University Books, 1971), p. 57.

30 Patrul Rinpoche, "The difficulty of finding the freedoms and advantages," in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), p. 7.

31 Frithjof Schuon, "The Meaning of Race," in *Castes and Races*, trans. Marco Pallis and D.M. Matheson (Bedfont, Middlesex, UK: Perennial Books, 1982), p. 60.

32 Luther Standing Bear, "Hunter, Scout, Warrior," in *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), p. 45.

33 Alain Daniélou, "Hinduism and Human Behavior," in *India, A Civilization of Differences: The Ancient Tradition of Universal Tolerance*, trans. Kenneth Hurry, ed. Jean-Louis Gabin (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2005), p. 9.

34 Alain Daniélou, "Introduction," to *Yoga: Mastering the Secrets of Matter and the Universe* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1991), p. 6.

35 Ānandamayī Mā, quoted in *The Essential Śrī Ānandamayī Mā: Life and Teachings of a 20th Century Indian Saint*, trans. Ātmānanda, ed. Joseph A. Fitzgerald (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), p. 62.

36 Quoted in Frithjof Schuon, *The Eye of the Heart: Metaphysics, Cosmology, Spiritual Life* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1997), p. 121.

understanding as there are human knowers.”<sup>37</sup>

Integral metaphysics provides a way of conceptualizing the divine Unity underlying the human condition which is at the same time the origin of human diversity. “The single origin of humanity implies the profound unity within diversity of human nature”.<sup>38</sup> This becomes apparent in the relationship between the uncolored light and the spectrum of colors comprising of the rainbow. “The rainbow owes its beauty to the variety of its shades and colors. In the same way, we consider the voices of various believers that rise up from all parts of the earth as a symphony of praises addressing God, Who alone can be Unique.”<sup>39</sup> And expressed similarly in: “All light is one but colors a thousandfold.”<sup>40</sup> The source of each distinct color belongs to what is beyond all color: “If my eye is to see color, it must be free of all color.”<sup>41</sup> Metaphysically speaking, the uncolored light represents the

37 Meister Eckhart, quoted in C.F. Kelley, *Meister Eckhart on Divine Knowledge* (Cobb, CA: Dharmacafé Books, 2009), p. 190.

38 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “One God, Many Prophets,” in *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 16.

39 Tierno Bokar, quoted in *Amadou Hampâté Bâ, A Spirit of Tolerance: The Inspiring Life of Tierno Bokar*, trans. Jane Casewit, ed. Roger Gaetani (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), p. 126.

40 Fakh al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, “Flash XI,” in *Fakhruddin ‘Iraqi: Divine Flashes*, trans. William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 94.

41 Meister Eckhart, “Sermon 12,” in *Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986), 270.

pure Unity and the rainbow represents manifestation in the phenomenal world. To solely acknowledge the rainbow of human diversity is to lose sight of the singular source of the uncolored light, which gives birth to the rainbow itself:

Whatever a man’s race might be, when the Spirit crystallizes in him due to the effect of his worshipping God, his soul becomes like a mystical diamond. The skin color or the circumstances of the birth of such a man have no influence on the quality of his spiritual illumination. Whatever his social standing or the disadvantages of his birth might be, if he has reached this state, no outer element will be powerful enough to make this state slip away from him.<sup>42</sup>

This integral perspective on human diversity as it is found across the cultures is regrettably absent from contemporary multicultural discourse and interfaith dialogue. Without turning to this transpersonal dimension of human identity we cannot understand the deep roots of diversity. “[We take our] color from God; and who is better than God at coloring? And we worship Him.” (*Qur’ān* 2:138) Similarly without this metaphysical perspective we cannot understand religious pluralism: “Religions are like lamps of colored glass.... [I]f it is true that without a given colored lamp one

42 Tierno Bokar, quoted in *Amadou Hampâté Bâ, A Spirit of Tolerance: The Inspiring Life of Tierno Bokar*, trans. Jane Casewit, ed. Roger Gaetani (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), p. 131.

would see nothing, it is quite as true that visibility cannot be identified with any one color.”<sup>43</sup> The correlation between human diversity and religious pluralism is made evident in the perennial psychology: “[W]hat determines the difference among forms of Truth is the difference among human receptacles.”<sup>44</sup> And correspondingly the necessity of diverse revelations: “For every community there is a messenger”. (*Qur’ān* 10:48)

What is evident is that we can no longer turn our backs to the urgent need for more integral and deeper forms of religious pluralism. The consequences of not doing so are made apparent by the incessant media soundbites broadcasting horrific events transpiring throughout the globe in the name of religion. Furthermore, religious pluralism also requires that we not gloss over its connection to human diversity, as they are at their metaphysical root derivatives of the same divine Unity. Although there are no ready-made panaceas, a definitive remedy to the challenges of our day requires increasing spiritual literacy to go beyond the surface level understanding of the world’s religions and their relation to the diverse human col-

lectivities. The gift of all of the rich diversity that exists in the human and transpersonal domain can be understood and embraced through the divine Unity found in all times and places.

The attempt to forge a viable model of human diversity on the principle of diversity as do contemporary multicultural discourse or interfaith dialogue for that matter is not only questionable, but improbable for multiplicity cannot establish a true unity without an agency higher than itself. “[I]t must be authentically a unity, not merely something elaborated into unity and so in reality no more than unity’s counterfeit”.<sup>45</sup> The very existence of the diversity of human individuals and the religions does not contradict or negate Unity. At the same time, Unity does not contradict or negate diversity and this is an essential point that secular approaches to human diversity and the religions do not appear to grasp. The principle of diversity is contingent on what is higher than itself, a vertical dimension, to fuse and balance the domain of manifestation. Even though contemporary multicultural approaches to human diversity recognize the uniqueness and importance of the many colors of the rainbow, they overlook the most vital facet, the uncolored light prior to its refraction which is the source of the distinctive varieties of human beings

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43 Frithjof Schuon, “The Idea of ‘The Best’ in Religions,” in *Christianity/Islam: Essays on Esoteric Ecumenicism*, trans. Gustavo Polit (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1985), p. 152.

44 Frithjof Schuon, “Diversity of Revelation,” in *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*, trans. G.E.H. Palmer (Bedfont, Middlesex, UK: Perennial Books, 1990), p. 25.

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45 Plotinus, “How the Secondaries rise from The First; and on The One,” in *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 387.

and their faith traditions. By restoring human diversity to its sacred origins we can authentically recognize and celebrate the indwelling Spirit found in all of the unique human beings and their corresponding religions. The timeless wisdom reminds us that if the human microcosm is at peace, it will reverberate into the macrocosm. We conclude with a traditional Hindu *mantra* for invoking peace throughout all levels of Reality since the beginning of this temporal cycle: *Om, Shānti, Shānti, Shānti* and correspondingly a verse from the Islamic revelation at the end of the cycle, “O you who believe! Invoke blessings upon him, and greetings of peace!” (*Qur’ān* 33:56)