

LINGS, MARTIN, & MINNAAR, CLINTON (Eds.). (2007). *The underlying religion: An introduction to the perennial philosophy*. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom. 368 pp. ISBN 9781933316437. Softbound, \$24.95. *Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos.*

“There is...one sole religion and one sole worship for all beings endowed with understanding, and this is presupposed through a variety of rites” – Nicholas of Cusa

When exploring the foundations of transpersonal psychology and even humanistic psychology (Maslow, 1968, 1994) it becomes evident that the perennial philosophy¹ is central to the tenants of transpersonal psychology which is verified (Ferrer, 2000; 2002) and supported by key figures of the transpersonal field such as: Frances Vaughan (1982); Robert Hutchins (1987); Ken Wilber (1994); Kaisa Puhakka (2008); Bryan Wittine (1993); Stanislav Grof (1998); and Roger Walsh (1993).

Due to the pivotal function of the perennial philosophy within both transpersonal and humanistic psychology this volume will be of paramount interest to researchers and practitioners and belongs in every library of transpersonal and humanistic psychology.

This recent anthology was compiled by Clinton Minnaar and the late Dr. Martin Lings (1909–2005), one of the leading perennialist authors of the XXth century, who was the Keeper of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books at the British Museum.

This anthology is organized into seven themes, each theme having its corresponding essays:

I. ‘TRADITION AND MODERNITY’, describes the hiatus that divides the sacred orientation of the traditional world from that of the secular and progress driven modern and post-modern world.

Nothing and nobody is any longer in the right place; men no longer recognize any effective authority in the spiritual order or any legitimate power in the temporal; the “profane” presume to discuss what is sacred, and to contest its character and even its existence; the inferior judges the superior, ignorance sets bounds to wisdom, error prevails over truth, the human supersedes the divine, earth overtops heaven, the individual sets the measure for all things and claims to dictate to the universe laws drawn entirely from his own relative and fallible reason. “Woe unto you, ye blind guides,” the Gospel says; and indeed everywhere today one sees nothing but blind leaders of the blind, who, unless restrained by some timely check, will inevitably lead them into the abyss, there to perish with them. (pp. 317–318)

II. 'TRADITIONAL COSMOLOGY AND MODERN SCIENCE' underscores the implicit limitations of modern science, its failures and destructive tendencies for not receiving its directives from divine principles utilized since time immemorial in both East and West.

At the heart of the traditional sciences of the cosmos, as well as traditional anthropology, psychology, and aesthetics stands the *scientia sacra* which contains the principles of these sciences while being primarily concerned with the knowledge of the Principle which is both sacred knowledge and knowledge of the sacred *par excellence*, since the Sacred as such is none other than the Principle. (p. 117)

III. 'METAPHYSICS' gives a clear exposition on what is and what is not integral metaphysics according to the perennial philosophy which has nothing to do with "New Age" spiritualities.

[I]n truth, pure metaphysics being essentially above and beyond all form and all contingency is neither Eastern nor Western but universal. The exterior forms with which it is covered only serve the necessities of exposition, to express whatever is expressible. These forms may be Eastern or Western; but under the appearance of diversity there is always a basis of unity, at least, wherever true metaphysics exists, for the simple reason that truth is one. (p. 95)

IV. 'SYMBOLISM' contextualizes symbols outside the pale of modern psychology or that of the "unconscious" which they are commonly thought to originate rather than that of their true origin *in divinis* as are "archetypes".

The answer to the question 'What is Symbolism?', if deeply understood, has been known to change altogether a man's life; and it could indeed be said that most of the problems of the modern world result from ignorance of that answer. As to the past however, there is no traditional doctrine which does not teach that this world is the world of symbols, inasmuch as it contains nothing which is not a symbol. (Lings, 1991, p. vii)

V. 'THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY' provides a revision and an expansion, *mutatis mutandis* of what has been commonly attributed and often wrongly so as the perennial philosophy or the 'transcendent unity of religions'. It is through the perennial philosophy that true and authentic interfaith dialogue can precede for both the differences and similarities are taken into account without compromising the integrity of each tradition. Ibn 'Arabi² writes:

My heart is capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles
and a convent for Christian Monks,
And idol-temple and the pilgrim's Ka'ba [Mecca],
And the tables of the Torah and the book of the Koran;

I follow the religion of Love, whichever way his camels take;
my religion and my faith is the true religion.
(Ibn 'Arabi, quoted in Lings & Minnaar, p. 224)

VI. 'BEAUTY' makes it clear that it is incumbent upon anyone on a spiritual path to live within a context of beauty for spiritual support *vis-à-vis* highlighting the inherent the dangers and pitfalls of not having such an integral milieu.

“It is told that once Ananda, the beloved disciple of the Buddha, saluted his master and said: “Half of the holy life, O master, is friendship with the beautiful, association with the beautiful, communion with the beautiful.” “Say not so, Ananda, say not so!” the master replied. “It is not half the holy life; it is the whole of the holy life.” (p. 249).

VII. 'VIRTUE AND PRAYER' provides important notes on spiritual guidance, complementing the previous chapters dealing predominantly with that of traditional doctrine.

All great spiritual experiences agree in this: there is no common measure between the means put into operation and the result. “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible,” says the Gospel. In fact, what separates man from divine Reality is but a thin partition: God is infinitely close to man, but man is infinitely far from God. This partition, for man, is a mountain; man stands in front of a mountain which he must remove with his own hands. He digs away the earth, but in vain, the mountain remains; man however goes on digging, in the name of God. And the mountain vanishes. It was never there. (p. 308)

The Afterword entitled 'The Revival of Interest in Tradition' written by the late perennialist Whitall N. Perry (1920–2005), provides a condensed overview of the formative figures of the perennialist or traditionalist school and their unique contributions.

NOTES

¹ Readers may be curious by the title of this recent volume: *The Underlying Religion: An Introduction to the Perennial Philosophy* as the perennial philosophy is commonly attributed to Aldous Huxley who did not coin the phrase as it is often mistaken. Huxley rather published an anthology under this title in 1945 that was widely recognized and from this time on was associated with the perennial philosophy. What is not commonly known is that there is a group of writers and spiritual practitioners that have dedicated their lives to the exposition of the perennial philosophy known as the 'perennialist' or 'traditionalist' school of comparative religion. Although it is not a “school” *per se*, it is sometimes referred to as such which can lead to misunderstandings, for the truths articulated by the perennial philosophy are not the exclusive possession of any such school or individual nor can they be invented for that matter.

² Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240), also known as Shaykh al-Akbar (the Greatest Master), is an exponent *par excellence* of the perennial philosophy. In the quote above he introduced an Andalusian model of religion that allowed the three Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—to live side by side in peace for many centuries. Not only were these diverse traditions living and fostering a spirit of “tolerance” toward the

multiplicity of spiritual forms but they were each flourishing in an esoteric ecumenicism providing some of the most exalted examples of true and authentic mysticisms East or West that simultaneously embraced the 'transcendent unity of religions'. Some of these axial mystics are Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), St. John of the Cross (1542–1591), St. Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), Solomon ibn Gabirol (1021–1058), Ibn Rushd or Averroes (1126–1198) and it cannot be forgotten that the Zohar was first found in Spain during 13th century, considered to be one of the most important works on Kabbalah or Jewish mysticism.

REFERENCES

- BENDECK SOTILLOS, S. (2007). Modern psychology in the light of sufi psychology: Some reflections. *SUFI*, Issue 73, 40–43.
- FERRER, J. (2000). The perennial philosophy revisited. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 32(1), 7–30.
- FERRER, J. (2002). *Revisioning transpersonal theory, A Participatory vision of human spirituality*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- GROF, S. (1998). *The cosmic game: Explorations of the frontiers of human consciousness*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- HUTCHINS, R. (1987). Ten simple ways to explain transpersonal psychology. *PDTP: Newsletter of the proposed division of transpersonal psychology in the American Psychological Association*, 9–12.
- HUXLEY, A. (1945). *The perennial philosophy*. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.
- LINGS, M. (1991). *Symbol & archetype: A study of the meaning of existence*. Cambridge, UK: Quinta Essentia.
- MASLOW, A. H. (1994). *Religions, values, and peak-experiences*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.
- MASLOW, A. H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*. Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand.
- PUHAKKA, K. (2008). Transpersonal perspective: An antidote to the postmodern malaise. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 40(1), 6–19.
- VAUGHAN, F. (1982). The transpersonal perspective: A personal account. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 14(1), 37–45.
- WALSH, R. N., & VAUGHAN, F. (1993). The transpersonal movement: A history and state of the art. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 25(3), 123–139.
- WILBER, K. (1994). Foreword. In J. Nelson, *Healing the split: Integrating spirit into our understanding of the mentally ill* (pp. viii–xii). Albany: SUNY Press.
- WITTINE, B. (1993). Assumptions of transpersonal psychotherapy. In R. Walsh, & F. Vaughan (Eds), *Paths beyond ego: The transpersonal vision* (pp. 165–171). New York: Putnam.

The Editors

Dr. Martin Lings received an English degree at Oxford in 1932 and was appointed Lecturer in Anglo-Saxon at the University of Kaunas. His interest in Islam and in Arabic took him to Egypt in 1939, and in the following year he was given a lectureship in Cairo University. In 1952 he returned to England and took a degree in Arabic at London University. From 1970–74 he was Keeper of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books at the British Museum where he had been in special charge of the Qur'an manuscripts, amongst other treasures, since 1955. Dr. Lings is the author of numerous books including author of the authoritative biography of the Prophet, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, *The Secret of Shakespeare: His Plays in the Light of Sacred Art, Symbol and Archetype*, *A Sufi Saint in the Twentieth Century*

Shaikh Ahmad al-Alawi: His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy, The Eleventh Hour: The Spiritual Crisis of the Modern World in Light of Tradition and Prophecy. He is an authority on tradition and on Sufism in particular. Dr. Lings passed from this world at the age of 96 on May 12th, 2005.

Clinton Minnaar completed an undergraduate degree at the University of Cape Town, majoring in Comparative Religion, Philosophy, and English. After finishing a teaching degree, he pursued his interest in the Perennialist school of thought, writing an M.A. on the epistemological and ecumenical concerns of the mystical experience debate. He presently works in the publishing field as a copyeditor, having spent several years in the book trade.

The Reviewer

Samuel Bendeck Sotillos received an M.A. in Integrative Education from Norwich University and also an M.A. in Transpersonal Psychology from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology and has gained extensive training in both transpersonal and humanistic approaches. He currently works as a mental health clinician in California.