

Modern Discontents and the Wisdom of the Ages: A Conversation with Harry Oldmeadow

Interviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos



Harry Oldmeadow was for many years the Coordinator of Philosophy and Religious Studies at La Trobe University, Bendigo (Victoria, Australia). He was born in Melbourne in 1947. His parents were Christian missionaries in India, where he spent nine years of his childhood and developed an early interest in the civilizations and religions of the East. Dr. Oldmeadow is a recognized authority on the Traditionalist or Perennialist school of comparative religious thought. He lives with his wife in Bendigo.

He has published extensively in different journals and authored, edited, and co-authored many books, including *Traditionalism: Religion in the Light of Perennial Philosophy* (2000; reissued 2011), *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions* (2004), *The Betrayal of Tradition: Essays on the Spiritual Crisis of Modernity*

(edited 2005), *Light from the East: Eastern Wisdom for the Modern West* (edited 2007), *A Christian Pilgrim in India: The Spiritual Journey of Swami Abhisbiktananda (Henri Le Saux)* (2008), *Mediations: Essays on the Perennial Philosophy and Religious Pluralism* (2008), *Crossing Religious Frontiers: Studies in Comparative Religion* (edited 2010), *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy* (2010), *Touchstones of the Spirit: Essays on Religion, Tradition, and Modernity* (2012), *Black Elk, Lakota Visionary: The Oglala Holy Man and Sioux Tradition* (2018) and *Timeless Truths and Modern Delusions: The Perennial Philosophy as a guide for contemporary Buddhists* (2021).

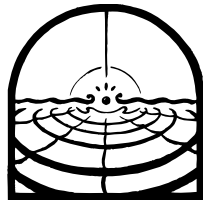
The conversation was conducted on June 12, 2020, through an online platform allowing Dr. Oldmeadow to address the questions from his home in Australia.

Samuel Bendeck Sotillos: Perhaps we could begin with your extraordinary upbringing that immersed you in the complexity of human diversity and religious pluralism. Could you speak about the enduring impact it has had on your perspective?

Harry Oldmeadow: I was born in 1947, and after the first couple of years of my life my parents moved to India as missionaries; we were in northern India, not too far from Benares. They were Methodist missionaries. We spent nine years in India. I spent some of the time at a boarding school in Mussoorie in the Himalayan foothills, and the rest of the time in a town called Azamgarh, which was predominantly a Hindu community, although there were a large number of Muslims, Sikhs, and various other smaller groups. I was about two and a half when we moved there, so I picked up the Hindi and Urdu languages very quickly. I had many Indian friends, so from a very early age I was conscious of this cultural diversity, different languages, different ways of seeing and being in the world, different religious traditions. So, I suppose that left some sort of impression and disposition. My father was actually very interested in other religions. There were conversations around the dinner table; there were books about different traditions that were in my father's library; all of these influences pervaded the atmosphere, you might say.

SBS: Could you please talk about how you came to learn about the exponents of the perennial philosophy or the transcendent unity of religions such as René Guénon (1886–1951), Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

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