

## Muslim Intellectuals and the Perennial Philosophy in the Twentieth Century<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract:

This paper will examine how Muslim intellectuals, as a result of their attachment to the doctrine of Divine Unity (*tawhūd*), the Quran, *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad, and the doctrines and methods of Sufism, were largely responsible for the restating of the perennial philosophy in the West in the twentieth century.

The article consists of four sections: an introduction to the term 'philosophia perennis'; the place of the perennial philosophy in the Qur'an and Sunnah; the perennial philosophy and the Islamic intellectual Tradition; the lives, writings, and intellectual contributions of the five most important Muslim perennialists of the twentieth century, namely, Guénon, Schuon, Burckhardt, Lings, and Nasr

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the inextricable link between Islam and the perennial philosophy in the twentieth century, while defending the role that orthodoxy and orthopraxy play in any authentic expression of the perennial philosophy.

**Key terms:** Perennial Philosophy, Rene Guenon, Frithjof Schuon, Titus Burkhardt, Martin Lings, Seyyed Hossein Nasr

There is an attempt from certain quarters to marginalize the relationship between Islam and the perennial philosophy, and specifically what Frithjof Schuon called, “the transcendent unity of religions.” On the one hand, some interpreters of Schuon and the perennial philosophy have denied, in the name of pure esoterism, the necessary religious forms and discipline which allow man to transcend himself, and have an authentic vision of Reality. On the other hand, some Muslim scholars have attempted to deny salvation and sanctification for those in other orthodox religions.<sup>2</sup> These two trends, which deny an aspect of religion, fail to grasp the fullness and grandeur of religion, as that which binds man to his Source, the common and transcendent Source of all authentic religions.

Our paper will examine how Muslim intellectuals, as a result of their attachment to the doctrine of Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*), the Quran, *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad, and the doctrines and methods of Sufism, were largely responsible for the restating of the perennial philosophy in the West in the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> It is not an accident that the great majority of those responsible for restating the perennial philosophy in the modern era, such as René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon, Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, adhered to the doctrine and practiced the rites of Islam.<sup>4</sup>

At the heart of the perennial philosophy is metaphysics or gnosis. It is from this vantage point that the prophets, *avatars*, saints, and sages have spoken about the essential unity of religions. For the religions only truly meet at the Divine Principle, and not on the formal or exoteric level, where we sometimes find considerable differences. We will look at the origin of the term the “perennial philosophy” (*sophia perennis*) in the West, from men such as Agostino Steuco and Gottfried von Leibnitz, who understood and appreciated the perennial wisdom in the various religions that they encountered. We will also examine the Islamic equivalents to this term, such as *al-ḥikmat al-khālīdah* and *jāvīdān khīrad*.

Islam, like the perennial philosophy, is governed and shaped by the principle of Divine Unity (*tawḥūd*). God, as the Absolute and Infinite Reality, is One (*al-Aḥad*). In Islam, man, religion, philosophy, art, nature, and the whole of the cosmos, all reflect the principle of Divine Unity. Each messenger and prophet came to revive the doctrine of Divine Unity. Within

the Quran itself, as well as the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad, one finds some of the most universal expressions of the *religio perennis*. Indeed, the Prophet Muḥammad himself simply revived the primordial religion (*al-dūn al-ḥanūf*) of Adam and Abraham. More than anything else, we contest that it was direct knowledge of the doctrine of Divine Unity, as well as the unity of the divinely sent messengers and prophets, which inspired the writings of Guénon, Schuon, Burckhardt, Lings, and Nasr. This is true of not only their texts that speak directly about Islam, but also those that appreciate the Truth and Beauty in other religions, and also point to the transcendent unity of religions.

We will also examine the perennial philosophy and its expressions in the Islamic intellectual tradition, including the Muslim philosophers, Suhrawardi's *Ishrāqū* school, Ibn 'Arabū's *Akbarū* school—which all found a synthesis in the writings of Mullā Ṣadrā. Further, we will pay close attention to Islamic esoterism or Sufism, and the poetry and prose of the Sufis, which culminated in Persian Sufi poetry, and the writings of Jalāl al-Dūn Rūmū, Ḥāfīz, and Maḥmud Shabistarū. These writings clearly emphasize the transcendent unity of religions, and issue from the inner reality (*ḥaqūqah*) of the Quran and the soul of the Prophet Muḥammad. We will also look at other streams related to the perennial philosophy in the Islamic tradition, such as Ithnā 'asharū Shū'ism and spiritual chivalry (*futuwwah*).

After establishing the imperative link between Islam and the perennial philosophy, we will examine the lives, writings, and intellectual contributions of Guénon, Schuon, Burckhardt, Lings, and Nasr. Not only did they help, more than any other group of scholars, to bring the teachings of the Islamic intellectual tradition and the perennial philosophy to the attention of the West, but perhaps more importantly, they benefited from the initiation, doctrine, and methods of Islam and Sufism. These Muslim intellectuals were not simply concerned with theoretical metaphysics, but gained—through the inner reality of the Quran and soul of the Prophet—a Way to the Ultimate Reality—the Eternal Sophia contained at the center of the Intellect, which transcends and is at the same time the source of our

rational faculty. Therefore, it must be stated that their immense contributions to the fields of the perennial philosophy, which includes, metaphysics, ontology, cosmology, symbolism, comparative religion, art, science, as well as a critique of modernity, scientism, secularism, and the environmental crisis, was made possible because of their attachment to the exoteric and esoteric aspects of the Islamic tradition. While all of these men wrote about other traditions, and knew that all orthodox religions lead to salvation and Truth,<sup>5</sup> they believed in and practiced the religion of Islam, which enabled them to know the transcendent unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), as well as the transcendent unity of religions.<sup>6</sup>

This paper will demonstrate the providential link between Islam and the perennial philosophy in the twentieth century, while defending the role that orthodoxy and orthopraxy play in any authentic expression of the perennial philosophy, with a particular emphasis on Islamic orthodoxy and the perennial philosophy. For one cannot realize the One who transcends forms, except by adhering to a form that the One has revealed. Most of the leading traditionalists in the twentieth century believed in and practiced Islam, and as a result, their message was universal and helped to revive an authentic appreciation and understanding of other religions, which are also paths that lead to salvation and sanctification for different individuals and communities.

### The Perennial Philosophy

The essence of the perennial philosophy is metaphysics. Every religion begins with a descent of the Logos from Heaven, which allows man to ascend vertically from the relative to the Absolute, and have a direct taste of principial knowledge. The perennial philosophy is first and foremost concerned with the vertical axis of religion, which enables man to return to his Source. Yet, when a sage encounters the multiplicity of religious forms, and recognizes the Truth and Beauty in these forms—which he has discovered through his own tradition—he cannot ignore that at the heart of all religions is a common and perennial Truth. While many scholars mistakenly attribute this unity to historical borrowing, the perennial philosophy sees in the variety of religious forms, unique and direct

manifestations of the same Divine Wisdom or Sophia. Therefore, the perennial philosophy is concerned with knowing the Absolute Truth through a particular religion, and the perennial manifestations of the Truth in various religions.

While it was commonly believed that Gottfried von Leibniz was the first to use the term the *philosophia perennis* in 1714, according to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “the term was probably employed for the first time by Agostino Steuco (1497-1548), the Renaissance philosopher and theologian who was an Augustinian.”<sup>7</sup> S.H. Nasr also states,

The work of Steuco *De perenni philosophia* was influenced by Ficino, Pico, and even Nicolas of Cusa, especially the *De pace fidei* which speaks of harmony between various religions. Steuco, who knew Arabic and other Semitic languages and was a librarian of the Vatican Library where he had access to the “wisdom of the ages” as far as this was possible in the Occident at that time, followed the ideas of these earlier figures concerning the presence of an ancient wisdom which had existed from the dawn of history.<sup>8</sup>

Steuco and the earlier perennialists in the West believed this wisdom extended beyond Christianity, and was present in Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Greek Philosophy, and the ancient Egyptian tradition.<sup>9</sup> While the perennial philosophy has been articulated in important religious and philosophical texts, its appearance does not always come in the same form. The greatest masterpieces of traditional art and architecture are clear signs of a living intellectual tradition, even if religious or philosophical manuscripts are absent.<sup>10</sup> In addition, many esoteric traditions continue to be transmitted orally.<sup>11</sup> The perennial philosophy has existed as long as man has. While the great works of traditional prose and poetry, and especially sacred art and architecture, aid in our return to the Source, not all of these arose in every tradition. For example, wisdom in the heart of a Native American shaman is not dependent upon its written articulation, and in many

cases nature or the cosmic revelation serves as a support for intellection.

There are direct equivalents of the term the *philosophia perennis* in various religions, such as *sanatāna dharma* in Hinduism and *al-ḥikmat al-khālīdah* and *jāvūdān khīrad* in Islam,<sup>12</sup> which pre-date its use in the West, and may have also influenced its formal construction. It was not until the twentieth century however, that the meaning of the perennial philosophy was expounded with such clarity and depth by traditionalists such as René Guénon, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, and especially Frithjof Schuon. According to Frithjof Schuon:

“*Philosophia perennis*” is generally understood as referring to that metaphysical truth which has no beginning, and which remains the same in all expressions of wisdom. Perhaps it would here be better or more prudent to speak of a “*Sophia perennis*”, since it is not a question of artificial mental constructions, as is all too often the case in philosophy; or again, the primordial wisdom that always remains true to itself could be called “*Religio perennis*”, given that by its nature it in a sense involves worship and spiritual realization...<sup>13</sup>.

When referring to the perennial philosophy, Schuon and other traditionalists use several terms interchangeably. While these terms each possess different shades of meaning, they all refer to the primordial wisdom that is at the heart of all authentic expressions of the Truth, whether religious or philosophical. One must keep in mind that the original meaning of the latter term is the love of wisdom, which modern and postmodern philosophy has apparently forgotten. In any case, Schuon preferred the terms *religio perennis* and *sophia perennis*, while Guénon used the term tradition instead of religion because of its negative connotations in the France of his time, and A.K. Coomaraswamy added the term *universalis* to the *philosophia perennis*.<sup>14</sup> S.H. Nasr states:

In one sense, *sanatāna dharma* or *sophia perennis* is related to the Primordial Tradition and therefore to the Origin of human existence. But this view should not in any way detract from or destroy the authenticity of later messages from Heaven in the form of various revelations, each of which begins with *an* origin which is *the* Origin and which marks the beginning of a tradition that is at once *the* Primordial Tradition and its adaptation to a particular humanity, the adaptation being a Divine Possibility manifested on the human plane.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, while the perennial philosophy fully appreciates various manifestations of the Primordial Tradition, it is also concerned with understanding and preserving particular manifestations of tradition, each of which contains in its heart the Primordial Tradition. The perennial philosophy rejects syncretism and the attempt to create a meta-religion, which is devoid of religious forms, such as doctrines, rites, and laws. It is only through attaching oneself to a specific Revelation and tradition from Heaven that one can reach the transcendent Source of all religions. Unlike the pseudo-esoteric and New Age movements, which deny the validity of any one religion in the name of universalism, traditionalists who have articulated the perennial philosophy live in one religious universe, while understanding and appreciating other religions.

Further, all religions in their original form contain exoteric and esoteric dimensions.<sup>16</sup> The exoteric doctrines, rites, and laws of a religion, provide a means of salvation in the hereafter for the faithful. Those who wish to see God here and now must also embark on the initiatic and spiritual path, which is synonymous with esoterism. The mistake of many in the West (who are often encouraged by false teachers from the East), is to attempt to practice esoterism without the necessary doctrines, rites, and laws of a particular tradition, which provides the necessary foundation and protection for those on the spiritual path. We should not confuse the perennial philosophy or the transcendent unity of religions with a false uniformity that strips all religions

of their unique doctrines and methods that make the journey to the One possible. Moreover, it is only at the level of the esoteric that the religions begin to converge, and finally meet in the common Principle. Only the gnostic whose heart has been illuminated by sacred knowledge, which is the goal of esoterism, can penetrate into his own and other religious forms, and perceive the One True Reality as it reveals itself through all orthodox religions, in nature, and the heart of man.

### The Quran, *Sunnah*, and the Perennial Philosophy

Perhaps more than other religions, Hinduism and Islam are able to accept the multiplicity of religions, which lead to the Divine Reality because they stand at the alpha and omega points in this cycle of creation. In the case of Islam, one simply has to examine the writings of Jalāl al-Dūn Rūmū or Ibn ʿArabū to see how ubiquitous the principle of Divine Unity and all of its ramifications has been throughout Islamic history, even if it was not fully elaborated until the twentieth century by leading Muslim traditionalists. The writings of great Muslim sages, philosophers, and poets are rooted in the Quranic revelation and *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad, which emphasizes the unity of the Divine Principle (*tawḥīd*), as well as the chain of messengers and prophets sent by Heaven to restore the message of Divine Unity.

Therefore, to understand why the restating of the perennial philosophy in the twentieth century came primarily from Muslim intellectuals, it is necessary to understand the essential link between Islam and the perennial philosophy. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr,

Islam sees the doctrine of unity (*al-tawḥīd*) not only as the essence of its own message but as the heart of every religion. Revelation for Islam means the assertion of *al-tawḥīd* and all religions are seen as so many repetitions in different climes and languages of the doctrine of unity. Moreover, wherever the doctrine of unity was found, it is considered to be of divine origin.<sup>17</sup>



Muslims believe that the Absolute Reality revealed sacred messages to different communities through 124,000 prophets. The Quran affirms, “Every community has had a messenger.” (10:47)<sup>18</sup> Many specific prophets, whose sacred stories are also found in the Bible, are extensively referred to in the Quran, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Mary and Jesus. While the Quran does not explicitly name prophets, *avatars*, or sages, from the Iranian, Indian, or Shamanic religions,<sup>19</sup> it firmly establishes the principle of the transcendent unity of religions, which extends to all the world’s great religions.<sup>20</sup> According to the Quran:

Verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians—all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds—shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve (2:62).

Therefore, we can assert that the Quran affirms the variety of sacred forms as paths for different communities that all lead to the Transcendent Reality. It has been stated by some that this verse and others like it were abrogated,<sup>21</sup> and that Islam only accepts other religions in their original form. While it is true that many religions that pre-date Islam have decayed (including some modernist and “fundamentalist” currents within Islam itself!), the Quran does not expect other religions to be carbon copies of Islam.

Unto every one of you We have appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you must all return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ (5:48).

The Quran defines all of the prophets, including Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, as *muslims*, or those who surrender to the Divine Reality. *Islām*, or submission to the Divine Reality, is also seen as the universal essence of all prophetic messages, while at the same time corresponding to the crystallization and descent of the Quranic revelation in the heart of the Prophet Muḥammad beginning in 610 A.D. In the mind of most Muslims, there is not a clear line of demarcation between the religion of Islam and its various manifestations and crystallizations in different religions throughout history. Therefore, some Muslims expect the submission (*islām*) of Christ or the Buddha, as practiced among their followers, to look exactly like the Islam that is practiced in Mecca in the twenty-first century.

While the form of the Quran is clearly situated in the Abrahamic universe, it is only by examining the inner reality (*ḥaqūqah*) of the Quran that one can find close correspondences with other religions from the East, and also the indigenous traditions. According to the Quran, “On Earth there are signs [of God’s existence, visible] to all who are endowed with inner certainty, just as [there are signs thereof] within your own selves: can you not, then, see?” (51:20-21) If the Quran represents the central theophany of the Divine Reality in a manner similar to the Torah in Judaism, it also draws our attention to the book of the cosmos and also the soul of man.

The cosmos or nature as Divine revelation is clearly emphasized among the Native American, Aboriginal, and Shinto traditions, and well as in Taoism. The soul or spirit of man as revelation, which is central in Christianity as well as the Indian religions, is also found in the Quran. Jesus is called ‘the spirit of God’ (*nūḥullāh*) in the Quran. The Arabic term *nūḥullah* can be translated as the breath, spirit, or word of God. Jesus, and by analogy the *avatars* in Hinduism and the inner being of each prophet and man, is a direct revelation from the Absolute, in a manner similar to the book in Judaism and Islam. By emphasizing the three grand revelations (the book, the cosmos, and man), Muslims have the necessary intellectual tools to see the signs of the Divine Reality in other religions.

There are also various terms in the Quran that directly correspond to the perennial philosophy and the primordial tradition. Islam renewed the

primordial religion (*al-dūn al-ḥanūf*), which is associated with the prophet Abraham.<sup>22</sup> The primordial religion in the Quran is also closely related to man's primordial nature (*fiṭrah*), which is hidden by forgetfulness, and made accessible through religion and the remembrance (*dhikr*) of the Divine.

The perennial philosophy was also expressed in the *Sunnah* or wonts of the Prophet Muḥammad (570-632), which complements and acts as a commentary upon the Quran. According to an account of the Prophet Muḥammad's life when he ordered all of the pre-Islamic idols in the Ka'bah to be smashed:

Apart from the icon of the Virgin Mary and the child Jesus, and a painting of an old man, said to be Abraham, the walls inside had been covered with pictures of pagan deities. Placing his hands protectively over the icon, the Prophet told ʿUthmān to see that all the other paintings, except that of Abraham, were effaced.<sup>23</sup>

There is a major difference between the idolatry practiced in Arabia in the pre-Islamic age of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*), and the sacred art and symbols of other authentic religions, which the Prophet Muḥammad respected. The Prophet Muḥammad, as the spiritual and political leader of the new Muslim community (*ummah*), respected all of the earlier divinely sent messengers and religions, as well as the people who practiced these religions. In response to a conflict between a Jew and a zealous Muslim who wanted to assert the superiority of the Prophet over other prophets, the Prophet Muḥammad stated, "Say not that I am better than Moses," and "Say not that I am better than Jonah."<sup>24</sup>

The Prophet of Islam married a Jewish and a Christian woman, who were not forced to convert to Islam. He also consulted with a Christian monk, who was related to his wife Khadūjah, after first receiving the Revelation. Throughout the life of the Prophet, Jews and Christians in Arabia were not forced to convert to Islam, but were allowed to practice their religion in peace and security as long as they did not harm the Muslim community. The

Prophet even established a treaty with the Arab and Jewish tribes in Medina known as the Constitution of Medina, which guaranteed and outlined certain basic rights and responsibilities for Arabs and Jews. A Christian congregation was also allowed to pray in the Prophet's home—the Medina mosque—according to their own rites.<sup>25</sup>

What is of greater significance for Muslims, as far as the spiritual dimension of religion is concerned, is the pinnacle of the Prophet's spiritual life when he made his miraculous Night Journey with the Angel Gabriel (Jibra'ūl) and a mythical horse *burāq* from Mecca to Jerusalem and led a congregation of various prophets in prayer, and then made a vertical ascension (*mfrāj*) through the heavens, meeting various prophets and angels along the way, to the Divine Presence.<sup>26</sup> It was here that canonical prayers were revealed. The Prophet in fact said, "The daily prayer (*ṣalāh*) is the *mfrāj* of the believer." One therefore finds a direct correlation between quintessential esoterism and the exoteric rites of Islam. It is by adhering to his own tradition, and specifically the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, that a Muslim can enter the Divine Stratosphere and gain a direct vision of the Supreme Reality, as well as the countless prophets and angelic beings, and understand the transcendent unity of religions.

The Prophet of Islam is at once the Logos and, like other prophets in the Islamic universe, a manifestation of the Logos. He represents the plenitude of the prophetic function, as well as the human norm, which cannot be reduced to the modern standards that define Promethean man.<sup>27</sup>

It is clear that in the Quran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet of Islam, one finds some of the clearest expressions of the perennial philosophy, and the transcendent unity of religions, which Muslim sages throughout history and in the twentieth century drew from to elucidate the perennial philosophy. By referring and adhering to their own traditional doctrines and methods they drew from the Source of Intelligence, which is peerless in its expression of the Truth:

Say: We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob

and their descendents, and that which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus, and that which has been vouchsafed to all the [other] prophets by their Sustainer: we make no distinction between any of them. And it is unto Him that we surrender ourselves (Quran 2:136).

### The Islamic Intellectual Tradition and the Perennial Philosophy

Islamic philosophy and esoterism developed along similar lines, and ultimately made use of the same intellectual faculties, although they expressed their knowledge of the Sacred in different ways. Unlike the West, where philosophy has become divorced from the Intellect (*al-ʿaql*) and reduced to the rational faculty alone, in the Islamic world Islamic philosophy was wedded to Revelation and intellection. In a similar manner, Muslim gnostics and Sufi masters described a vision of Reality that was based on the inner reality of Revelation and intellectual intuition, and not a sentimental form of love that is detached from sacred knowledge. Therefore, the expressions of the perennial philosophy that derive from the Islamic intellectual tradition are objective visions of Reality that are based on the Quran, *Sunnah*, and the central doctrine of Divine Unity, and not simply theoretical metaphysics or profane philosophy that is divorced from an operative tradition. After the Quran and *Sunnah*, the writings of sages from the Islamic intellectual tradition are of the greatest significance for the understanding of the perennial philosophy in general, and the Islamic tradition in particular. What is remarkable about the Muslim intellectuals in the twentieth century we are studying, is that they were responsible for not only restating the perennial philosophy, but also preserving and demonstrating the importance of the Islamic intellectual tradition, not to mention the Quran and *Sunnah*. According to S.H. Nasr,

For [Muslims] the sages of antiquity such as Pythagoras and Plato were “Unitarians” (*muwahhidiin*) who expressed the truth which lies at the heart of all religions. They, therefore, belonged to the Islamic universe and were not considered as

alien to it. The Islamic intellectual tradition in both its gnostic (*māʿrifāh* or *ʿirfān*) and philosophical and theosophical (*falsafāh-ḥikmah*) aspects saw the source of this unique truth which is the “Religion of the Truth” (*dūn al-ḥaqq*) in the teachings of the ancient prophets going back to Adam and considered Idrūs, whom is identified with Hermes, as the “father of philosophers” (*Abu’l-ḥukamā*).<sup>28</sup>

From al-Kindū to Mullā Ṣadrā,<sup>29</sup> Muslim philosophers and theosophers preserved and transformed Greek philosophy, as well as Persian and Indian philosophy, and followed a different trajectory from the West after the Renaissance, because of their attachment to a living tradition and Revelation, which could discern between those sages and schools who were guided by higher principles, and those trends in the West and the East which were opposed to sacred knowledge. Islamic philosophy as a whole has always relied first and foremost upon the Quranic revelation, and used the wisdom of ancient philosophers to describe their vision of Reality, which was the result of their attachment to Islam and Islamic esoterism. Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb Al-Kindū (801-866) states,

We should not be ashamed to acknowledge truth and assimilate it from whatever source it comes to us, even if it be by former generations and foreign peoples. For him who seeks the truth there is nothing of higher value than truth itself; it never cheapens or abases him who reaches for it, but ennobles and honors him.<sup>30</sup>

The Prophet Muḥammad established this principle when he said, “Seek knowledge even unto China.” Therefore, the wisdom of the ages, including sacred texts, philosophy, and the writings of gnostics and sages around the world was considered the rightful inheritance of Muslims, and was easily incorporated into Islamic philosophy and esoterism. According to S.H. Nasr,

[Al-Fārābū] sought to unify the wisdom of Aristotle and Plato, like nearly all other Muslim sages, considered the wisdom expounded by these men to have come ultimately from Divine revelation, and could not therefore be contradictory.<sup>31</sup>

Abū Naṣr al-Fārābū (870-950), and many other Muslim philosophers, were also conversant with and/or initiated into Sufi orders, and therefore helped establish an epistemology, which privileged higher modes of knowing—especially Revelation and intellectual intuition—without denying the importance of logic and reason, and those pre-Islamic currents of philosophy, which according to the early Muslim philosophers were also the result of Revelation and gnosis.<sup>32</sup>

As mentioned above, one also finds direct references to the perennial philosophy in Islamic philosophy, such as *al-ḥikmat al-khālīdah* in Arabic and *jāvūdān khīrad* in Persian, which may have influenced the formulation of the term *philosophia perennis* by Steuco and Leibnitz.<sup>33</sup> Referring to *al-ḥikmat al-khālīdah* in Arabic and *jāvūdān khīrad* in Persian, S.H. Nasr writes,

This is in fact the title of a well-known work by Ibn Miskawayh (Muskūyah) which contains metaphysical and ethical aphorisms and sayings by Islamic and pre-Islamic sages...including those from ancient Persia, India, and the Mediterranean world (Rūm).<sup>34</sup>

The accumulated wisdom of the ages, as well as direct knowledge of the Sacred is also clearly seen in the life and works of Avicenna or Abū ʿAlī Sūnā (980-1037) who was not only a Muslim philosopher and metaphysician, deeply attached to the Quran (which he had memorized), but also a traditional scientist, physician, mathematician, and psychologist, who, like al-Fārābū, wrote about the theory of music.<sup>35</sup> S.H. Nasr states,

But it was essentially the “esoteric” or “Oriental Philosophy” of Avicenna that had the greatest import in the Orient. It was his cosmology supported by his angelology that was elaborated by Suhrawardū and, after being divorced from the rationalistic and syllogistic mesh in whose matrix it was at first placed, became integrated into certain schools of Sufism.<sup>36</sup>

While being firmly rooted in the Revelation and gnosis, Avicenna, as well as Aristotle and the Greek Philosophers, was later misappropriated to promote rationalism, which was then critiqued by Ash‘arite theology, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, and Fakhr al-Dūn al-Rāzī, despite certain excesses on their part as well.<sup>37</sup> In response to his critics Avicenna or al-Shaykh al-Ra’īs (the Master among wise men) wrote,

It is not so easy and trifling to call me a heretic  
No belief in religion is firmer than mine own.  
I am the unique person in the world and if I am a heretic  
Then there is not a single Muslim anywhere in the world.<sup>38</sup>

The wisdom of the Muslim philosophers, which included ancient Greek, Iranian, and Indian philosophy, was incorporated into Suhrawardū’s *Ishrāqī* school, which relied heavily on pure intellection and gnosis, and of course the Quran and *Sunnah* of the Prophet of Islam. S.H. Nasr writes,

Suhrawardū considered himself as the reunifier of what he calls *al-ḥikmat al-laduniyyah*, or Divine Wisdom, and *al-ḥikmat al-‘atūqah*, or ancient wisdom. He believed that this wisdom is universal and perennial, the *philosophia perennis* and *universalis*, which existed in various forms among ancient Hindus and Persians, Babylonians and Egyptians, and among the Greeks up to the time of Aristotle...<sup>39</sup>

Shihāb al-Dūn Suhrawardū (1153-1191) or Shaykh al-Ishrāq (the Master of Illumination) believed philosophy began with Hermes or the prophet Idrīs in the Quran, and therefore has its origin in prophecy, and cannot be



divorced from Revelation in the name of rationalism. He also believed that he inherited this ancient wisdom from two schools in ancient Egypt and Persia, which both trace their chains of transmission back to Hermes.<sup>40</sup> Suhrawardū states,

Whoever is a traveler on the road to Truth is my companion and aid on this path. The procedure of the master of philosophy and *imām* of wisdom, the Divine Plato, was the same, and the sages who preceded Plato in time like Hermes, the father of philosophy, followed the same path. Since sages of the past, because of the ignorance of the masses, expressed their sayings in secret symbols, the refutations which have been made against them have concerned the exterior of these sayings not their real intentions. And the *Ishrāqū* wisdom, whose foundation and basis are the two principles of light and darkness as established by the Persian sages like Jāmāsp, Frashādshūr, and Būzarjumīhr, is among these hidden, secret symbols.<sup>41</sup>

The principles of Suhrawardū's *Ishrāqū* school are found in the Quran, and in all authentic revelations. Suhrawardū made use of the verse of light in the Quran (24:35), which includes the Divine Name *al-Nūr* (the Light), and the commentaries on this verse by al-Ghazzālū in his *Miskāt al-anwār* (*The Niche of Lights*).<sup>42</sup> He also relied on the writings of Avicenna, al-Ḥallāj, and the vast intellectual heritage that he inherited from Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Hermeticism, and Zoroastrianism to describe the metaphysics, ontology, cosmology, and symbolism of Divine Light.<sup>43</sup>

Suhrawardū believed that all of reality consists of degrees of light and darkness. Ultimately, all light finds its origin in the Light of lights (*Nūr al-anwār*) or the Divine Essence, which is like the Sun of existence. This Light then radiates and reflects into the cosmos and in the heart of man through a hierarchy of angels, which are like stars in the night sky. Our goal is to discover our higher self or the angel of one's being, which is the luminous source of the immanent Intellect.<sup>44</sup> Suhrawardū identifies the angel of

humanity with Gabriel (Jibra'ūl), as well as the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-quḍus*) and the Muḥammadan spirit (*al-rūḥ al-muḥammadiyyah*),<sup>45</sup> which reminds us of Christ as *Christos Angelos* in the Nag Hammadi collection.<sup>46</sup>

Suhrawardū's *Ishrāqū* school was an essential element in later branches of Islamic philosophy and gnosis, such as in the writings of Mullā Ṣadrā. According to S.H. Nasr,

The perennial wisdom which the Master of *Ishrāq* has sought to establish, or rather to re-establish, in his short terrestrial life thus became not only a dominant intellectual perspective in Shū'ism, and more generally in the eastern lands of Islam, but also overflowed the banks of the Islamic world to reach other traditions.<sup>47</sup>

Another major light in the firmament of the Islamic intellectual universe is Muḥyū al-Dūn Ibn 'Arabū (1165-1240), who made use of the legacy of Divine wisdom which his predecessors preserved and transmitted, and also added his own immense contributions. The great Andalusian gnostic, known as al-Shaykh al-akbar (the Greatest Master), relied heavily on the Quran, Ḥadūth literature, Islamic philosophy and Sufi prose and poetry to describe his theophanic visions of Reality. His major works, *al-Fuṭūḥāt al-makkiyyah* (*The Meccan Revelations*) and *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*The Bezels of Wisdom*) are among the greatest masterpieces of what Joseph Lumbard has called the "iḥsānū intellectual tradition," and the perennial philosophy.<sup>48</sup> He is famously known in the West for his poem *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* (*The Interpreter of Desires*), in which he describes the beauty of a young maiden Niẓām, who becomes a symbol for the Beloved. S.H. Nasr writes,

He met a young girl of great devoutness and beauty who henceforth became the embodiment of the eternal *sophia* for him and fulfilled a role in his life which resembles that of Beatrice in the life of Dante.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, the symbol of the feminine beloved is a common theme in the writings of the greatest Sufi masters, and, as we shall see, plays an important

role in Shū'ite esoterism through Fāṭimah the daughter of the Prophet, and also in the life of Frithjof Schuon and his successors, through the presence of the Virgin Mary. The archetypal Sophia is a manifestation of the Infinite Beauty and Wisdom of the Divine. This beatific vision allows man to see the beauty and wisdom in the various religions, the cosmos, and in his own heart. This feminine manifestation and reflection of the Divine in Islamic esoterism is what enabled Ibn 'Arabū and Frithjof Schuon to see the Truth and Beauty in other religions. It is only after seeing the archetype of Wisdom and Beauty, that one can recognize its diverse reflections in the world of forms.

It was in the *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* that Ibn 'Arabū wrote one of the most powerful set of verses, which describes what Frithjof Schuon called the *religio cordis* or religion of the heart and also the transcendent unity of religions. After seeing Nizām, Ibn 'Arabū asserts:

Receptive now my heart is for each form;  
For gazelles pasture, for monks a monastery,  
Temple for idols, Ka'bah to be rounded,  
Tables of Torah and script of Quran.  
My religion is love's religion; where'er turn  
Her camels, that religion my religion is, my faith.  
An example is set us by Bishr, lover  
Of Hind and her sister, and likewise the loves  
Of Qays and Laylā, of Mayya and Ghaylān.<sup>50</sup>

Ibn 'Arabū's poetry, and Sufi poetry in general, is not based on eroticism or a sentimental love and attachment, but on knowledge of the Sacred, which is always wedded to love of the Divine. In Islamic esoterism, the goal of the Path is union and knowledge that unites, and there is no better symbol for this than the love and union with the beloved. What also must be kept in mind is that Ibn 'Arabū saw the Essence and Formless within all forms and religions, but came to this realization because of his attachment to Islam and Sufism, which finds its source in the inner reality of the Quran and the soul of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Ibn ʿArabū and his heirs in the *Akbarū* school of gnosis elucidated the inner meaning of the central doctrine of Divine Unity (*tawḥūd*) in Islam, which is based on the first part of the *shahādah*, *Lā ilāha illaʾllāh*, or “There is no god but God,” through what became known as *waḥdat al-wujūd*, or the transcendent unity of Being. Ibn ʿArabū, along with ʿAbd al-Karūm al-Jūlū, was also responsible for explaining the esoteric meaning of the second part of the *shahādah*, *Muḥammadun rasūl Allāh*, or “Muḥammad is the messenger of God,” through the doctrine of the universal or perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*). It would not be an exaggeration to say that the whole of Islamic esoterism is based on the inner meaning of the *shahādah*, which Ibn ʿArabū wrote about with remarkable depth and clarity. The realization of this inner meaning is not dependent upon its written articulation, especially during the early centuries of Islam. Conversely, the theoretical knowledge that is gained by reading the works of Ibn ʿArabū, which was the fruit of realization for Ibn ʿArabū, is not the same as realized knowledge, which requires a living tradition, as well as the guidance of a spiritual master.

Ibn Arabū’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* also deserves special attention. According to S.H. Nasr:

The work was composed in 627/1229, and according to Ibn ʿArabū’s own words, stated in the introduction, it was inspired by a vision of the Prophet holding a book in his hand which he ordered the Shaykh to “take” and to transmit to the world so that men might benefit by it. The very title, *Bezels of Wisdom*, symbolizes the content of the book in that each “bezel” contains a precious jewel which symbolizes an aspect of Divine wisdom, each bezel is the human and spiritual nature of a prophet which serves as a vehicle for the particular aspect of Divine wisdom revealed to that prophet.<sup>51</sup>

Each chapter is named after a prophet, such as Adam, Seth, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, and contains the archetypal wisdom of that prophet, as well as the universal wisdom of the Divine Word.<sup>52</sup> Written

completely within the Islamic universe, the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* is a summary of Islamic esoterism, as well as the *sophia perennis*, which each prophet manifests in his own way.<sup>53</sup>

*Al-Fuṭūḥāt al-makkiyyah* is a vast ocean of wisdom, which also contains some of the most important expressions of the perennial philosophy in the Islamic tradition. William Chittick quotes Ibn ʿArabū in his *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-ʿArabū and the Problem of Religious Diversity*.

The People of Unveiling have been given an all-inclusive overview of all religions, creeds, sects, and doctrines concerning God. They are not ignorant of any of these. Adherents follow creeds, sects conform to specific laws, and doctrines are held concerning God or something in the engendered universe. Some of these contradict, some diverge, and some are similar. In every case the Possessor of Unveiling knows from where the doctrine, the creed, or the sect are taken, and he ascribes it to its place. He offers an excuse for everyone who holds a doctrine and does not declare him in error. He does not consider the doctrine to be vain, for God *did not create the heaven and the earth and is between them for unreality* [Quran 38:27] and He did not create the human being *in vain* [Quran 23:115]. On the contrary, He created him alone to be in His form...<sup>54</sup>

Ibn ʿArabū understood that the diversity of religious forms is based on the infinite possibilities within the Divine Names and Nature, while adhering to the religion of Islam, which provided him a path to realization and made his universal understanding of forms and the Formless possible. Ibn ʿArabi's defense of the transcendent unity of religions through the Quran is perhaps best illustrated in the following passage:

Those who adore God in the sun behold the sun, and those who adore Him in living things see a living thing, and those who adore Him in lifeless things see a lifeless thing, and

those who adore Him as a Being unique and unparalleled see that which has no like. Do not attach yourself to any particular creed exclusively, so that you disbelieve in all the rest; otherwise, you will lose much good, nay, you will fail to recognize the real truth of the matter. God, the omnipresent and omnipotent, is not limited by any one creed, for He says, (Quran 2:109), 'Wheresoever ye turn, there is the face of Allah.'<sup>55</sup>

Titus Burckhardt quotes Ibn ʿArabū to describe the Muslim view of sacred art in other religions, which issues from Muḥammad's respect for the icon of the Virgin and Christ referred to above: "The Byzantines developed the art of painting to its perfection, because for them the unique nature (*fardāniyyah*) of Jesus (Sayyidnā ʿĪsā), as expressed in his image, is the foremost support of concentrating on Divine Unity."<sup>56</sup> Ibn ʿArabū respected Islamic Law (*Sharīʿah*) and knew that such forms were not meant for Muslims, who have aniconic art, but he also clearly understood their importance for other religious communities and believed they were sanctioned by God.

What must be emphasized when examining the intellectual contributions of Ibn ʿArabū is that his knowledge was based on direct vision or gnosis of the imaginal and angelic worlds and the Divine Reality, and not only the rational faculty or other modes of knowing. S.H. Nasr brings this point out when referring to one of Ibn ʿArabū's visions of the spiritual hierarchy of saints in Sufism:

During these years the Shaykh continued to have his theophanic visions. He had already had a vision of the invisible hierarchy ruling the Universe, consisting of the Supreme Pole (*Qutb*); the two *imāms*; the four "pillars" (*awtād*) governing the four cardinal points; the seven "substitutes" (*abdāl*) the influence of each of whom reigns over one of the climates; the twelve chiefs (*nuqabāʾ*), dominating the twelve signs of the Zodiac; and the eight

nobles (*nujabā'*) corresponding to eight heavenly spheres. He also had a vision of all the spiritual poles of the revelations anteceding Islam, and realized the transcendent unity of all the traditions revealed by God to man.<sup>57</sup>

Ibn ʿArabū is one of the supreme expositors of the perennial philosophy in Islamic history, whose presence and teachings have nourished generations of Muslim philosophers, gnostics, and aspirants on the Sufi path, and helped pave the way for some of the greatest philosophers and gnostics in Islamic history, such as Ṣadr al-Dūn Qunyawū, Maḥmūd Shabistarū, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulū and Mullā Ṣadrā. The *Akbarū* school, as well as Suhrawardū's *Ishraqū* school, and the writings of Avicenna and other Muslim philosophers found a harmonious union in the Shūʿite world through the writings of Mullā Ṣadrā, who also represents one of the peaks of the Islamic intellectual tradition and the perennial philosophy.<sup>58</sup>

Ṣadr al-Dūn Shūrāzū (1571-1640), also known as Mullā Ṣadrā, was born in Shiraz. He created a harmony between Islamic philosophy, Ibn ʿArabū's school, and Shūʿism with the help of his predecessor Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulū (and other important scholars), whose *Jāmf al-asrār* (*The Sum of Divine Mysteries*) sought to unify Shūʿism, the gnosis of Ibn ʿArabū, and Sufism in general.<sup>59</sup> S.H. Nasr writes, "It is Āmulū who believed that every true Shūʿite is a Sufi and every true Sufi a Shūʿite."<sup>60</sup>

Mullā Ṣadrā was versed in traditional philosophy and the religious and intellectual sciences, which had an important impact on his life and writings. What is of even greater significance is that he may have been initiated into a Sufi order or received guidance directly from the Hidden Imām or Khiḍr.<sup>61</sup> We do know that he spent several years in retreat where he focused on quintessential prayer and returned as a realized sage.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, whether he had a regular initiation or received guidance from one of the hidden masters of Islamic esoterism, his knowledge was the fruit of spiritual discipline and gnosis and not simply the result of the rational faculty.

Mullā Ṣadrā is best known for his *al-Ḥikmat al-mutāʿāliyyah fī'l-asfār al-ʿaqliyyat al-arbāʿah* (*The Transcendent Theosophy concerning the Four*

*Intellectual Journeys of the Soul*), also known as *Asfār (Journeys)*, but his corpus includes nearly fifty manuscripts on subjects that include Quran and Ḥadūth commentary, Imamology, Shū<sup>c</sup>ite esoterism, philosophy, metaphysics, ontology, cosmogony, eschatology, symbolism, free will and predestination, epistemology, logic, and poetry.<sup>63</sup> In breadth and depth few philosophers in Islamic history can compare to Mullā Ṣadrā, whose perspective has become known as transcendent theosophy (*al-ḥikmat al-mutā<sup>c</sup>āliyyah*), not to be confused with certain pseudo-theosophical movements in the West. S.H. Nasr writes about Mullā Ṣadrā's *Asfār*:

The symbolism of wayfaring is universal and found in nearly all religions and the flight of the soul to God is often expressed in terms of a journey. The very name Taoism is derived from the Tao or the "way", while in Islam the names for both the Divine Law or *Sharīf ah* and the esoteric way or *Ṭarūqah* mean literally road and path. The Sufis especially emphasized in their works the symbolism of traveling. Some Sufi works such as the *Conference of the Birds (Mantiq al-tayr)* of <sup>c</sup>Attār are based wholly on this symbolism. Ibn <sup>c</sup>Arabū even wrote a treatise whose title includes the name "*al-asfār*" and he discusses the meaning of its singular form, *safar*, in his *al-Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfīyyah*. Mullā Ṣadrā was fully conscious of this tradition and in fact in the introduction of the *Asfār* mentions that the gnostics undertake four journeys...<sup>64</sup>

The path to illuminative knowledge that Mullā Ṣadrā writes about in his *Asfār*, as well as his other treatises on metaphysics and ontology, was inspired by his own journey through the Divine Intellect, and returns to us as a precious jewel of the Islamic intellectual tradition and the perennial philosophy, reflecting the light and wisdom of the Revelation, intellectual intuition, and reason. The teachings of Mullā Ṣadrā continue to be studied and cultivated throughout the Islamic world, as well as in India and the



West, and constitute a living philosophical tradition that is wedded to Revelation and gnosis.

We should also note the immense contribution to Islamic esoterism and the perennial philosophy that Ismā'īlī philosophers have made. They developed a cyclical doctrine of history, which is based on the cosmological significance of the number seven. Each of the major prophets had an esoteric representative, who transmitted the inner dimension of religion. For example, the representative of Adam was Seth, of Abraham was Ishmael, of Moses was Aaron, and of Muḥammad was 'Alī.<sup>65</sup> The seventh guide in the chain of each representative inaugurates a new cycle and who revives the tradition.

Some of the most eminent Ismā'īlī philosophers include Abū Ḥātim Rāzū, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, and Ḥamūd al-Dūn al-Kirmānī.<sup>66</sup> These men made great contributions not only to Ismā'īlī thought, but also to the Islamic tradition as a whole and the perennial philosophy.<sup>67</sup> Abū Ḥātim Rāzū (874-933) defended religion and the prophets against the accusation that the various religions show too much formal diversity to come from one Source.<sup>68</sup> Referring to the essential or transcendent unity of religions, Rāzū states,

Whoever is just and is not arrogant, and reflects on the differences by his intellect and examines the contradictions of the prophets and what they have revealed in their *sharāyf* and the parables which they have struck and have been revealed from God the exalted and glorified, - [he will perceive] that the literal words of the prophets in their symbols (*amṭhāl*) differ but in the inner content (or intentions, *mā'ānū*) they are consistent. They have not differed in the core value of religion, such as the Divine unity. They unanimously agree that God, glory be to His remembrance, is one God...<sup>69</sup>

The poetry and prose of Sufī masters, especially in the Persian-speaking world, is without a doubt a central expression of the perennial philosophy, as

well as the transcendent unity of religions. For this reason, it is often difficult for interpreters and readers of Jalāl al-Dūn Rūmī and Ḥāfīz in the West to see their essential link to the Quran and the Prophet of Islam, and falsely attribute to them a universalism that stands opposed to tradition and orthodoxy. Unfortunately, this same mistake is also made by some interpreters of Guénon and Schuon, who attempt to detach them from the Islamic tradition.<sup>70</sup> S.H. Nasr writes,

It is by making the distinction between *ṣūrat* and *māʿnā* that Rūmī is able to offer a hermeneutical interpretation of all of reality, of both the ‘cosmic Quran’ and the ‘revealed Quran’ and to unveil the transcendent unity of being and of religions. Jalāl al-Dūn is, along with Ibn ʿArabū, perhaps the foremost expositor of the transcendent unity of religions in the annals of Sufism as well as one of the grand expositors of the cardinal doctrine of the unity of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).

The great Persian Sufi poet Jalāl al-Dūn Rūmī (1207-1273) did not discard the *ṣūrat* or form (as if such a thing were possible in the world of forms), but revealed the *māʿnā* or meaning or essence within each form. Following the Quranic injunction, Rūmī saw signs of the Beloved in nature, poetry, sacred music and dance, his companions Shams and Ḥusām al-Dūn, Islam and all of the religions he encountered. Rūmī was extremely receptive to Divine Beauty and saw its reflection everywhere he turned. F. Schuon states:

...To be sensitive to the metaphysical transparency of beauty, to the radiation of forms and sounds, is already to possess—in common with a Rūmī or a Ramakrishna—a visual and auditative intuition capable of ascending through phenomena right up to the essences and the eternal melodies.<sup>71</sup>

Mawlānā (literally, 'our master'), as Rūmū is known in the Islamic world, wrote extensively about the prophets mentioned in the Quran, and provided an esoteric commentary on the Quran with his *Mathnawū*.<sup>72</sup> His appreciation for the various prophets and other religions was the result of his knowledge of the inner meaning and the outer form of the Quran. Referring to the prophets, Rūmū states,

If ten lamps are present in (one) place, each differs in form  
from the other:

To distinguish without any doubt the light of each, when  
you turn your face toward their light, is impossible.

In things spiritual there is no division and no numbers; in  
things spiritual there is no partition and no individuals.<sup>73</sup>

Referring to what Frithjof Schuon called the *religio cordis* or the religion of the heart, Rumi also writes,

The creed of love is separated from all religions;

The creed and the religion of lovers of God is God himself.<sup>74</sup>

We find numerous examples of the essential, not to be confused with the formal, unity of religions in the writings of almost all Persian Sufi poets. The transcendent unity of religions is almost taken for granted by anyone who has read and appreciated these Muslim gnostics. The great Sufi poet Ḥāfīz (d. 1389), who is buried in Shiraz, writes :

In love no difference there is between monastery and Sufi tavern  
of ruins,

Wheresoever it be, there is the glow of the light of the Beloved's  
Face.<sup>75</sup>

These lines illustrate that understanding between various religions is only achieved through what Frithjof Schuon called, "esoteric ecumenism", and knowledge of the Transcendent Reality through the inner dimension of religion.

In the *Gulshan-i Rāz (The Garden of Mystery)*, Maḥmūd Shabistarū (d.

1340) demonstrates that esoteric Christianity is very similar to quintessential Islam and Sufism. While Jesus is seen as a prophet in Islam, the crystallization of his teachings in the Christian world also point to the spiritual path (*ṭarīqah*), and the sole Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*), which is the common goal of all religions. Shabistarū writes:

I have seen that Christianity's aim is real detachment; I've seen it as the breaking of the bonds of imitation. Sacred Unity's courtyard in the monastery of Spirit where the Sūmurgh of the Everlasting makes Its nest. From God's Spirit, Jesus, this work of detachment appeared, since he was manifested from the sacred Spirit. There is also a spirit from God within you; in which is found a trace of the Most Holy. If you should seek extinction of the earthly self, come into the chamber of the Holy Presence. Anyone who, angel-like, has detached from the earthly soul will be risen, Jesus-like, to the fourth celestial realm.<sup>76</sup>

While Shabistarū wrote about the essential unity of Christianity and Islamic esoterism, this principle applies to all religions, and was not fully elaborated by Muslims until the twentieth century because most religious communities only encountered a few of the world's other great religions, and the Quran itself is formally situated in the Abrahamic universe. Similar expressions were however made by Sufis when they encountered Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Greek Philosophy, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism.<sup>77</sup>

One of the clearest expressions of the transcendent unity of religions in Arabic Sufi poetry comes from Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (858-922), the Christ-like martyr in Islam who was killed for uttering, "I am the Truth.":

Earnest for truth, I thought on the religions:

They are, I found, one root with many a branch.  
Therefore impose on no man a religion,  
Lest it should bar him from the firm-set root.  
Let the root claim him, a root wherein all heights  
And meanings are made clear, for him to grasp.<sup>78</sup>

While the transcendent unity of religions was not fully elaborated until the twentieth century by Frithjof Schuon, the principles of this doctrine can be found throughout the Quran, *Sunnah*, the Islamic intellectual tradition, especially in the writings of the Sufis such as Ibn ʿArabū and Jalāl al-Dūn Rūmū. There are also other notable streams that also deserve our attention, and further illustrate the link between Islam and the perennial philosophy, including Ithnā ʿasharū Shūʿism and *futuwwah* (spiritual chivalry). Further, this brief overview of these streams within the Islamic tradition, which also demonstrates the presence of the *sophia perennis* in Islam, is not meant to be exhaustive.

Shūʿism bases itself on the reality of Revelation, prophecy, and *walāyah* (the initiatic function). In a manner similar to Sufism, the presence and light of the Prophet Muḥammad is perpetuated through the Twelve Imāms, the first eight of whom also exist as poles (*aqṭāb*) within certain Sufi orders in the Sunni world.<sup>79</sup> Shūʿism demonstrates the trans-historical reality of Islam, prophecy, and initiation. While the function and designation of messenger (*rasūl*) and prophet (*nabū*) is reserved for the Prophet Muḥammad (and those prophets who preceded him), the seal of the prophets (*khātam al-anbiyā*) in both the Sunni and Shūʿite world, the presence of the Imams in Shūʿism, like the saints in Sufism, is a continuation of his inner reality (*al-ḥaqūqat al-muḥammadiyyah*). The Prophet of Islam said to ʿAlū, the first Imām in Shūʿism and the fourth rightly guided Caliph, “Are you not satisfied to be to me what Aaron was to Moses except that after me there will not be another prophet?” According to the famous *ḥadūth* at Ghadūr Khumm the Prophet said, “For whomever I am his master (*mawlā*) and the authority whom he obeys, ʿAlū will be his master. Oh God! Be friendly with the friends of ʿAlū and enemy of the enemies of ʿAlū.”<sup>80</sup>

Therefore, we find a continuation of the presence and sanctity of the Prophet of Islam in ʿAlū, in both Shūʿism and Sufism.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, this sanctity and initiatic function was transmitted through various chains. In Ithnā ʿasharū Shūʿism, there are twelve Imāms, of whom the Hidden Imām is the last and current Imām in the chain. The Imāms transmit the light of the Prophet (*al-nūr al-muḥammadiyyah*) to each generation, and also are authorities in the Islamic sciences, which include Quranic interpretation (*tafsūr, tā wūl*), *Ḥadūth* literature, theology (*kalām*), philosophy (*falsafah/hikmah*), and gnosis (*ʿirfān/mārifah*). For a Shūʿite, the perennial wisdom within the context of Islam was transmitted from the Prophet to the Imāms. Within Shūʿite esoterism, the Imāms are the Logos, which in fact can never be absent in a living tradition.

There is also a distinct feminine presence of sanctity in Shūʿism through the Prophet’s daughter Fāṭimah, who was also the wife of Imām ʿAlū, and is likened to the Virgin Mary. Henry Corbin writes,

The First Imām and Fāṭimah are related to each other in the same reciprocal way as the two first hypostases, ʿaql and Nafs, Intelligence and Soul, or in terms more familiar to us (because they go back to Philo): *Logos* and *Sophia*. The couple ʿAlū-Fāṭima is the exemplification, the epiphany on earth, of the eternal couple Logos-Sophia. Hence we can foresee the implications of their respective persons...<sup>82</sup>

In the Imām and Fāṭimah, the mother of the second and third Imāms, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, one finds the manifestation of the Logos and the feminine Sophia, or archetypal beauty and wisdom. In a manner similar to the Sufi martyr al-Ḥallāj, Imām Ḥusayn’s martyrdom at Karbalā in the year 680 A.D. closely resembles the function and martyrdom of Christ in Christianity, although Shūʿism was not founded on redemptive suffering.

One also finds in the person and presence of the Hidden Imām, a role that is analogous to Elias and Khiḍr. In Ithnā ʿasharū Shūʿism, the Twelfth Imām, Muḥammad al-Mahdū (868 A.D. - present), had a lesser occultation, which began in the year 872, and a greater occultation, which began in 939 and

continues until the present. Moreover, his return is expected before the second coming of Christ and the end of this cycle of human history. He will restore peace and justice on earth and openly guide humanity for a number of years.<sup>83</sup> S.H. Nasr states:

According to Islam when the Mahdū appears before the end of time, not only will he reestablish peace but he will also uplift the outward religious forms to unveil their inner meaning and their essential unity through which he will then unify all religions. Similar accounts are to be found in other traditions such as Hinduism where the eschatological events at the end of the historical cycle are also related to the unification of various religious forms.<sup>84</sup>

Nasr makes it clear that the Mahdū will uplift the various religious forms to reveal their *essential* unity. In other words, he will restore the form of each religion and then reveal their common substance. Therefore, according to the Islamic tradition, the Mahdū has a pivotal function that completes the work that many saints and sages have already begun. Indeed, even before the coming of the Imām or the Messiah, unity can only be attained by the type of esoteric ecumenism that Schuon has written about. The parody of this inner unity is seen in various manifestations of the New Age movement, which discard religious forms in the name of unity.<sup>85</sup>

There is also a close relationship between Sufism, the perennial philosophy, and *futuwwah* or spiritual chivalry. In addition to spiritual chivalry, the term *futuwwah* (or *javānmardū* in Persian), implies courage, honor, nobility, generosity, and beauty, and traces its origin to the prophet Abraham. According to S.H. Nasr,

Abraham was therefore the initiator of the cycle of *futuwwah*, which according to later authors such as Wāʿiz Kāshifū was transmitted like prophecy (*nubuwwah*) itself. Abraham passed it to Ishmael and Isaac, Isaac to Jacob, and Jacob to Joseph, one of the chief exemplars of *futuwwah*.

Then it was transmitted to Christianity and finally Islam. The Prophet of Islam received through the “Muḥammadan Light” the truth and power of *futuwwah*, which he transmitted to ʿAlú, who henceforth became the supreme source of *futuwwah* in Islam for both Sunnis and Shūʿites.<sup>86</sup>

According to a saying of the Prophet, “There is no *fatā* (chivalrous youth) except ʿAlú and no sword except *dhuʿl-fiqār*,” referring to the chivalry that ʿAlú displayed on the battlefield and his sword *dhuʿl-fiqār*, although such chivalry was not possible without the aforementioned virtues. The virtues of *futuwwah* are summarized in a famous story when ʿAlú had overtaken his opponent on the battlefield, and decided to show mercy after his opponent spat in his face. Rūmú retells this story in his *Mathnawū*,

He spat on the face of ʿAlú  
The pride of every prophet and saint... .  
And ʿAlú responded,  
He said, “I wield the sword for the sake of Truth,  
I am the servant of the Truth, not commanded by the body.  
I am the Lion of the Truth, not the lion of the passion,  
My action is witness to my religion.”<sup>87</sup>

In Islam, the virtues and qualities of the prophets are contained in the universal man (*al-insān al-kāmiā*), who embodies the perennial wisdom of the ages and directly reflects the Divine Names and Attributes here on earth. After the Prophet of Islam, there have been numerous Muslim saints, whose presence and teachings continue to inspire and guide Shūʿites and Sunnis. One of the greatest proofs of the *sophia perennis* in Islam is the vast number of saints and sages that it has produced, and, as we shall see, continues to produce.

The Islamic intellectual and spiritual heritage, which derives from the inner and outer reality of the Quran and soul of the Prophet, is an ocean of sacred knowledge. Reviewing this tradition in light of the *sophia* or *religio perennis* helps explain why Muslim intellectuals were largely responsible for restating the perennial philosophy in the twentieth century. Indeed, for a



Muslim sage who knows the Quran, *Ḥadūth* literature, and the Islamic intellectual tradition—and has followed the spiritual path (*ṭarūqah*) that leads to the Transcendent—the *sophia perennis* is ubiquitous. Without knowing something about the Quran, *Sunnah*, and the Islamic intellectual tradition, and their relationship to the perennial philosophy, the connection between contemporary Muslim traditionalists, as described below, and the perennial philosophy is unintelligible.

### Contemporary Muslim Intellectuals and the Perennial Philosophy

René Guénon (1886-1951) or Shaykh ʿAbd al-Wāhid Yaḥyā as he is known in the Islamic world, lived the last twenty years of his life in Cairo as a practicing Muslim. He is the reviver of tradition in the West, and a fierce critic of modernity in all its facets. He wrote extensively about metaphysics, tradition, initiation, and symbolism in the context of Hinduism, Taoism, Islam, Christianity, and Hermeticism. His critique of modernity, including scientism, materialism, secularism, democracy, and various precursors to the New Age movement, was like a sword that discerned truth from falsehood, and a powerful complement to his appreciation of tradition. Indeed, Guénon's *The Crisis of the Modern World* proves the famous saying, "The pen is mightier than the sword." He is responsible for expounding the principles of tradition in the modern world. Guénon made the tactical decision to first express himself through writing about the Hindu tradition in his *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines* and *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta* because he thought many in the West would not accept tradition if it came in Islamic garb, which was closely related to the Jewish and Christian traditions which many had already rejected.<sup>88</sup> This, as well as the fact that Guénon preferred privacy and moved to Egypt, concealed the fact that Guénon lived and died as a traditional Muslim in the fullest sense of the term.

It is undoubtedly true that Guénon's Catholic upbringing and his encounters with people knowledgeable of other traditions, especially Hinduism and Taoism, enabled him to appreciate the Truth in these religions and further understand the essential unity of all traditions. But what is often overlooked is Guénon's providential acceptance of Islam, both its exoteric

shell and esoteric kernel, and how the universality of the Islamic tradition provided a foundation for Guénon's acceptance of other religions, as well as nourishment and support for his vertical journey to the One. Islam is certainly a central theme in several of Guénon's works including *Insights into Islamic Esoterism and Taoism* and *The Symbolism of the Cross*, which is dedicated to Shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿIlyash al-Kabūr of the Shādhiliyyah order.

Guénon's essay "Islamic Esoterism" in *Islamic Esoterism and Taoism* is an essential prerequisite for anyone interested in the inner dimension of Islam, because of its insistence on Islamic Law (*Sharīʿah*) and a regular initiatic chain (*silsilah*) that goes back to the Prophet Muḥammad. He also continuously reminds us of the goal of all wayfaring, which is knowledge of the One True Reality. These writings on Islam reveal Guénon's own tradition, and the spiritual path he was on to reach the Formless. He reminded the West that all religious forms and symbols are so many vehicles and signs on the way to the Transcendent.

In 1912, Guénon was initiated into the Shādhiliyyah order by a Swedish Muslim, Ivan Gustaf Aguéli or ʿAbd al-Hādū, who was a student of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿIlyash al-Kabūr. Shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān emphasized the teachings of the great Sufi gnostic, Ibn ʿArabū, which can be seen in Guénon's *Symbolism of the Cross*. This text is essentially about the universal man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), which as we have seen is a central doctrine in the *Akbarū* school. This spiritual link to Shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, and by extension the Prophet Muḥammad, connected Guénon to the heart of the Islamic tradition. Yet, according to Guénon, the acceptance of another tradition for initiatic reasons,

[has] absolutely nothing in common with any kind of exterior and contingent change, whether arising simply from the 'moral' domain... . Contrary to what takes place in 'conversion,' nothing here implies the attribution of the superiority of one traditional form over another. It is merely a question of what one might call reasons of spiritual

expediency, which is altogether different from simple individual 'preference.'<sup>89</sup>

Guénon clearly understood the essential identity of all traditions, yet felt he could not find a proper initiation in Christianity. He also realized the necessity of exoteric and esoteric forms to know the transcendent unity of Being, which is at the heart of tradition. Muslim and non-Muslim traditionalists continue to benefit from his exposition of the perennial philosophy. S.H. Nasr writes:

The central figure who was most responsible for the presentation of the traditional doctrines of the Orient in their fullness in the modern West was René Guénon, a man who was chosen for this task by Tradition itself and who fulfilled an intellectual function of a supra-individual nature.<sup>90</sup>

In addition to the above-mentioned texts, some of Guénon's most important books include, *The Reign of Quantity & the Signs of the Times, East and West, The Multiple States of the Being, The Great Triad, Symbols of Sacred Science, and Traditional Forms and Cosmic Cycles*. Guénon restored the meaning of the word tradition in the modern world through an authentic understanding of metaphysics, symbolism, the traditional sciences, and various religious doctrines. He used the term tradition to designate all of the above realities in a way that had not been necessary before. He also rightfully condemned various precursors to the New Age movement, as can be seen in his *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion* and *The Spiritist Fallacy*. Finally, he defended tradition against the most powerful pseudo-religions of the present day, including modernism, scientism, materialism, secularism, democracy, and individualism. Traditionalists from all faiths continue to benefit from his immense contributions. A.K. Coomaraswamy wrote:

No living writer in modern Europe is more significant than René Guénon, whose task it has been to expound the universal metaphysical tradition that has been the essential

foundation of every past culture, and which represents the indispensable basis for any civilization deserving to be called so.<sup>91</sup>

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Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) or Shaykh ʿĪsā Nūr al-Dūn Aḥmad, exposed universal and esoteric truths, which were directed to all people, especially westerners with the necessary aptitude and intelligence to understand. Among his greatest achievements is his text, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, which demonstrates the essential unity of all religions, East and West, through metaphysics, symbolism, art, logic, and recourse to the perennial wisdom contained in the sacred texts and the writings of great sages and saints from all religions. This book issues from and points to the transcendent Reality that is common to all authentic religions, while recognizing and demonstrating the need for religious differences. All of Schuon's texts express pure metaphysics and gnosis from a truly enlightened human being. Some of his most notable titles include, *Form and Substance in the Religions*, *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, *Gnosis—Divine Wisdom*, *Stations of Wisdom*, *In the Tracks of Buddhism*, and *Logic and Transcendence*.

Schuon emphasized tradition, orthodoxy, and the need to practice the unique exoteric rites of a particular religion to fully realize the transcendent unity of religions, and more importantly the transcendent unity of Being. According to Schuon, each religion contains relatively-Absolute crystallizations of the Logos, which are needed to know the Absolute, for example, Christ in Christianity or the Quran in Islam—with all of the laws, rites, prayers, and sacred art that issue from the Logos. The forms of a particular religion are not simply impediments on the way to the Formless, but necessary keys that unlock the door to the Divine Mysteries, especially when practiced with the esoteric dimension of religion.

In a manner similar to Guénon, Schuon did not publicly reveal his Muslim identity, and wrote exceptional works on the Native American

religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. He wrote about metaphysics, cosmology, philosophy, theology, epistemology, aesthetics, anthropology, psychology, eschatology, and sacred art.<sup>92</sup> He restated the essential universality of religions and also wrote scathing critiques of the modern world. What is sometimes obscured for a reader is that Schuon's universal perspective came as a result of his attachment to a particular religion—Islam—and was not simply a sentimental appreciation for ancient wisdom, or an attempt to create a meta-religion that discarded the forms of any one religion. Schuon, more than anyone, understood that there are different paths up the mountain, but he also followed one of those paths to reach the Eternal.

Schuon's Muslim name ʿĪsā (Jesus in Arabic) certainly suggests a particular affinity with Christ, who also championed the esoteric and the universal in a time when many religious people had forgotten about the inner meaning of Revelation and tradition. Yet Schuon clearly lived and died in the Islamic tradition, and practiced the rites and essential laws in the *Sharīʿah*, while also directly benefiting from an Islamic initiation at the hands of the great Algerian Shaykh, Aḥmad al-ʿAlawū. Schuon was most of all concerned with quintessential prayer, but it was quintessential prayer that derived from the Arabic name of God (Allāh) in the Quran, which was always supported by the daily prayers, fasting, charity, and all of the necessary pillars and laws in Islam.

Even before meeting his master, Shaykh Aḥmad al-ʿAlawū, as a young man in Switzerland Schuon met a Muslim marabout from Senegal who greatly influenced his perspective.

When the young Schuon talked with him, the venerable old man drew a circle with radii on the ground and explained: “God is in the center, all paths lead to Him.” This metaphysical truth is the *leitmotiv* of all of Schuon's writings, beginning with his first book whose title, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, is very indicative in this respect.<sup>93</sup>

Yet the greatest spiritual and intellectual influence upon Schuon came from Shaykh Aḥmad al-°Alawū and the Shādhiliyyah Sufi order. It was from Shaykh al-°Alawū that Schuon received initiation and a spiritual method, which allowed Schuon to ascend from the formal plane to the Divine Reality—all within the context of orthodox Islam. The connection between Schuon and Islam has already been brought out in S.H. Nasr’s essay “Schuon and the Islamic Tradition”.<sup>94</sup> Nasr discusses Schuon’s acceptance of Islam in Paris in 1932, as well as his study of Arabic and the Quran with the Persian scholar, Sayyid Ḥasan Imāmū.<sup>95</sup> S.H. Nasr writes,

His journey to Algeria in 1932 where he spent several months and most important of all where he met Shaykh Aḥmad al-°Alawū, who initiated the young Schuon into Sufism, only strengthened his bond to the Islamic tradition in general and the traditional ambience of the Maghrib in particular.<sup>96</sup>

Schuon was also made a representative of the Shādhiliyyah order by Shaykh al-°Alawū in the West, and later received a vision of the Virgin Mary, who blessed a new branch of the Shādhiliyyah order. S.H. Nasr writes,

It was Islam and the Muḥammadan *barakah* that allowed him to become a spiritual teacher and a shaykh of the Shādhiliyyah Order, to found a *ṭarūqah*, the Shādhiliyyah °Alawiyyah Maryamiyyah, and to reach spiritual states and stations from whose perspective he was to write his remarkable and incomparable works.<sup>97</sup>

Schuon’s works on Islam are the most salient and essential works of Islam and the perennial philosophy in a European language. His *Understanding Islam* reveals the powerful metaphysical significance of the *shahādah*, in a manner that is unsurpassed in the West. He was also responsible for formulating what might be called, the transcendent unity of

Sunnism and Shūfism<sup>98</sup> in his essay “Seeds of a Divergence” in the text *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*. In *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, Schuon unveils the core of the Islamic tradition, and is not afraid to critique his eminent predecessors on certain issues. If one examines the texts of Schuon on Islam and Sufism alone, which also includes *Dimensions of Islam* and many unpublished manuscripts, one finds the most important writings on the Islamic tradition in the West. These texts elaborated the principles of Islam and Islamic esoterism, which Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr brought to fruition. Schuon dealt with all of the essential aspects of the Islamic tradition including the Quran, *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad, Islamic Law, the Path, theology, eschatology, the doctrine of Divine Unity (*tawḥūd*), and the relationship between Islam and the perennial philosophy, while always differentiating between the relative and the Absolute. Schuon writes in *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*,

Revelation is present still, but it is hidden away beneath a sheet of ice which necessitates that intervention of outward Revelation; but these cannot have the perfection of what might be termed “innate Religion” or the immanent *philosophia perennis*. Esoterism by definition takes account of this situation; heretics and philosophers are often aware of it too, in their fragmentary way, but clearly they do not wish to understand that the religions in fact provide the key to pure and universal Truth. That we should say this might well appear paradoxical, but every religious world not only renews the lost Paradise after its own fashion but also bears, in one way or the other, the stigmata of the fall, from which only supraformal Truth is exempt; and this inward Truth is, we repeat, de facto inaccessible without the help of outward manifestations, objective and prophetic.<sup>99</sup>

Schuon asserts the absolute perfection of the Divine Principle alone, and the relativity of everything else, but emphatically states the needs for a religious form, both outward and inward, to know the Truth. He wrote about

the transcendent unity of religions and the Truth and Beauty in other religious forms, and fully realized the Absolute Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*) and Beauty (*al-Jamūl*) through the exoteric and esoteric aspects of the Islamic tradition, which he practiced for more than sixty years until his passing in 1998.

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Titus Burckhardt (1908-1984), or Sūdū Ibrāhūm ʿIzz al-Dūn, was one of Schuon’s most eminent disciples, who reflected the wisdom of his master, and applied the principles Guénon, Coomaraswamy, and Schuon had established to various intellectual domains, including metaphysics, cosmology, sacred art, symbolism, and also traditional astrology and alchemy. He also wrote about many modern fallacies, including scientism, empiricism, modern psychology, and Darwinian evolution. Burckhardt smashed these modern idols, but was wiser than many contemporary iconoclasts and saw the wisdom and beauty in the world’s religions, and especially their sacred art.<sup>100</sup>

Burckhardt is perhaps best known for his book, *Sacred Art in East and West*, which exhibits the perennial wisdom in Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Taoism, through the sacred art of each tradition. In his text, *Mirror of the Intellect*, one finds important expressions of the *sophia perennis*, including one important section which deals with what Burckhardt called the “*cosmologia perennis*.” There is also an essay in the text called, “Perennial Values in Islamic Art”, which reminds us of the principle of Divine Unity in Islamic art, and ultimately all traditions. Burckhardt writes,

Islamic art is fundamentally derived from *tawḥīd*, that is, from an assent to or a contemplation of Divine Unity. The essence of *al-tawḥīd* is beyond words; it reveals itself in the Quran by sudden and discontinuous flashes. Striking the plane of the visual imagination, these flashes congeal into crystalline forms, and it is these forms in their turn that constitute the essence of Islamic art.<sup>101</sup>



Burckhardt has written about the arts of Quranic recitation and calligraphy, geometry, the arabesque, the void, the alchemy of light, and the mosque. He also demonstrated the connection between these forms of art and the inner reality of the Quran, and the principle of Divine Unity. Burckhardt did for Islamic art what A.K. Coomaraswamy did for Hindu and Buddhist art by demonstrating its profound metaphysical and cosmological symbolism, which like other forms of sacred art, can only be discerned by the Intellect or the eye of the heart. In fact, Huston Smith said, “No one since the legendary A.K. Coomaraswamy has been able to demonstrate how entire civilizations define themselves through their art with the precision of Titus Burckhardt.”<sup>102</sup>

His *Art of Islam* is perhaps, along with S.H. Nasr’s *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, the most important text on the subject, which highlights the intellectual and spiritual nature of sacred and traditional art in Islam. Burckhardt’s *Fez: City of Islam* and *Moorish Culture in Spain* demonstrate his vast knowledge of and love for art in the western Islamic lands, which he knew so well. His writings on Islamic art are widely studied throughout the Islamic world, especially in Iran, Turkey, and Morocco.

Burckhardt can in fact be considered the greatest writer on Islamic art from the West. He also wrote his own treatise on Islamic esoterism called, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, and translated some of the most important classical texts on Sufism, including Ibn ‘Arabū’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ‘Abd al-Karūm Jūlū’s *al-Insān al-kāmil*, and letters of spiritual counsel written by Shaykh al-‘Arabū al-Darqāwū, published as *Letters of a Sufi Master*. In this last selection, one also finds quintessential and perennial wisdom from a master in Burckhardt’s own spiritual chain (*silsilah*). In one selection we read about the universal or perfect man,

Discriminative knowledge does not hide unitive knowledge from such a man, neither does the unitive hide the discriminative. From him, the effect does not hide the cause, nor the cause the effect; from him, religious law (*sharī‘ah*) does not hide spiritual truth (*ḥaqūqah*) nor spiritual truth

religious law; from him, method (*sulūk*) does not hide inner attraction (*jadhb*), nor inner attraction method; and so on. He has attained the aim; he is the perfect one, the gnostic; whereas his opposite is the man who is lost...<sup>103</sup>

This letter stresses the need for both the Divine Law and the spiritual path that leads to the Truth, and further demonstrates that the message of the *sophia perennis* is always wedded to a particular religious form. As mentioned above, Burckhardt was a disciple and life long friend of Frithjof Schuon. Therefore, like Guénon and Schuon, Burckhardt's writings on the perennial philosophy, and specifically sacred art, were the fruit of realized knowledge, which he attained through the Islamic tradition. S.H. Nasr writes,

He was not a Western scholar of Islam in the usual sense but a person of exceptional intellectual and spiritual gifts who went to the Islamic world as a young man to master the Islamic disciplines from within at the feet of masters of both the exoteric and esoteric sciences. He was providentially chosen to express the truths of the Islamic tradition, and in fact tradition in its universal sense, to the modern world and in a language comprehensible to contemporary man. His writings in fact represent one of the major formulations and statements of traditional Islam in the modern world.<sup>104</sup>

Burckhardt was a visionary figure who could, with the aid of the Intellect, penetrate into the sacred forms of all traditions and see them as symbols, which suggest and even embody the principle of Divine Truth and Beauty. While he wrote about and even helped revive the study of sacred and traditional Christian art (as well as art from other traditions), as can be seen in his *Siena, City of the Virgin* and *Chartres and the Birth of the Cathedral*, his life was molded after the model and archetype of the Prophet of Islam. Therefore, his understanding of the principle of unity and his profound appreciation for the world's great religions and their metaphysical doctrines,

cosmology, sacred art, and symbolism, was a result of his connection to the inner reality of the Quran and the Prophet Muḥammad.

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Martin Lings (1909-2005), also known as Shaykh Abū Bakr Sirāj al-Dūn was also a disciple of Frithjof Schuon, and a light and guide representing Islam and the perennial wisdom of the ages in the darkness that characterizes the modern world. Lings wrote about the *sophia perennis* in the context of Islam, Sufism, and even Shakespeare. Like his predecessors he was deeply concerned with metaphysics, cosmology, symbolism, sacred art, and the crisis of the modern world. Lings is perhaps the most celebrated and widely read European Muslim scholar. He was born in a Protestant family in Lancashire, England. In 1935, Lings went to Oxford to study English Literature with C.S. Lewis.<sup>105</sup> According to S.H. Nasr,

Lings reminisced about his days at the University and he told me how disappointed Lewis was when the young Lings left Christianity for Islam and told Lings, “What a loss for Christianity!” As it was, Lings embraced Islam not to deny but to reconfirm the deepest and oft-forgotten truths of Christianity as his works reveal amply and he made great contributions to that religion.<sup>106</sup>

In the 1930’s Lings became interested in the perennial philosophy through the writings of René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon. In 1938, Lings embraced Islam through Titus Burkhardt.<sup>107</sup> Lings also spent time with Guénon in Egypt, but his most influential teacher was Frithjof Schuon, who initiated and guided Lings on the spiritual path, and later made Lings a guide for others. Lings’ connection to Guénon and Schuon is important because it shaped the rest of his life and writings, and influenced a great number of people in the West and in the Islamic world. Shaykh ‘Alū Juma<sup>c</sup>a, the Grand

Mufti of Egypt, wrote the following in a tribute to Lings after his passing in 2005, which demonstrates the influence of Lings and Guénon in the heart of the Islamic world:

The meeting between Martin Lings and René Guénon had the most profound impact on the emergence of the light of guidance which became known as the Traditionalist School. One of its most conclusive results was a critique of the modern world which is dominated by materialism and the rediscovery of the wisdom which is at the heart of all religions, whether Zoroastrianism or Buddhism or Hinduism, as well as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This wisdom is the primordial light that God created in the hearts of all people, through which He guides them to the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*).<sup>108</sup>

One of Lings' masterpieces is his biography of the Prophet Muḥammad entitled, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*. This text is considered by many to be the most accurate, elegant, and spiritually efficacious biographies of the Prophet in English. Lings' biography conveys accounts of the Prophet Muḥammad's respect for other prophets and religions, and the eternal wisdom he received from the Transcendent. In one of Lings' last publications before his death, *A Return to the Spirit*, he refers to and then quotes a verse from the Quran, "They believe, all of them, in God and His Angels and His Books and His Messengers. And say: 'We make no distinction between any of His Messengers.'" (2:285) Lings understood the primary Islamic sources well, and saw in them the transcendent unity of religions.

Lings also refused to separate Sufism from Islam, which is a common error in the West. In *What is Sufism?* Lings writes, "Sufism is nothing other than Islamic mysticism, which means that it is the central and most powerful current of that tidal wave which constitutes the Revelation of Islam."<sup>109</sup> Along with the Quran, Lings states that Sufism is based on the *Sunnah* or wonts of the Prophet Muḥammad. This challenges the assumptions of many

Orientalists, who attempt to prove the Hindu, Buddhist, Neo-Platonic, Zoroastrian, and/or Christian origin of Sufism.

One of Lings' other gems is his biography of Shaykh Aḥmad al-<sup>c</sup>Alawū entitled, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*. We not only learn about the saintly figure who directly initiated Schuon into Sufism, and catalyzed the revival of tradition in the West, but also about the doctrines, methods, and goal of Sufism, such as the transcendent unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), symbolism, ritual purification (*wuḍū*) and prayer (*ṣalāh*), invocation (*dhikr*), and gnosis (*mārifah*). This volume also contains selections of Shaykh Al-<sup>c</sup>Alawū's own poetry rendered into masterful English verse.

Lings also translated a book of exquisite Arabic poetry entitled, *Sufi Poems: A Mediaeval Anthology*, which is one of the richest collection of Arabic Sufi poetry in English. He also wrote poems of his own which have been published in a book entitled, *Collected Poems*. In addition to the art of poetry, Lings was also interested in the art of Quranic calligraphy and illumination. From 1970-73, he was Keeper of Oriental Manuscripts at the British Museum. Lings wrote a book on the subject, which has stunning selections from the treasury of this sacred Islamic art, entitled, *Splendors of Qur'an Calligraphy and Illumination*. The new edition of this book is truly an epiphany to behold. This work also contains a foreword by the Prince of Wales, which illustrates how vast Lings' influence has been.

Lings saw truth and beauty in all directions, and found expressions of perennial wisdom in places that one would not expect from a devout Muslim. Another area of Lings' specialization that overlaps with his study of religion is his work on Shakespeare. In his *The Secret of Shakespeare*, Lings demonstrated the spiritual meaning of many of Shakespeare's plays, and how the characters in each play correspond to aspects of the human soul.

Shaykh Abū Bakr will be remembered as a traditional Muslim scholar who helped revive the perennial philosophy in the twentieth century through his knowledge and understanding of Islam, Sufism, sacred art, symbolism, and Shakespeare, and the Unique Source at the heart of all expressions of wisdom. His words are beautiful and generous rays of light from an Intellect, which clearly perceived the Eternal Sophia. Many students of Islam, Sufism,

and even Shakespeare will continue to benefit from his priceless contributions to the perennial philosophy.

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Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933-present) was influenced by all of the above Muslim sages, especially Frithjof Schuon, to whom he pays tribute in, *Knowledge and the Sacred*. He was born in Tehran into a family of educators and physicians. He is a descendent of the Prophet Muḥammad, as his name Seyyed suggests, and also a famous Sufi from Kashan, Mullā Seyyed Moḥammad Taqū Poshtmashhadū. At a young age he was also able to study the Quran, classical Islamic texts, and Persian Sufi poetry, including the works of Firdawsū, Nizāmū, Sa<sup>c</sup>dū, Rūmū, and Ḥāfīz, which undoubtedly shaped the rest of his life.<sup>110</sup> At the age of twelve he embarked for the United States to begin an illustrious academic career.

Nasr graduated from M.I.T with a B.S. in physics, and did his postgraduate work at Harvard, earning his M.S. in geology and geophysics, and his Ph.D. in the history of science and philosophy, with an emphasis in Islamic science and philosophy. His dissertation was later published in 1964 as *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, which remains the only text of its kind in any European language. His advanced knowledge of the natural and physical sciences is unique among traditionalist writers, except for A.K. Coomaraswamy who began his career as a geologist. Nasr therefore has credibility among mainstream scientists and philosophers when he objects to the modern worldview, which is based on scientism, materialism, and Darwinian evolution—subjects that he knows well.

He has been teaching in universities in the United States, Iran, and Lebanon since 1955, and continues to teach courses at the George Washington University on subjects that include, Islam, Islamic theology and philosophy, Islamic art, Sufism, Persian Sufi poetry, mysticism East and West, man and nature, and the perennial philosophy. He has trained some of the most important intellectuals and academics in Islamic Studies and comparative religion, such as William Chittick, Sachiko Murata, James

Morris, Naşrollāh Pourjavādy, Osman Bakar, Gholām Rezā A<sup>c</sup>vānū, Mehdū Amūnrazavū, and Zailan Moris. He also had the opportunity to work closely with Henry Corbin, Toshihiko Izutsu, Huston Smith, Jacob Needleman, and Keith Critchlow. He has studied or been acquainted with some of the most eminent Iranian scholars in the twentieth century, such as <sup>c</sup>Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā<sup>’</sup>ū, Abu’l-Ḥasan Qazwūnū, Muḥammad Kāzim <sup>c</sup>Aṭṭār, Murtaza Muṭahharū, and Jalāl al-Dūn Āshtiyānū. Of even greater significance for Nasr were the teachings of René Guénon, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, and especially Frithjof Schuon.<sup>111</sup>

Nasr has received some of the highest honors in academic study of religion and philosophy, which he has taken advantage of to restate the perennial philosophy and the transcendent unity of religions. His *Knowledge and the Sacred* was delivered as the Gifford lectures in 1981 at the University of Edinburgh, which are the most prestigious lectures held in the West on the study of religion. This text deals with tradition and its decline and subsequent revival in the West, metaphysics, traditional anthropology, cosmology, time and Eternity, traditional art, the multiplicity of religions, and spiritual realization, all from a sapiential perspective. Huston Smith once told us that *Knowledge and the Sacred* was among the three most important works written on religion in the twentieth century, the other two being William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience* and Schuon’s *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*. Nasr’s *Religion and the Order of Nature* was prepared for the Cadbury Lectures in 1994. An immense volume, *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, was also dedicated to him in the Library of Living Philosophers series in 2001, which is one of the most prestigious honors an academic can receive in the field of philosophy. These texts signaled the arrival of the perennial philosophy in academia, and more mainstream religious and philosophical circles.

Nasr has also written other key texts on the perennial philosophy such as *The Need for a Sacred Science*, and edited *The Essential Frithjof Schuon*, which is the best collection of Schuon’s writings and which Schuon himself endorsed. Nasr also helped edit the volume, *Religion of the Heart: Essays Presented to Frithjof Schuon on his Eightieth Birthday*, and translated Schuon’s *Understanding Islam* into Arabic with Ṣalāh al-Ṣāwū. He has

appeared in countless collections that deal directly with tradition, modernity, and the perennial philosophy. Nasr also supports and oversees the publication of the journal *Sophia*, which contains articles by all of the leading traditionalists mentioned in this paper, as well as esteemed scholars from various religions. With Katherine O'Brien, the editor of *Sophia*, Nasr has also edited the volumes *In Quest for the Sacred* and *The Essential Sophia*, the later of which contains some of the most pertinent articles that have appeared in this leading traditionalist journal in English. Nasr's collected essays and works in Persian also represent a major contribution to the study of the perennial philosophy in Iran.

In addition to restating the perennial philosophy in so many academic domains, Nasr has also written some of the clearest and most accessible works in the West on Islam, Islamic philosophy, science, esoterism, and art. His, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, which was first published in 1966, is still used as a core textbook in many undergraduate and graduate university courses on Islam. His recently published *The Heart of Islam* complements the previous text, and deals with the essence of the Islamic tradition, as well as crucial issues that people of all faiths face. Nasr's spiritual biography on the Prophet of Islam entitled, *Muhammad: Man of God*, is a classic text and summary of the inner life and qualities of the Prophet. This text also includes important events in the Prophet's life that are missing in many of his biographies in European languages.

His writings on Islamic philosophy and science are the most comprehensive and challenging works on the subject to appear in English. In addition to *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, some of his other celebrated and influential works include, *Three Muslims Sages*, which is about Avicenna, Suhrawardū, Ibn 'Arabū, and the schools that they represent, *Ṣadr al-Dūn Shūrāzū and his Transcendent Theosophy*, *Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study*, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, and *An Annotated Bibliography of Islamic Science*. There is also an important text that Nasr just wrote entitled, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy*, which is the definitive work on the subject.



Nasr's work on Islamic esoterism deals with the most essential aspects of the spiritual path, as well as the intellectual history of Sufism. These include, *Sufi Essays* and the two-volume set he edited, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations and Manifestations*. He is also publishing a new book on Sufism entitled *The Garden of Truth*. Not unrelated to Sufism, are his texts on Shū'ism, the most famous of which is the volume by °Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ū, *Shf ite Islam*, which Nasr translated and edited, and is the most widely read text on Shū'ism in English.

After Titus Burckhardt's corpus, Nasr's *Islamic Art and Spirituality* is among the few texts on the subject that penetrates into the symbolic structure of Islamic art to reveal the very principles of the religion, and the Presence of the One. In this text he has beautifully written about the intellectual dimensions of sacred art in Persian culture, °Aṭṭār's *Conference of the Birds*, the poetry of Rūmū, the influence of Sufism on traditional Persian music, the Persian miniature, and the Void. Nasr has also published his own volume of poetry entitled, *Poems of the Way*, which reveals the artist and gnostic behind the scholar.

Perhaps Nasr's most important intellectual contribution to the world at large are his writings on the spiritual nature of the environmental crisis. In a manner similar to Guénon's *Crisis of the Modern World*, Nasr perceived the spiritual roots of this crisis years before the world took notice. One wonders what affect he had on bringing more attention, and especially wisdom, to the most crucial issue of our day. His *Man and Nature* was first published in 1968, followed by his aforementioned, *Religion and the Order of Nature* in 1996, and most recently, *The Spiritual and Religious Dimension of the Environmental Crisis* in 1999. One often overlooks this key aspect of Nasr's corpus because he is such a prolific writer on Islam and the perennial philosophy. Yet he also points out that the ecological disaster we are heading towards, and are already experiencing, can only be averted by our attachment to a living Revelation and tradition, which provide the necessary tools and grace from Heaven for man to live in harmony with the earth. Therefore, there is an intimate relationship between the Islamic tradition, the perennial philosophy as it manifests in Islam and all traditions, and Nasr's pertinent and urgent message for the world.

In depth and breadth, there is no living scholar in Islamic studies or the perennial philosophy who begins to match Nasr's knowledge and insight. Yet we would be mistaken if we think Nasr's interest in the perennial philosophy and Islam is limited to the academic domain. He writes in his intellectual autobiography,

I also spent much of the summer of 1957 and 1958 in Morocco. Those years were crucial to my whole intellectual and spiritual life. It was at this time that my intellectual and philosophical orientation received its final and enduring formation and I embraced Sufism not only intellectually but also existentially in a form linked to the Maghrib and more particularly to the spiritual lineage of the great Algerian master Shaykh Aḥmad al-ʿAlawí and Shaykh ʿĪsā Nūr al-Dūn Aḥmad. These intellectual and existential experiences not only rooted my mind and soul for the rest of my life in the world of tradition, intellectual certitude, and faith, but also led to the discovery of inner illumination, the harmonious wedding of “logic and transcendence,” to use the title of one of the works of Schuon, and intellectual lucidity and rigor combined with love for the truth and beauty.<sup>112</sup>

Therefore, the philosophy that Nasr espouses is philosophy in the original sense of the term, combined with an operative tradition in its exoteric and esoteric dimensions, and not simply the academic study of the history of philosophy or religion. Nasr is able to write so powerfully and elegantly about Islam, the Islamic intellectual tradition, and the perennial philosophy because he has gone beyond theoretical knowledge of religion and philosophy, and gained sacred knowledge through the inner dimension of Islam.

It has become all too easy in the West to believe in an abstract unity of religions, which denies the importance of any one religion, and therefore the possibility of attaining true knowledge of the One Reality, and of the

transcendent unity of religions. Nasr has defended tradition in general, and his own tradition in particular, because he understands the tendency in the West to reject forms in the name of the Formless. Yet those who reject forms, which include many false interpreters of Guénon, Coomaraswamy, and Schuon, have rejected the means of knowing the Formless. One cannot truly know the transcendent unity of religions unless one knows the Transcendent, and one cannot know the Transcendent unless one knows and practices religion. Nasr has preserved tradition and championed sacred knowledge. This is an immense service for all people concerned with the *sophia perennis*.

Moreover, Nasr has encouraged people of all faiths to practice their traditions more fully. Like his predecessors, he is a colossal intellectual and spiritual figure, and is also responsible for bringing the light of the *sophia perennis* and tradition to the modern world. Nasr applied the principles of the perennial philosophy that were established by Guénon, Coomaraswamy, and Schuon, to various intellectual, philosophical, and religious domains it had not reached. He is also responsible for preserving the tradition of Islam, including Islamic philosophy, science, art, Sufism and Shū'ism. There is no one scholar concerned with the perennial philosophy who has written as many quality works on Islam in all its facets. Nasr has thereby preserved an integral manifestation of the perennial philosophy for future generations. Yet, his knowledge of Islam and other traditions, which he applied so perfectly to modernism, scientism, and the environmental crisis, was also the result of his connection to the inner reality and *barakah* of the Quran and the Prophet Muḥammad, who is his biological and spiritual ancestor.

This oriental sage in exile provided the intellectual armor for the perennial philosophy, and, like the other sages we are examining, helped to revive the *sophia perennis* and the tradition of Islam in the twentieth century. As we have seen, this was possible because as a Muslim, Nasr understands the doctrine of Divine Unity, the essential unity of the revealed books, messengers, and prophets, as well as the Islamic intellectual tradition, and explained these principles and heritage in light of the transcendent unity of religions, and was able to reformulate the perennial philosophy in a way that contemporary man can understand.

### Some Conclusions

In this paper we have discussed the five most important Muslim intellectuals who restated the perennial philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, further study of this topic is needed to examine other important Muslim and non-Muslim scholars who also helped restate the perennial philosophy in the twentieth century. The names of some of the other major Muslim traditionalists include Victor Danner, Lord Northbourne, Whitall Perry, Charles le Gai Eaton, Jean-Louis Michon, William Chittick, Osman Bakar, and Reza Shah-Kazemi. While Joseph Epes Brown studied the Native American traditions and Leo Schaya wrote some penetrating works on Judaism and the Kabbala, they both also practiced the religion of Islam. All of these scholars were influenced by the five Muslim intellectuals we have researched, and also demonstrate the wedding between Islam and the perennial philosophy in the twentieth century.

It would be an inexcusable omission not to mention Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and other leading traditionalists from the world's other religions who were also responsible for restating the perennial philosophy in the modern era. René Guénon's complement in the first half of the twentieth century came from A. K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), who in his own way revived the study of tradition through revealing the metaphysical, cosmological, and symbolic meaning of sacred art, especially Hindu and Buddhist art. A.K. Coomaraswamy also dealt extensively with the excesses of modernity, and is perhaps the most important non-Muslim traditionalist who was responsible for restating the perennial philosophy. A.K. Coomaraswamy represents the perennial wisdom of the Hindu tradition, which like Islam, is more inclined to accept the validity of other faiths. His writings on sacred and traditional Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and to some extent Islamic art, as well as the vicissitudes of modernity represent an intellectual peak in the modern era.

We must also mention in summary the names of Marco Pallis who was Buddhist, Elémire Zolla who was a Catholic traditionalist, Philip Sherrard who was Orthodox Christian, and James Cutsinger who is also Orthodox Christian. Without doubt, these men were also responsible for restating the

*sophia perennis* in the twentieth century, which by its nature embraces all divinely revealed religions that lead to the One Eternal Reality. The presence of these men, as well as their writings, demonstrates the universal nature of the perennial philosophy and its message for people of all religions. We should also note that these men practiced one tradition fully, whether Hinduism, Buddhism, Orthodoxy, or Catholicism. They also realized that the only way to the Transcendent is through an orthodox and revealed tradition.

However, we cannot ignore the fact that the vast majority of the leading traditionalists in the twentieth century, as well as two of the three founders of the school, practiced the religion of Islam. We maintain that this was not an accident, but the result of the message of Divine Unity in the Quran, *Sunnah*, and the Islamic intellectual tradition, which guided and inspired the lives and writings of Guénon, Schuon, Burckhardt, Lings, and Nasr. Therefore, we assert that the perennial philosophy was restated in the twentieth century to a large extent because of the Islamic tradition, which inspired the writings of these eminent Muslim intellectuals.

What must be kept in mind is that when Guénon wrote *The Crisis of the Modern World*, Schuon wrote *The Transcendent Unity of Religion*, Burckhardt wrote *Sacred Art in East and West*, Lings wrote *The Secret of Shakespeare*, and Nasr wrote *Knowledge and the Sacred*, they were all praying five times a day towards Mecca, consulting the Quran, and meditating on and invoking the Supreme Name of God in Arabic. They were not pseudo-universalists who denied Revelation and tradition, but practicing Muslims who also appreciated all of the other manifestations of the *sophia perennis* in the world's religions. Moreover, they knew that these diverse religions were suited for people of different temperaments and civilizations, and brought this knowledge to the attention of the West.

The fact that those most responsible for restating the perennial philosophy in the twentieth century were Muslims sheds light on the universality of Islam. In a time in history when Islam is accused of promoting intolerance and fanaticism because of the actions of some Muslims, it is important to examine the Islamic tradition through the writings of its greatest sages and luminaries. In the writings of these men, and other lights in Islamic history such as Rūmū, Ibn ʿArabū, and Mullā

Ṣadrā, one finds concrete examples of universal and perennial wisdom. These Muslim intellectuals were ultimately responsible for demonstrating to the West that all religions issue from the One Transcendent Reality, and are so many expressions of Divine wisdom and beauty. While this has become common knowledge in many circles, it would be a mistake to overlook the origin of this sacred knowledge.

As a relatively recent and living tradition, Islam is also able to provide a spiritual path to the Truth, which is the Source of all knowledge. Our Muslim sages in the twentieth century took this path, and shared the fruit of their realizations with the world. So while their knowledge affirms the transcendent unity of religions and helped revive so many expressions of the perennial philosophy, it would be unwise to ignore the tradition of Divine Unity that served as the primary source of inspiration for the writings of these Muslims intellectuals, who helped to revive the religion of Islam and the *sophia perennis* for people of all faiths.

**References:**

1. We wish to thank Prof. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, whose writings, lectures, and suggestions made this paper possible. We also wish to express our gratitude to Farah Michelle Kimball who first introduced us to the perennial philosophy and the texts mentioned in this paper, edited the initial draft, and provided many helpful comments on the content of the paper.
2. While the second error is common in all religious communities, it is not as destructive as the first. Someone who denies the validity of other religions can attain salvation through his own religion, while someone who denies religion—through either syncretism or pseudo-esoterism—has rejected a path to salvation.
3. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the study of the perennial philosophy among contemporary Muslims and non-Muslims intellectuals in the East.
4. While this phenomenon has been overlooked or ignored by many scholars, Carl Ernst makes a note of this in his review article, “Traditionalism, the Perennial Philosophy, and Islamic Studies” *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, December 1994, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 176-81.
5. The fact that all religions originally provided access to salvation and sanctification, does not mean that all religions are equally intact, especially their esoteric dimensions.

6. These two doctrines, along with the universal man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) are perhaps the most important esoteric commentaries on the Quran and *Sunnah* in the Islamic intellectual tradition.
7. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 69.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 253-279.
11. This is especially true of the methods of Islamic esoterism.
12. *Knowledge and the Sacred*, p. 68.
13. *The Essential Frithjof Schuon*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2005), p. 534.
14. *Knowledge and the Sacred*, p. 69.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.
16. In Islam, the exoteric is identified with the *Sharīf ah* (Divine Law), while the esoteric is both the *Tarūqah* (spiritual path) and the *Ḥaḡūqah* (Truth). Schuon and others have pointed out that not all religions manifest these two dimensions in the same manner.
17. *Knowledge and the Sacred*, p. 71.
18. The Quranic translations throughout this paper are based on Muḡammad Asad's *The Message of the Quran* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980).
19. S.H. Nasr states, "...Not only have some of the most authoritative Muslim scholars of the sub-continent during Moghul period called the Hindus 'ahl al-kiḡāb', belonging to the chain of prophets preceding Islam and beginning with Adam, but also some of the Muslim Indian commentators have considered the prophet Dhu'l-Kifl mentioned in the Quran to be the Buddha of Kifl (Kapilavasta) and the 'Fig Tree' of surah 95 to be the bodi Tree under which the Buddha received illumination." See "Islam and the Encounter of Religion," in S.H. Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Chicago, IL: Kazi Publizations, 1999), p. 132.
20. For an excellent discussion of this topic see Reza Shah-Kazemi's "The Metaphysics of Interfaith Dialogue: Sufi Perspectives on the Universality of the Quranic Message," in *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*, ed. James Cutsinger (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc., 2002), pp. 140-189.
21. Ibn ʿArabū states, "All the revealed religions are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of the stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are hidden, and their lights are included in the light of the sun. Their being hidden is like the

abrogation of the other revealed religions that takes place through Muhammad's revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as the existence of the lights of the stars is actualized. This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all the messengers and all the revealed religions. They are not rendered null [*bāṭil*] by abrogation—that is the opinion of the ignorant.” William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-Arabi and the Problems of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) p. 125.

22. Quran 2:135.
23. Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1983), p. 300.
24. Martin Lings, “Do the Religions Contradict One Another?,” *Sophia*, Summer 2005, Volume 11, Number 1, p. 18.
25. *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, p. 324.
26. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Muhammad: Man of God* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, Inc., 1995), pp. 29-36.
27. *Knowledge and the Sacred*, pp. 160-183.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.
29. Of course Islamic philosophy, and specifically the perennial philosophy in Islam, did not begin with al-Kindū or end with Mullā Ṣadrā, as this study intends to demonstrate.
30. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1976), p. 11.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
33. Ibn Miskawayh's (940-1030) text predated Steuco's (1497-1548) use of the term *philosophia perennis* by approximately five hundred years.
34. *Knowledge and the Sacred*, p. 87.
35. *Three Muslim Sages*, pp. 16, 20-43.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
41. *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 63.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 69-74.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 73.



46. *Knowledge and the Sacred*, p. 36.
47. *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 82.
48. See Joseph Lombard, "The Decline of Knowledge and the Rise of Ideology in the Modern Islamic World", in *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition*, ed. Joseph Lombard (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc., 2004), pp. 39-77.
49. *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 96
50. Martin Lings, *Sufi Poems: A Mediaeval Anthology* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2004), p. 62.
51. *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 99.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
53. *Knowledge and the Sacred*, p. 279.
54. *Imaginal Worlds*, p. 154.
55. Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1914), pp. 87-88.
56. Titus Burckhardt, *Mirror of the Intellect*, trans. and ed. William Stoddart (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 222.
57. *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 95.
58. It is impossible for us to do justice to the Muslim philosophers and sages who existed in between these intellectual giants, such as Mūr Dāmād, Mūr Findiriskū, and Shaykh Bahā' al-Dūn ʿĀmilū, who transmitted these teachings to later generations.
59. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ṣadr al-Dūn Shūrāzū and his Transcendent Theosophy* (Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 1997), p. 24.
60. *Sufi Essays*, p. 115.
61. *Ṣadr al-Dūn Shūrāzū and his Transcendent Theosophy*, p. 36.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
63. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-50.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
65. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc., 2000), p. 168.
66. Ismāʿūlūs also believe the enigmatic Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (the Brethren of Purity) were Ismāʿūlūs, although this link has not been definitively established. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' were however a major manifestation of the *sophia perennis* in Islamic history, who preserved Greek philosophy and Hermeticism. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1968).

67. *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, pp. 165-166. S.H. Nasr writes in the same section, “Of great interest is the identification of the esoteric dimension of the religion, or *bāṭin*, by Ismāʿīlism with theosophy (*ḥikmah*), which is also called *dūn-i ḥaqq* (the religion of the truth), in Persian...Ismāʿīlism believes that this philosophy, or theosophy, contained in the *bāṭin* of religion leads to spiritual rebirth (*wilādat-i nūḥānū*) through which man is transformed and “saved”...By philosophy the Ismāʿīlīs meant *sophia* which was not just a mental play but a doctrine of a metaphysical and cosmological order closely connected with means of its realization.”
68. See Latimah-Parvin Peerwani’s “Abū Ḥātim Rāzū On The Essential Unity of Religions”, in *Beacon of Knowledge: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. Mohammad H. Faghfoory (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2003), pp. 269-287.
69. *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284.
70. We do not mean to imply that only Islam has the necessary forms to reach the Formless, but that man must choose one religion if he wishes to know the Essence of all religions.
71. Frithjof Schuon, “Concerning the Proofs of God,” *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Winter, 1973, p. 8.
72. The Persian Sufi poet Jāmū wrote, “The spiritual couplets of Mawlānā are the Quran in the Persian tongue.” See Annemarie Schimmel, *Rumi’s World* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), p. 114.
73. *Mathnawī*, trans. R.A. Nicholson (Warminster, Wiltshire: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1990), Book I, v. 678-679. One is reminded of the verse from the Quran, which states, “...We make no distinction between any of His Messengers” (2:285).
74. *Ibid.*, Book II, v. 1770.
75. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), p. 316.
76. *The Garden of Mystery (Gulshan-i rāz)*, trans. Robert Darr (Sausalito, CA: Real Impressions, 1998) pp. 106-107.
77. See “Islam and the Encounter of Religions” in *Sufi Essays*, pp. 123-151.
78. *Sufi Poems*, p. 34.
79. The names of ʿAlū ibn Abū Ṭālib, al-Ḥasan al-Sibt, al-Ḥusayn al-Sibt, Zayn al-ʿĀbidūn, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, Jaʿfar al-Šādiq, Mūsā al-Kāzim, and ʿAlū Riḍā are on the spiritual chains of the Qādiriyyah and Šādhiliyyah Sufi orders. All of the Sufi orders trace their lineage back to the Prophet through ʿAlū, and in some cases through ʿAlū and Abū Bakr.

80. <sup>c</sup>Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ū, *Shī'ite Islam*, trans. and ed. S. H. Nasr (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1975), p. 180.
81. See Reza Shah-Kazemi's *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam <sup>c</sup>Alī* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006).
82. Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 64.
83. While Sunnis also expect a figure named the Maḥdū to come, most Sunnis do not identify him with the Twelfth Imām.
84. *Knowledge and the Sacred*, p. 308.
85. These pseudo-religious movements, which are secular in nature, offer a counter-initiation, to use Guénon's terminology, and will reach a new low with the anti-Christ.
86. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Spiritual Chivalry" in *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, ed. S.H. Nasr (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2000), p. 305.
87. *Mathnawū*, Book I, v. 3725.
88. "Our works have never been purported to remain exclusively within one given traditional form; indeed, the acceptance of such a restriction would be extremely difficult in view of the essential unity of tradition underlying the diversity of more or less outward forms, which are really no more than different garments clothing one and the same truth. In general, we have taken the point of view of Hindu doctrines as our central one, for reasons that have been explained elsewhere; but that can be no reason for failing to make use, whenever it seems advisable, of modes of expression drawn from other traditions—always provided, of course, that they are authentic ones, that is, traditions that can be called regular or orthodox...". René Guénon, *The Symbolism of the Cross*, trans. Angus Macnab (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), p. 1.
89. René Guénon, *Initiation and Spiritual Realization*, trans. Henry Fohr, ed. Samuel Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), chap. 12. This quote nevertheless raises more questions than it answers. Guénon may not have felt that Islam was inherently superior to other religions, but he did feel that in the twentieth century the esoteric kernel of religion was more accessible through Islam than through other religions.
90. *Knowledge and the Sacred*, p. 100.
91. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *The Bugbear of Literacy* (Sophia Perennis, 1979).
92. See *The Essential Frithjof Schuon*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc., 2005).

93. Frithjof Schuon, *Christianity/Islam: Essays on Esoteric Ecumenicism*, trans. Gustavo Polit (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Inc., 1985).
94. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Schuon and the Islamic Tradition", *Sophia*, Summer 1999, Volume 5, Number 1.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 30
97. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
98. This is not a completely accurate description, as Sunnism and Shū'ism also agree on most exoteric religious principles.
99. Frithjof Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, trans. J. Peter Hobson (World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd, 1976) pp. 194-195.
100. Burckhardt wrote that Islamic art was aniconic and not iconoclastic. Therefore, while Muslims do not use naturalistic human or animal forms to represent the Divine Reality, Islam accepts and respects the various sacred forms revealed by Heaven to other communities.
101. *Mirror of the Intellect*, p. 230.
102. *The Essential Titus Burckhardt: Reflections on Sacred Art, Faiths, and Civilizations*, ed. William Stoddart (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Inc., 2003).
103. The Shaykh ad-Darqāwū, *Letters of a Sufi Master*, trans. Titus Burckhardt (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1998), p. 20.
104. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1990), pp. 291-292.
105. Shaykh Ali Juma'a, "The Departure of Shaykh Abū Bakr Sirāj al-Dūn," *Sophia*, Summer 2005, Volume 11, Number 1, p. 38.
106. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Shaykh Abū Bakr Sirāj al-Dūn (Martin Lings): A Tribute," *Sophia*, Summer 2005, Volume 11, Number 1, p. 31.
107. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
108. "The Departure of Shaykh Abū Bakr Sirāj al-Dūn," *Sophia*, p. 40.
109. Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p. 15.
110. *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, (eds.) Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier, and Lucian W. Stone Jr. (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 2001), p. 7.
111. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-85.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 27.