

process of monetising life and experience. Eisenstein puts this point forcefully when he says that mechanistic science denies the very fabric of human experience by quantifying qualities. By contrast, the new sciences of holism and interconnectedness mean that purpose, meaning, order, beauty and the sacred emerge as a function of relatedness. Individuals are defined in terms of a web of relationships with people, Earth, animals and plants, which means that any harm done to the other is also imposed on oneself. The next chapter applies this understanding to money and property, showing how videogames are a substitute for play and how experience of Nature is packaged into something to be consumed.

Eisenstein sees the ascent of humanity as the history of ever-greater control over Nature but also over human nature tainted by original sin. Technology is to control nature and culture controls human nature. Life itself is not about control, but rather about growth, change and transformation. This means that death is part of life, and fear of death translates into fear of life. Yet we have wars all around - the war against cancer, the war against terror, without realising that the war on the Other is in fact a civil war - anything we do to the world, we do to ourselves as well. The final diagnostic chapter is about crumbling of certainty and the impossibility of perfection. If we see the universe as blind and purposeless, then there is no perception of natural order; on the other hand, an understanding of the operating system of Nature leads us to want to work with the grain in harmony and balance with natural principles. All this is implicit in holistic science, organic agriculture and positive health, as exemplified in the work of Viktor Schauberger.

The Age of Reunion charts a path towards interdependence, new money systems (the currency of cooperation), a restorative economy and different forms of technology based on cycles, abundance and connection. Eisenstein also proposes a medicine of interbeing, an ecological approach beyond strategies of control. This evolves into a gift mentality and creates a new story and understanding. The last chapter is devoted to healing the split between self and cosmos, going beyond the struggle of good against evil and instilling a sense of self-acceptance, self-love and self-trust. The author restates the neo-Platonic idea of the Fall as separation as a prelude to reunion, drawing on the perinatal work of Stan Grof. It is easy to see that the fetus must eventually outgrow the finite womb, so one can say that 'the limits of growth trigger a birth crisis'

and apply this to the human situation. He adds that 'if the status quo did not become intolerable, there would be nothing to impel change - birth into a new state of being.' In the Age of Reunion, we will see everything as extensions of ourselves, experiencing a world that is 'wholly sacred, pregnant with creativity, immanent with purpose, alive with spirit.'

Here Eisenstein parallels the participatory vision of Richard Tarnas in *The Passion of the Western Mind* and the final participation of Owen Barfield. Leading thinkers represented in the creative minority are already making this transition from separation to wholeness, from independence to interdependence. The sweep and depth of this book enables readers to understand this process at a whole new level and to realise that it is already underway.

Perennial Wisdom for the Contemporary World

Samuel Bendeck Sotillos

TOUCHSTONES OF THE SPIRIT: ESSAYS ON RELIGION, TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Harry Oldmeadow

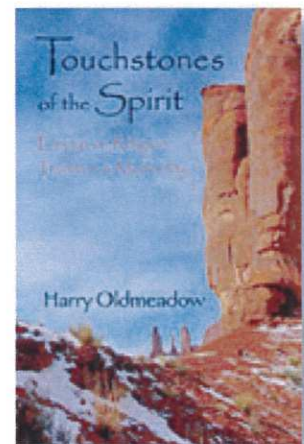
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"The sense of the sacred is fundamental for every civilization because fundamental for man; the sacred—that which is immutable, inviolable, and thus infinitely majestic—is in the very substance of our spirit and of our existence." - Frithjof Schuon

We live in a rather extraordinary time; we have access to the great wisdom traditions of the world, which has never before been possible. Now regardless of inner qualification or formal commitment to a traditional form, anyone can acquire texts that were previously inaccessible to outsiders, and it goes without saying that what is sacred was never taken frivolously. An important question, seldom posed, is: what is the cost of this accessibility? For example, as highly regarded as Tibetan Buddhism is today, rarely is it reflected upon that in order for not only the West, but the world at large to have access to its spiritual heritage, its civilisation was essentially decimated and is until today, some sixty years later, still occupied. The same could be said for all the traditional societies, especially those of the indigenous and shamanic societies. Many of their teachings would be inaccessible to outsiders if it were not for their elders deciding that it is better to share their wisdom in the

face of genocide than to lose their wisdom forever. The crisis of our times is coupled with a perplexing phenomenon of extremes—on one hand there is the mass disintegration of traditional societies and on the other hand there is the mass dissemination of its illumined wisdom. While there are tremendous spiritual benefits for those living in today's world, this remarkable opportunity comes with great responsibility. From the outset we are mindful of Professor Oldmeadow's striking assertion that sets the precedent for *Touchstones of the Spirit*: "Let us start with a recognition that there is indeed a fundamental crisis in the modern world and that its root causes are spiritual." This work is divided into three parts: I. Echoes of Tradition, II. The Wastelands of Modernity and III. East and West. Oldmeadow elaborates on these themes: "This compilation of essays is structured around three themes: the timeless messages of Tradition; the obscuration of this perennial wisdom in the modern world; and the spiritual intercourse between East and West which holds out some hope that we may yet recover something of what we have lost."

The first part contains an interesting collection of essays on a wide spectrum of subjects offering a unique look at the integral spirituality of the Australian Aborigines and its relationship to the other religious and wisdom traditions of the world. While it is quite fashionable to claim that all of the religions are one, Oldmeadow delves deeper into the inherent limitations of modern Western philosophy as well as comparative religion when they are not contextualised within the principal knowledge of the perennial philosophy. Although all religions are one in their essence their forms are multiple. The explanation for the existence of multiple religions is precisely because they are all different—for this reason it has been said that the Divine never



speaks the "same" language twice. The author takes the reader into the heart of Shankara's metaphysics in order to elaborate on the Advaita Vedanta and the doctrine of *maya*. He explores the profundity of the Bodhisattva ideal and expands upon Western interpretations. He also provides an original essay on the modern notion of biography, which has many detrimental ramifications. The last piece in this section is devoted to a book by Joseph Epes Brown, a remarkable scholar of Native American traditions.

The second part of the book "Wastelands of Modernity" is superbly and profoundly encapsulated in the essay "The False Prophets of Modernity":

Some of the symptoms: ecological catastrophe, a material sign of the rupture between Heaven and Earth; a rampant materialism and consumerism, signifying a surrender to the illusion that man can live by bread alone; the genocidal extirpation of traditional cultures by "modernization"; political barbarities on an almost unimaginable scale; social discord, endemic violence, and dislocations of unprecedented proportions; widespread alienation, ennui, and a sense of spiritual sterility amidst the frenetic confusion and din of modern life; a religious landscape dominated by internecine and inter-religious and by the emergence of xenophobic fundamentalisms in both East and West; the loss of any sense of the sacred, even among those who remain committed to religious forms, many of whom have retreated into a simplistic and credulous religious literalism or into a vacuous liberalism where "anything goes."

Another insightful essay contained in this section is "Frankenstein's Children: Science, Scientism, and Self-Destruction", which further elaborates on the inherent flaws of modern science by its attempt to make an absolute of itself and usurp all of Reality into its fold that is juxtaposed by sacred science: "By its very nature modern science is thus unable to apprehend or accommodate any realities of a supra-sensorial order. Science (a method of inquiry) becomes scientism (an ideology) when it refuses to acknowledge the limits of its own competence". There are many insights

to ponder in the essay "Computers: An Academic Cargo Cult?", including an inquiry into the true meaning of intelligence and its relationship to what has been termed culturism. "The Past Disowned" explores the postmodern outlook and its hazardous implications for education. This section concludes with a review of Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*, an overnight New Age best seller whose shortcomings Professor Oldmeadow exposes in the light of the *sophia perennis*.

Part three presents an overview of the work of two seminal representatives of the perennial philosophy, Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy and Frithjof Schuon. In the third part there is also an essay on Western scholarship and its attempts to articulate the wisdom of the East; another contains homage to the doyen of the study of the world's religions, Professor Huston Smith. Additionally, there is an essay offering a rare look at Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux), a relatively unknown French Benedictine who immersed himself for numerous years in Advaita Vedanta and contributed to an integral understanding of the Hindu *dharma*. This section ends with an insightful essay on inter-religious understanding and lays out valuable pointers as to how to make it more complete.

Never before have there been so many counterfeit spiritualities, nor has spirituality previously been turned into a business as it has today and in no other time have we witnessed the massive destruction of traditional societies, something that has become a global pandemic. Paradoxically there are more tangible points of contact with the sacred than ever before. How is one to make sense of this? According to the unanimous teaching of all the spiritual traditions of the world, we are living at the end of a temporal cycle. Professor Oldmeadow takes no prisoners in critiquing the errors of the modern and postmodern mindset, yet he also supplies the principles that permit us to move beyond the current impasse. For all those seeking to reclaim the sacred in the midst of the ambiguity and confusion in the present age *Touchstones of the Spirit* offers an impressive spectrum of pointers to assist in this search.

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He is currently editing an issue of *Studies in Comparative Religion* dedicated to "Psychology and the Perennial Philosophy". He lives in California.

The TV Within

Mary Midgley

SOUL DUST: THE MAGIC OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Nicholas Humphrey

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Nicholas Humphrey is more human and more entertaining than many psychologists. He also deserves thanks because, in the seventies, he helped dispel the behaviourist convention which

kept discussions of consciousness out of scientific talk altogether. His suggestion was that conscious thought mainly evolved, not to solve practical problems but to develop social tact among animals living together. This evolutionary talk reassured scientists that the topic was a decent one, so controversies about it have raged merrily ever since.

Humphrey's approach to this topic was, however, always slightly odd. He used these social needs to explain, not just why consciousness has gone on developing but why it arose originally. Yet how could social needs - which don't seem to bother plants - ever have troubled creatures which were not conscious already? Humphrey's strange assumption that they could still haunts this book, in which he claims to have finally solved the 'hard problem of consciousness' - the question how our subjective life can exist at all in a world of matter which is supposedly fully described by the physical sciences. (He now uses the word consciousness to mean only an extra intensity of feeling characteristic of human beings. But as he still claims to have solved the whole 'hard problem' this makes little difference).

He does not undertake the complete rethinking of mind-body questions which would actually be needed to solve that problem. This rethinking would need to centre on the concept of matter itself. Matter is still often imagined, in seventeenth-century style, as an inert, passive stuff moved only by impact from outside. Since this view was deliberately designed by devout scientists to leave space for God as the source of all activity, it rather naturally becomes unworkable