



FRITHJOF SCHUON'S THEORY OF THE TRANSCENDENT UNITY OF
RELIGIONS IN RELATION TO THE DECLINE OF THE SACRED: AN
ANALYSIS FROM A MYSTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Martyn Amugen

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES
ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY OF THAILAND
BANGKOK

2010

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DISSERTATION TITLE: Frithjof Schuon’s Theory of the Transcendent Unity of Religions in Relation to the Decline of the Sacred: An Analysis from a Mystical Perspective


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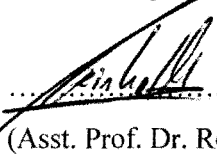

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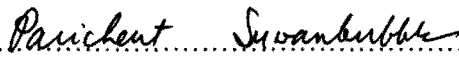
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Abstract

This dissertation examines the theory of the Transcendent Unity of Religions by Frithjof Schuon through a mystical perspective. The primary theme of the work is a philosophical expression of the humanisation, rationalisation and decline of the Sacred. As a result of the latter, the importance of the Perennial Philosophy is largely lost in the modern secular Western world; and as a consequence, the notion of transcendent unity is further obscured. The Exoteric Religious forms which are supposed to be a map or guide to the followers of Religions are further diluted. The dissertation also argues for the notion of mysticism as an underpinning column for a transcendent unity of Religions. Mysticism is a constant reminder of the metaphysical esoteric dimension of an Orthodox Religion¹, that has certain empirical common pathways which can lead to union with the Absolute: To misunderstand this or to dilute it is to trap each Religion in its own exoteric prism. The Researcher will also explore the change of form in sacred art and the role that it has to play in the rationalisation of Religion. The principal argument is that for any sacred art to remain sacred it must conform to the religious form that spawned it; moreover, such sacred works of art are as equally important as, say, scriptures and are vehicles for contemplation towards the Divine. Sacred art is explored from the mediaeval period to the Renaissance, from which point it is argued that the humanisation of Sacred begins. The Researcher also looks at some 20th century 'sacred art' and argues that, in terms of form, it has largely been reduced to academia. The work also gives a detailed analysis of Schuon's notions of the Exoteric and the Esoteric. The Researcher also argues against Schuon in regards to the exoteric, as Schuon fails to make a distinction between dogma and what has been added or made compulsory. The Researcher argues that in some instances the additions may prove divisive and should be matters for individual spirituality. Schuon's arguments for the Perennial Philosophy will be studied and discussed through his five pillars, Religion, Beauty/Sacred Art, Truth, Prayer and Virtue. In chapter five on mysticism, it will be argued that there is, to some extent, a common pathway across the religious divide. The Researcher will conclude this work by asking: is there an alternative way of looking at Religion, other than the Western conceptualisation that is so common place today in modern first world societies?

¹ Capitals will be use for the term Orthodox Religion as the latter refers to Schuon's definition rather than any other definition.

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Frithjof Schuon's Theory of the Transcendent Unity of Religions in Relation to the Decline of the Sacred: An Analysis from a Mystical Perspective



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1 Chapter I Introduction

It follows, therefore, that in the external world there is only One Real Being, who, by clothing Himself with different modes and attributes, appears to be endued with multiplicity and plurality to those who are confined in the narrow prison of the 'stages', and whose view is limited to visible properties and results (Perry 1971, p. 782).

There is only one eternal, immutable truth. It can appear under many different aspects; but even so, it is not the truth which changes, it is we who change our manner of conceiving it (Perry 1971, p. 788).

There are many paths that lead to the summit of one and the same mountain; their differences will be the more apparent the lower down we are, but they vanish at the peak; each will naturally take the one that starts from the point at which he finds himself' he who goes round about the mountain looking for another is not climbing. Never let us approach another believer to ask him to become "one of *us*," but approach him with respect as one who is already "one of *His*," who *is*, and from whose invariable beauty all contingent being depends! (Coomaraswamy, Lings/Minnaar, 2007, p. 229).

1.1 Objectives of Study

It would be absurd to argue that all Religions are the same, just as it would to argue that all snooker cues are the same. Whilst they might all appear to be long sticks, closer inspection shows that some are longer than others, some shorter, some wider, heavier, and some even made of different types of wood. Yet the purpose of all of them is to allow the player of the game of snooker to pot balls. Though the snooker player may choose his cue, according to his preferences, this is rarely the case concerning one's Religion. The main purpose of the major Religions is to allow participants/followers to achieve salvation in a Paradisial hereafter! This objective is often incommoded, impeded and clouded by arguments of outward appearance which have at times, to say the least, led to deadly conflicts amongst Religions or even those

who follow the same Religion. This dissertation will be dealing with the outward (exoteric) and the inward (esoteric), the former flowing from the latter.

The purpose of this work is to argue from a perennial philosophical/mystical point of view about the commonalities and divine objectives of major Religions on a transcendent level or grounds of commonality that reflect the transcendent unity. This work emphasises that these divine objectives are, to a large extent, cups of varying colours, which are a starting point for all those who wish to quench their salvational thirsts with the water of the Divine therein, the exoteric and the esoteric. Though this water reflects the colour of the individual cups, to a certain extent from the point of view of the outward observer, it remains basically the same divine essence of water which nonetheless needs an outward form in which to be tangible in this world. It may be argued that this is the distinction between theological and the metaphysical/divine, the Researcher will deal with this question against the background of Frithjof Schuon's five pillars of the Perennial Philosophy--Religion, Art/Beauty, Prayer, Truth and Virtue--when these five aspects will be examined critically and analytically. Another objective for undertaking this work is to argue for the importance of the Perennial Philosophy as a means by which the rationalisation and secularisation of Religion can be arrested (Though this is to be confined to a Western context). Also that these (Orthodox Religions) are forms that spring from the formless eternal reality and that, without the constant reminder of the latter, they are in danger of becoming dogmatic husks. Moreover, even diluting or distorting these outward forms either through dogma, art, mysticism or virtue, for the sake of any kind of expediency, still places those forms in great danger of losing their original validity, in an increasingly secularised world. One of the purposes of this dissertation is to seek to remind the world of the metaphysical framework upon which Orthodox Religions are based, and the possible benefits of returning, where possible, to that metaphysical framework.

1.2 Thesis Statement

The Exoteric value and form can only be given meanings through the Esoteric, and it is the latter which overlaps into each Religion. The more you seek to rationalise and humanise the exoteric, the more its form is reduced to being no more than an appendage of an increasingly secularised society and, in turn, reducing the notion of transcendent unity. The Esoteric needs the Exoteric if it is to be accessible. It is in the latter two regards that this work goes beyond Schuon.

1.3 Research Outline

This argument will be advanced ostensibly through Frithjof Schuon's theory of the transcendent unity of Religions. It is the purpose of the Researcher to analyse Schuon's argument, its fundamental principles the Esoteric vs Exoteric, and to argue whether or not there is a hidden reality of which all the major Religions are varying manifestations. One also wishes to argue that the timeless *religio* is faith in a transcendent reality. In addition, the Researcher has subtly taken the view that man is a *homo religiosus* being, best perhaps, epitomised by his attitude to Religion in the mediaeval period. Moreover a reminder of this *homo religiosus* nature can sometimes be seen in mysticism which serves as a periodic reminder of the esoteric and transcendent nature of Orthodox Religions as well as reminding us of the import that the Intellect has to play in that *homo religiosus* nature of man:

“In reality, the transcendent character of metaphysic makes it independent of any purely human mode of thought. In order to define clearly the difference between the two modes in question, it may be said that [modern] philosophy proceeds from reason (which is a purely individual faculty), whereas metaphysic proceeds exclusively from the Intellect...There is something in the soul that is uncreate and uncreatable; if the whole soul were this it would be uncreate and uncreatable; this is the Intellect” (Schuon, 2005a, pp. xxix-xxx).

By its hidden nature, the esoteric is likely to have less followers and evoke less understanding than the exoteric, which is on the whole the ready face of any Religion. For the esoteric is the Absolute/God, and is therefore hidden beyond words and description and accessible to only a very few. The esoteric minority consists of, according to Huston Smith in his introduction to Schuon's *Transcendent Unity of Religions*, those women and men who realise that they have their roots in the Absolute (Smith/Schuon, 2005a, p. xv).

The Researcher asks: Has the reverse ever been the case? Where the esoteric was in the ascendancy over the exoteric, and if so, why, and what has been lost by the current reverse? This will be dealt with in chapter three on Religion in the mediaeval period.

The question that needs to be asked and answered: Is Schuon's argument for transcendent unity (a definition of which can be found below) different from that of others, if not, why not? After all, the theory that there is a unity at the heart of all Religions can hardly be new! Is religious unity possible in diversity? This dissertation consists of six chapters. The following gives a basic overview of each chapter. Chapter I begins with a basic definition of Schuon's arguments for transcendent unity. Chapter II starts with a look at the exoterism as defined by Schuon and its limitations, and the Researcher's criticism of Schuon's notion that everything is absorbed into the greater good. The chapter will end with Schuon's esoteric argument as well as a definition of the Perennial Philosophy and the introduction of his five pillars.

Chapter III looks at the pillar of Religion and seeks to argue, what it was as opposed to what it has now largely become. This will be done primarily by looking through the mediaeval period and the permutation of Religion in almost everything, and the general perception of the Sacred amongst all echelons of society. The chapter closes with a contrast of the mediaeval position with that of modern existentialism in the representation of Sartre. Chapter IV examines the significance of beauty and sacred art and the role it plays in an Orthodox Religion, and how the former has been undermined through the debasement of form. It will be argued primarily that in order for sacred art to be sacred it must conform to the religious forms from which it has sprung. In addition, it will contend that sacred art is an important vehicle for contemplation and is, as such, sacred garments.

In Chapter V the argument will look at transcendent unity through mysticism, the important part that scripture plays (in that role), the contradictory nature of scripture and the hidden reality it alludes to. At the same time it also discusses the importance of exoterism as a starting point, and yet the Researcher believes that there are still common pathways to mysticism amongst those starting at different exoteric positions. This work will examine how the argument for transcendent unity of Religions through mysticism has been debased and undermined. In the final chapter the Researcher will argue, whether it is possible to take another view of Religion other than the conceptual Western one that we often grapple with.

1.4 Limitations and Overview of Study

In this work the Researcher will not be trying to prove or deny the existence of God/Absolute or argue that one Religion in its manifested form is superior to another. Instead the argument will be based on Schuon's *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, which provides the main basis of this argument. References to his other works will be used when and where necessary to support the principal argument. The Researcher will only touch on Schuon's vast metaphysical arguments in so far as they pertain to the thesis of this work. In addition, the Researcher will make use of such other works and references as the Researcher deems necessary to either support or refute certain aspects of Schuon's arguments. This dissertation is not about the pluralist absolutes of John Hick and the inter-faith dialogue. This dissertation upholds that in the Perennial Philosophy there is but one Absolute: and this one Absolute may be reached through various exoteric forms.

1.5 Research Methodology

In this section, the methods used to carry out this dissertation will be explained. It should be noted at the outset that this methodology is, to a certain extent, an evolving one.

Thesis Statements and Objectives of Study

1. Schuon's argument that behind all the Orthodox Religions there is a hidden perennial reality, and it is from this reality that they all spring and are united.
2. When speaking of the exoteric, a distinction must be made between that which is core exoteric and that which is added to the core.
3. Advocates the theory that Religion has strayed from its traditional perception and Intellection no longer plays the role it once did.

4. The humanisation and rationalisation of sacred art prevents us from understanding it as a vehicle of contemplation. As such, sacred art can only be so called if it is reflective of the inherent symbolism within the Orthodox Religion from which it springs.
5. The theory that mysticism is an underpinning esoteric rock for a transcendent unity of Religions and a reminder of core esoteric nature of an Orthodox Religion.
6. The theory that most perceptions of Religion tend to originate from Western conceptualisations rather than faith based.

The objectives of this research are as follows:

To analyse Schuon's theory of transcendent unity of religions and the Perennial Philosophy with the main thesis that the esoteric needs the exoteric if it is to be accessible to the majority, nonetheless, the increasing rationalisation of the exoteric forms is an impediment to the potentiality of our Intellects.

To argue that Schuon's exoteric theory needs to distinguish more clearly between things that have been added to a Religion and may prove to be divisive or in some cases harmful.

To argue that in the West rationalisation of Religion has now led to substance taking precedence over essence.

The exoteric needs a non-rationalised form of sacred art if it is to have a general appeal to piety and Intellection in a follower of an Orthodox Religion and to show the importance Intellection plays in the Hindu artistic tradition.

The objective is to highlight the common ground of mysticism in Christianity, the Hindu tradition and Islam.

Research Methods

The research was based mainly on qualitative techniques with an extensive use of books purchased by the Researcher as well as those from the AU library. As an analytical research, it required both primary and secondary sources, relevant journals and documentation when available, as well as evidence gathered from reliable websites. The investigation will include a description, analysis, evaluation, criticism, and contribution.

Literature Review

A review of the literature has been done and can be divided into the following groups:

Direct sources of Schuon's own works comprising 14 books, three of which are different editions of the same books.

Other literature for example:

Sources on the Perennial Philosophy and its traditional approach consisted of 11 books primarily from Coomaraswamy, Burckhardt, Lings and Hossein Nasr. Coomaraswamy and Burckhardt primarily for their expertise in art and, in particular, sacred art, whilst Hossein Nasr and Lings for their writings on the perennial tradition and its decline.

Then next major category of literature comprises books on mysticism, those who wrote about it and those who practised it. The latter sources are from Teresa of Avila, Eckhart, Suso and Underhill, for a direct insight into mystical experience. The other group consists largely of Katz, Smart, Zaehner and Woods for an analysis of mystical experiences.

Finally electronic sources, such as the Vatican Website which proved invaluable and accurate source of ecclesiastical information, and the Catholic Encyclopaedia.

Scope and Limitations

The scope and limitations of this research is set within the following boundaries:

This research will emphasise the theory of a transcendent unity of religions as advocated by Frithjof Schuon through five pillars of the Perennial Philosophy--Truth, Way (Prayer), Virtue (or Life), Beauty and Religion.

The research will deal with the change in religious forms and the humanisation and rationalisation, in particular, of sacred art.

Some limitations on this research are as follows:

The research will not engage, as far as possible, in doctrinal comparisons

It will not seek to argue for proof of existence of God

The research will not seek to argue for an interfaith dialogue along the lines of John Hick

This research will also try to avoid the epistemological aspect of Schuon's metaphysics in its refutation of rationalism in general; this work will only touch upon the subject in so far as it pertains to a traditional perception of philosophy and its coupling with the Intellect.

The research will only give a definition of foreign terms as used by Schuon and those that do not have an explanation in the main text.

Research Presentation:

The dissertation presents a clear definition of two premises upon which Schuon's theory is founded, the esoteric and the exoteric.

The exoteric is dealt with first of all because it is the most visible and identifiable part of any Orthodox Religion.

Religion in the mediaeval period is included because it provides an excellent example of how things were when compared with the present.

Art and beauty are the next logical step because they could be used to show how the premise of Intellection has been reduced in terms of the visual aspect of Religion and gives greater emphasis on the lack of Intellection in the modern approach to an important part of an Orthodox Religion.

Mysticism is presented last of all because it has a framework when properly understood from a traditional perspective; it serves as a link to the formless esoteric.

This chapter explains the methods used in this qualitative study of Frithjof Schuon's theory of Transcendent Unity of Religions, succeeding chapters present the results obtained from these methods.

1.6 Background and Basic Definition of Schuon's Esoteric and Exoteric Arguments

One of the first principal undertakings is to define the esoteric and the exoteric as these are the two platforms that are central to Schuon's arguments. (For Schuon there is a unity at the heart of Religions, that transcends the manifest world, and the fact is it cannot be univocally described by anyone and concretely apprehended by a few). The latter is the core of Schuon's argument! In truth one is really talking, to some extent, about forms and their manifestations. If one goes back to the dawn of the philosophical age and the tussle between Plato and Aristotle, the divide is clearly drawn. Plato forms existed in their own right, but for Aristotle they existed only as objects of materialised objects. So it might be argued that for Plato the forms were real

and for Aristotle they were potentiality. "Thus Aristotelianism might be seen as a kind of external or exoteric interpretation of Platonism. The latter, according to St Bonaventura, attributed to wisdom, and the former, to science" (Smith/Schuon, 2005a, p xxiv). So according to Huston Smith, some problems of relationships between religions are solved. For many, the problem is unsolvable because the generic is taken for the abstract and the concrete for the abstract, "Only what is concrete can be loved and worshipped," as Huston Smith puts it. (Smith/Schuon, 2005a, p. xxiv); or in other words, the manifestation of form.

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For Schuon, there has to be a careful definition of the esoteric, for in the current age the term is subject to much abuse, with some trying to find God-awareness through altered states of consciousness. For Schuon this means asking for end without means, the kernel without husk or soul without body. He argues that the way to focus on God/Absolute awareness is to stick to the faith filled forms of one's various religious traditions; they in turn help to establish a balance in the soul with the theology of each respective Religion providing a road map that helps to show where the desert stretches fit in (Smith/Schuon, 2005a, p. xxiv).

So even esoterics must submit to exoteric rites. The latter can be transcended by fathoming their depths and discerning their universal content and not by circumventing them. This is a point the Researcher will explore in depth when the mystical side of the argument manifests itself. The esoteric uses her/his faith as a window to the Absolute, a window that is never left totally behind, thus the esoteric finds the Absolute within the traditions (Smith/Schuon, 2005a, p. xxiv). It might thus be argued that the definition of the esoteric is to look for the Absolute within their respective traditions but not to be lost in the exoteric attributes of their respective traditions.

According to Schuon, the exoterics "Are persons whose meanings derive from forms that are more restricted in scope than those of esoterics" (Smith/Schuon, 2005a, p. xxiv). A good example of what Schuon is trying to say is, when one hears, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me," for the esoteric "me" will designate the Word and for the exoteric this will imply through Christ, the historical Christ only and these are relatively non-negotiable. (Smith/Schuon, 2005a, p. xxvii). Thus form and content for the exoteric are less distinguishable and, according to Schuon, are fused and welded together in a homogenous alloy. The exoteric can see no way of having the one without the other and are relatively non-negotiable, whereas the esoteric negotiates such forms more loosely, knowing that because they (the exoteric forms) are finite

they are at best keys to a few lock restricted doors leading to the mystery. This argument will be scrutinised later when the Researcher discusses individual examples of esoterics. In his most powerful analogy of the esoteric compared to the exoteric, Schuon likens the former to one who has command over spiritual space, whilst the latter is anchored to a single spot and unable to circumbulate spiritual objects, thus it making it difficult for him/her to distinguish them as they are in themselves, as opposed to how they appear from the exoteric particular point of reference (Smith/Schuon, 2005a, p. xxvi). Though one could not do without form in the first place, the usurping of the form to itself alone, instead of opening to the idea of successive expanding forms, puts itself in danger of becoming paralysed and constricted.

It is argued by Schuon that the exoterism by its nature has one of these two courses: either to absolutise the relative or fall into relativism. According to Schuon, the former course is best, but this comes at a price. This debar the exoteric from according equal rights to other revelations, or it will encounter theological conundrums of an unsolvable nature, along the lines of Gödel's² theorem to the effect that every formal system with precise specifications must contain at least one question that cannot be answered by the stipulations of the system itself. So if God is self-sufficient, why did He create the world; if He is perfect why did he create a world that is imperfect? Exoterism cannot answer these questions, yet for esoterism they do not arise. (Smith/Schuon, 2005a, p. xxvii). This theme is important because if the exoteric is less in touch with its esoteric roots then it is in danger of being looked at only from an outward point of view and that outwardness is unable to answer those questions that do not arise with the esoteric. Moreover, that outwardness is in danger of being even more humanised and rationalised too, a theme that will be dealt with later.

The distinction between the esoteric and the exoteric is quite significant for Schuon, and the Researcher is in full agreement. God's personal mode is his only mode for the exoteric, yet for the esoteric this mode resides in one that is higher and ultimately modeless, not dissimilar to Eckhart's views on God and the Godhead. Eckhart says "that the Godhead is utterly ineffable

² Kurt Gödel (April 28, 1906-1978), was an Austrian American logician, mathematician and philosopher. One of the most significant logicians of all time, Gödel's work has had immense impact upon scientific and philosophical thinking in the 20th century, a time when many, such as Bertrand Russell, A. N. Whitehead and David Hilbert, were pioneering the use of logic and set theory to understand the foundations of mathematics

and there is no talking, no words, in the Godhead; everything within the Godhead is unity, and we cannot speak about it" (Eckhart, 1980, p.79, Sermon III)--the Absolute, the Godhead, *Nirguna* (निर्गुण ब्रह्म) Brahman of the Vedantists, the Tao that cannot be spoken.

1.7 Schuon's Argument for Transcendent Unity

From the distinction as explained above, a question may be asked: What is Schuon's argument concerning transcendent unity and what distinguishes it from any that may have come before? Basically from his perspective, the claim of unity comes too soon and it is exoteric rather than esoteric:

"...From his perspective the defect in other versions of this distinction is that they claim unity in religions too soon, at levels where being exoteric, true Unity does not pertain and can be posited only on pain of Procrusteanism³ or vapidty. The Absolute Unity that is God defies visualisation or even consistent description but is nonetheless required for in the symbolism of the spirit the separation on which duality resides tokens ignorance epistemologically and privation affectively. The Unity must however be of an exceptional kind for it must include everything, if anything possessed reality apart from it, this would reintroduce the division that Absolute Unity by definition precludes. Absolute Unity must be All-Possibility; every possibility must be actualised within it--with God in his personal mode all things are possible (*Matt. 19:26; Mark 10:27*): in his absolute mode all things are actual Man's mind cannot imagine a Something that excludes nothing save distinctions" (Smith/Schuon, 2005a, p. xiv).

It can then be argued how is this to be known? Of course not with the rationality of the mind, but with the Intellect, for the Intellect as here defined is not reason; reason proceeds through language--the knower and the known--a bridge which joins two banks without removing the intervening river. For the Intellect knows intuitively, the Intellect is the absolute as manifest in the human soul, the something in the soul that is uncreated and uncreatable. This something, according to Meister Eckhart, is the Intellect (Smith/Schuon, 2005a, p. xiv). In other words, the Intellect is the means by which we might know the Suprarational.

³

A reducing to strict conformity by violent measures

It is important to note that one of the most important foundations of Schuon's theory is the precise definition of metaphysics which is in opposition to the philosophical definition of the same. He is of the belief that philosophy suffers from an inadequate appreciation of the metaphysical, as it suffers from certain limitations. Schuon is of the view that the truly transcendental character of metaphysics makes it independent of purely human mode of thought:

"This book is founded on a doctrine that is metaphysical in the most precise meaning of the word and cannot by any means be described as philosophical...In reality, the transcendent character of metaphysic makes it independent of any purely human mode of thought. In order to define clearly the difference between the two modes in question, it may be said that [modern] philosophy proceeds from reason (which is a purely individual faculty) whereas Metaphysic proceeds directly from the Intellect" (Schuon, 2005a, p. xxix).

Schuon gives us an inkling of what he considers to be the Absolute and its relation to the Infinite:

"The Infinite is so to speak the intrinsic dimension of plenitude proper to the Absolute; to say Absolute is to say Infinite, the one being inconceivable without the other. We can symbolise the relation between these two aspects of Supreme Reality by the following images; in space, the absolute is the point, and the infinite is extension in time, the absolute is the moment, and infinite is duration. On the plane of matter, the absolute is the ether- the underlying and omnipresent primordial substance-whereas the infinite is the indefinite series of substances; on the plane of form, the absolute is the sphere-the simple, perfect primordial form- and the infinite is the indefinite series of more or less complex forms; finally, on the plane of number, the absolute is will be unity or unicity, and the infinite will be the unlimited series of numbers or possible quantities, or totality" (Schuon, 1986, p.15).

What he is trying to argue here is that modern philosophy proceeds from reason (which is a purely individual faculty) and the metaphysical⁴ from Intellect as defined above. It is not the purpose of the Researcher to argue as to what knowledge is or is not, but this point raised by Schuon is an important definition to the premise of his argument and therefore needs to be fully elucidated. It may be argued then that philosophy when divorced from the Intellect relies on reason alone and therefore seeks to invent its own premises, whilst the traditional philosophical

⁴ Metaphysics in the etymological meaning of that which lies 'after' or beyond *physis*, or nature, transcends by means of the Intellect the parallel paradoxes that Reality poses for language and visualisation. (Smith/Schuon 2005a p. xiv)

approach combines the use of the Intellect and reason; this is primarily the malaise of modern man:

“The rationalist is not a person who reasons adequately in terms of total and supralogical intelligence and on the basis of the necessary data- data that are traditional in origin when it comes to things that escape the limitations of common experience –but, on the contrary, a person who thinks he can resolve every problem, be it even by denying its existence, by means of logic alone and on the basis of some arbitrarily exploited fact.

Such being the case, all integral rationalism is false by definition and since nothing is ever rejected without its being replaced by something else, it will be individual tendencies that will supplant the missing Intellection. A reasoning that is square in shape- if such an image be permitted-will reject a spherical reality and will replace it with a square error based on a personal tendency that is opposed to global reality of existence in other words, a profane system of thought is always the portrait of an individual, even when it is mingled with some glimmerings of knowledge, as must always be the case since the reason is not a closed vessel. Reason, then, to the extent that it is artificially divorced from the Intellect, engenders individualism and arbitrariness” (Schuon, 2005b, p.487).

Schuon argues that, by its definition, purely intellectual knowledge is beyond the reach of the individual, being in its essence supra-individual, universal or divine. Moreover, it goes beyond faith and reasoning, as it proceeds from pure Intellect, which is direct and not discursive (Schuon, 2005a, p. xxx). This is central to Schuon's esoteric argument because in his view this knowledge transcends a specifically theological point of view. He also argues that it is incomparably superior to a philosophical point of view. This is because such intellectual knowledge comes from God and not from man, whereas the metaphysical proceeds directly from intellectual intuition, Religion proceeds from Revelation. “The latter is the Word of God spoken to His creatures, whereas intellectual intuition is a direct and active participation in divine Knowledge and not an indirect and passive participation as is Faith” (Schuon, 2005a, p. xxx).

The distinction between metaphysical and theological knowledge is another argument in the definition between the esoteric and the exoteric. The former, when manifested through religious symbolism, is conscious of the colourless essence of the light and the character of pure luminosity, whilst a given religious belief will assert that light is one colour or another. For Schuon they are right in so far as they distinguish light from darkness, but not when identifying

them with one particular colour. The significance of this definition is that every great and intrinsically Orthodox Religion can serve as a means of expression for the truth is seen by the eye of the Intellect (the spiritual organ that is sometimes called the eye of the heart in Moslem esoterism) through its rites and symbols. So to add further to the essence of the above definition, Religions translate the universal or metaphysical truths into dogmatic language. Though dogma in its intrinsic truth is not accessible to all, and can only be directly obtained by the Intellect, it is nonetheless accessible by faith, which for the majority is the only possible means to participate in Divine Truths. Schuon further adds that, "As for intellectual knowledge, which, as we have seen, proceeds neither from belief nor from a process of reasoning, it goes beyond dogma in the sense that, without ever contradicting the latter it penetrates its internal dimension, that is, the infinite Truth that dominates all forms" (Schuon, 2005a, p. xxxi).

It needs to be further added that in the definition of terms used in this dissertation, Schuon echoes a theme that the great mystics have often echoed, that the rational mode of knowledge needs to be put aside in order to access this Truth. Though Schuon does agree that rationality is still needed to serve as a means of expression of suprarational knowledge, as all concepts once expressed are clothed in human modes of thought, which is rational and dialectical (Schuon, 2005a, p. xxxi):

"...the rational mode of knowledge in no way extends beyond the realm of generalities and cannot by itself reach any transcendent truth; if it may nevertheless serve as a means of expressing a suprarational knowledge...the fact that all concepts, once they are expressed are necessarily clothed in modes of human thought, which is rational and dialectical" (Schuon, 2005a, p. xxxi).

Thus for Schuon whilst he accepts that the major Religions have some grounds for commonality, it is only at the highest level of each of these Religions that a unity is to be found without division. The dividing line is horizontal, cutting across the historical aspects of the major Religions, if one could imagine a drawing of Mount Fuji, with the snow cap being the peak of the mountain and vertical lines coming down from the very summit, each one of these lines symbolising the various major Religions, then add a line marked esoteric cutting across the peak, the vertical lines are all marking different paths to the summit, but the horizontal line cutting across the peak is the historical aspect of all the Religions concerned.

The purpose of Schuon's argument is for the transcendent unity of Religions inwardly and in a spiritual way, without prejudice to any particular form. The unity of the various major Religions, based on their outward forms, is unrealisable and undesirable at that level, even if it were possible, would deprive the external forms of their sufficient reason. "Just as every colour, by its negation of darkness and its affirmation of light, provides the possibility of discovering the ray that makes it visible and of tracing this ray back to its luminous source. So all forms, all symbols, all Religions all dogmas, by their negation of error and their affirmation of Truth, make it possible to follow the ray of Revelation, which is none other than the ray of the Intellect back to its Divine Source" (Schuon, 2005a, p. xxxiv).

Therefore the Researcher has to argue that there is a super metaphysical source from which all Orthodox Religions spring and that there is a non-rational intellect which needs to be made use of in order to access it; and that it is this esoteric background upon which unity is established. Furthermore, this argument has also established that the esoteric requires the cover of some form of graspable rationality which is the exoteric, and that each Orthodox Religion has its own exoteric symbolism. Each intrinsically Orthodox Religion can serve as a means of expression of the Truth.

Having set out the basic premise upon which the argument is based, the Researcher will now set out to analyse, criticise, attack and defend the above, where appropriate, and as such will seek to attack Schuon on his doctrine of exoterism and defend him on his grounds for esoterism, as well as analytically examine selectively some of the other aspects of his transcendent unity argument. This dissertation will limit its study to the exoteric/esoteric argument and the five pillars of the Perennial Philosophy as defined by Schuon only. Truth, Prayer and Virtue will be examined from a mystical perspective, as the universal truth is the objective of mysticism and prayer is a fundamentally essential component, with virtue being inseparable from the other two. Moreover, mysticism has certain quality of Intellection, as well as perennial aspects that are an inseparable part of the overall argument of transcendent unity.

2 Chapter II Exoterism and Esoterism

The Researcher would like to remind readers of Schuon's definition of the exoteric whereby, form and content are less distinguishable and are welded together in a homogeneous alloy which is relatively non-negotiable. Moreover, an exoteric is one who is largely at a fixed point of religious reference and is unable to circumambulate this point. Schuon further defines the exoteric aspect of Religion as being a providential disposition that is necessary, and the esoteric way can only concern the minority. For him, exoterism is the outward limitation of dogma which confers upon it its dogmatic character and that it is a relative reality of it at its own level of existence. This, for Schuon, is acceptable as long as the said exoterism doesn't imply the negation of a higher level perspective:

“...that is to say insofar as it is limited by the mere fact of its nature, can and even must be integrated into one fashion or another in every path possessing a transcendental goal. Regarded from this standpoint, exoterism, or rather form as such, will no longer imply an intellectually restricted perspective but will play the part of an accessory spiritual means, without the transcendence of the esoteric doctrine being in any way affected thereby, no limitation being imposed on the latter for reason of individual expediency” (Schuon, 2005a, p.8).

2.1 The Limitations of Exoterism

Exoteric, as defined above by Schuon, is the outward form of Religion. In the following section, the limitations and importance of the exoteric will be explored. One important point advanced by Schuon is that the idea of religious universality is not necessary for salvation, as the latter can be achieved through adhering to one's own religious tradition. Moreover, if there were universality of Religion, some individuals may not be able to rise above their individual standpoint (Schuon, 2005a, pp. 7-9). This may lead, in turn, he argues, to religious indifference and neglect, as there may be some who may think that there is no point in observing the outward form of Religions if they are all of a universal nature. Hence, in this very argument, the need for the symbolic exoteric is clearly illustrated as each dogmatic character has a reality of its own, whose limitations make it dogmatic in and of itself.

Schuon is trying to warn us not to confuse the function of the exoteric viewpoint with that of exoterism as a spiritual means. "The viewpoint in question is incompatible, in one and the same consciousness, with the esoteric knowledge, for the latter dissolves this viewpoint as a preliminary to reabsorbing it into the centre from which it came; but the exoteric means do not for that reason cease to be utilisable" (Schuon, 2005a, p. 8). The trouble here is that there really has to be a better distinction between the dogmatic core and exoteric knowledge, in the sense that over the centuries various things are added to Religions either to diminish or augment their exoteric standpoint. As such, it might be argued that there must be some of these additions that are incompatible with Schuon's notion of the exoteric. Perhaps it might be better argued that anything added to the exoteric core must not contradict the original symbolism of a given Religion in order for it to fulfil Schuon's argued function of the exoteric being compatible with the esoteric centre into which it will be reabsorbed. After all some aspects of dogma have not only been mentally repressive but physically so, too, and one would surely be on extremely dangerous ground to attribute mental and physical repression as being conducive to re-absorption into the greater good.

Still one feels that this point is alluded to but not clarified when Schuon singles out the Latin mind and its narrowness as being responsible for what is blameworthy in exoterism and likening it to an all-invading autocracy (Schuon, 2005a, p. 9); though only from the point where it might impede knowledge of the esoteric by drawing a veil of prejudice and deformation over it. This

can lead to the danger of intellectual dissatisfaction, bringing about straying into artificial and false doctrines.

What is really being argued here is that when a particular Religion strays from its esoteric core, it is in danger of slipping into atrophy, and recoils upon them, as Schuon puts it, from the outside in the form of heretical and atheistic negations (Schuon, 2005a, p.9)!

The exoteric viewpoint is in fact, doomed to end by negating itself once it is no longer vivified by the presence within it of the esoterism of which it is both the outward radiation and the veil. So it is that religion, according to the measure in which it denies metaphysical and initiatory realities and becomes crystallised in a literalist dogmatism, inevitably engenders unbelief; the atrophy that overtakes dogmas when they are deprived of their internal dimension recoils upon them from the outside, in the form of heretical and atheistic negations (Schuon, 2005a, p. 9).

In order to reinforce his point about dogma as being one of the set reference points to the Divine, Schuon advances an argument that, in certain circumstances, even dogma can be bypassed for direct Revelation, by the direct intervention of Grace, for those who had no previous possession of it. Moreover for such individuals,⁵ dogma does not have a persuasive power and that this is in conformity with Divine Will, which has distributed the one Truth under different forms throughout humanity (Schuon, 2005a, pp. 16-17). It may be argued that if the external reality of exoterism is in conformity with Divine Will, then the latter cannot be set aside by human will, therefore there can only be unity amongst diversity and not conformity. Thus there can be no orthodox religious claim to the exclusivity of Truth. The Researcher will argue that each Orthodox Religion is a representative of the Truth, though this theory can only stand if spiritual truths are set aside and the focus put on the exoteric. Schuon says that, he who sets out to prove the truth of one Religion either has no proofs, as such proofs do not exist, or he has proofs that affirm to all revealed Orthodox Religions, no matter in what form they may have clothed themselves (Schuon, 2005a, p.18).

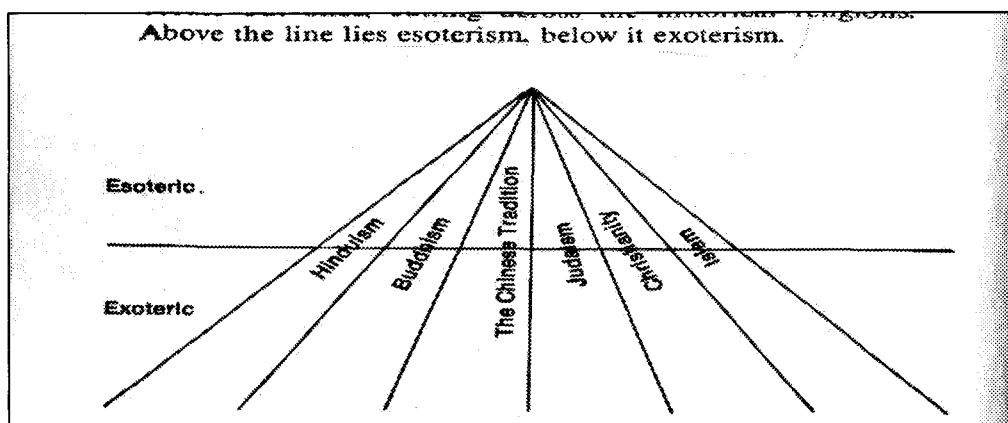
⁵ St Paul on the road to Damascus and Sadhu Sandar Singh (1889-1929 born into a powerful Sikh owning landed family) denounced Christianity and burnt the Bible, page by page in anger over the death of his mother. It is said that he resolved to commit suicide at railway station that night if the true God were not revealed to him. However, before dawn, he wakened his father to announce that he had seen Jesus Christ in a vision and heard his voice. Henceforth he would follow Christ forever.

What is most interesting in Schuon's allusion to the limitations of the Christian mission is his arguing that Christ's words (teachings) were for His church rather than the modern world, a world which owes its existence to the rupture with this Church; hence its infidelity towards Christ. In addition, Schuon also claims that the Bible alludes to other religious worlds that are not identifiable with paganism (Schuon, 2005a, p.28).

"That they be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick," and "For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," (Matt.9:12, 13); and finally the following verse which, according to Schuon, makes clear the nature of paganism: "Therefore take no thought, saying: What shall we eat? Or, what shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For all these things do the Gentiles [pagans] seek" (Matt. 6:31, 32). It may be argued that Schuon seeks to allude to 'limitations' (which Christianity has never set itself), merely to bolster his argument for the exoteric. This is somewhat contradictory to the passages that he has chosen to quote (Schuon, 2005a, p. 28). It is generally accepted that the first passage only refers to sinners and does not limit itself to any particular group of people or Religion, as it would suggest that those of other Religions are universally virtuous and without sin. This of course would be an absurdity! For even from the individual exoteric positions of each Religion, the call to repent and cease wrong-doings is almost universal.

Then in the next quoted passage Schuon contradicts his previous argument by emphasising the esoteric message of Christianity that even those outside the wall of the Church may be included in the feast, as they would come from east and west. Therefore it may be argued that there is neither limit to the Christian mission in the literal sense, nor to suggest that such limitations exist in other Religions. In addition, it may also be said that Schuon is alluding to the limitations of the exoteric nature of Christianity as opposed to its esoteric message (Schuon, 2005a, p. 28).

In his introduction to Schuon's *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, Huston Smith praised Schuon's position for its uniqueness in looking at raising the bar quite high on the Fujian like diagram, whereas others previously had not raised it so high:



From *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, p.xii

In the 20th century there were philosophers like Simone Weil and, in particular, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu who in his *No Religion*, also argues that those who have penetrated into the inner nature of Religions will see that after having done so such Religions are the same! His system does not claim unity, but seeks to deal with the issue raised by religious plurality,⁶ as does Hilary Putman in his theory of Internal Pluralism.⁷ Perhaps, it would not be an exaggeration to assume that what Schuon has done also ranks him as the first Westerner to bring this argument to the attention of the Western public at large. Ibn Arabi the 12th century mystic and philosopher had similar ideas; but one could say that he didn't quite live in so enlightened an age for those ideas to be universally embraced and popularised. Reza Shah-Kazemi in his *Paths to Transcendental Unity*, from the *Bukhari Collection*, quotes what Arabi wrote as follows:

“The chapter on what has come concerning the fact that the religions of the prophets is one. He brought the article which makes the word “religion” definite, because all religion comes from God, even if some of the rulings are

⁶ **Buddhadasa Bhikkhu** takes the view that only those who are ignorant and worldly, that there is this or that religion and for them such religions are different and opposed to each other. Moreover that such differences are down to personal feelings and turn religions into enemies. The learned monk further goes on to emphasise that those who have penetrated into the inner nature of religions will regard all such religions as the same. Those who have penetrated higher along the lines of *Dhamma* (Nature, Natural Law, Duty, Truth: the way things naturally are and the way we must live so that things (dhammas) don't become problems for us.) and will realise that the thing called religion does not exist at all. The argument is carried further with the view that outwardly religions may appear to be different but inwardly they are the same. The Researcher is of the view that the similarity between Schuon and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu is on the grounds of the inner unity; though for the latter is along the lines of *Dhamma*, but they differ strongly on their approach to the outward notion of religions, for one the form of the exoteric is of the greatest import for the other it must be put aside here as it is a form of ignorance and a manifestation of the self, I, We etc. For further details see “*No Religion*” a talk given 27th Jan 67 by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. Suan Usom Foundation, Bangkok.

⁷ **Putman's** view is that religious realities can only be meaningfully discussed within their own systems; and that the Real cannot be discussed outside any faith stance. The Internal Realism stance is that “there is no reality existing outside of our conceptual schemes.” See V. Harrison *Philosophia* (2006) 34:287-301) p. 292 *Internal Realism and the Problem of Religious Diversity* Published online 16 Nov 2006

diverse. Everyone is commanded to perform the religion and come together in it...As for the rulings which are diverse, that is because of the Law which God assigned to each one of the messengers. He said, "To everyone (of the prophets) We have appointed a Law and a Way: and if God willed, He would have made you one nation" (5, 48). If he had done that, your revealed Laws would not be diverse, just as they are not diverse in the fact that you have been commanded to come together and perform them" (Shah-Kazemi, 2006, p. 120).

Though Arabi may not have the same amount of religious freedom that Schuon has, he is still not quite as transcendental as he might be. In the following passage, Arabi echoes similar thoughts to the above on unity in diversity, but somehow Islam manages to come out on top:

"All the revealed religions [*shara'i*] are lights. Amongst 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, there 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 actualised. This explains why we have been required in all inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all the messengers and all the revealed religions. They are not rendered null [*batil*] by abrogation – that is the opinion of the ignorant" (Shah-Kazemi, 2005, p. 121).

Though Arabi deserves an immense amount of credit despite the slight bias towards Islam in the above passage, this message is again reinforced in another passage where Arabi says that, "God is greater and wider than to be confined to one particular religion to the exclusion of others. To whichever direction you turn, there surely is the Face of God" (Shah-Kazemi, 2005, p.128). Thus one can conclude that universality of outward form is not necessary for salvation and that the individual religious forms are a necessary part of all Orthodox Religions. Having carefully laid out Schuon's definition of the exoteric, the Researcher now wishes to proceed to criticise.

2.2 Criticism of Schuon's Exoteric Viewpoint and Celibacy as Discipline

In the previous section it was mentioned that Schuon really failed to distinguish between dogma and what might have been added to a Religion that in time has become accepted as policy

or in the case of celibacy, as discipline, he merely states that the dogmatic is a reflection of the esoteric and will be absorbed "into the centre from which it came" (Schuon, 2005a, p. 8). The Researcher wishes to raise this point, because there is a lot of what might be accepted as an addition to a Religion that has come to prove harmful to the Religion in question itself. Again the Researcher shall emphasise his theme of form and the harmful effects that the distortion of the latter in its outward manifestation or the debasement of its inner manifestation may prove harmful. For the purpose of this section the Researcher will be focusing on Catholicism, but not necessarily confined to that alone. The Researcher does not purport to be an expert on every Orthodox Religion. The issue of celibacy in the priesthood is taken as an example to support the Researcher's viewpoint that a distinction needs to be made between dogma (Divine Law) and Canon Law. The viewpoint being that sometimes additions to a Religion should be left to individual spirituality rather than being made compulsory.

So having looked at Schuon's thoughts on dogmatic and exoteric knowledge and sought to emphasise some of its vagaries, the next logical step is to criticise those vagaries and the lack of clear distinction between dogma and what has been added to a Religion. The following section will deal with dangers of this position by examining a clear issue of what was once optional but is now compulsory and to show how harmful such things can be.

An issue to support this argument is that of celibacy as a discipline in the Catholic Church. This issue clearly highlights a deficiency in Schuon's exoteric argument, for here is an example of an addition to exoteric practices, which could be argued might be better off being left to individual spirituality. The Researcher will here seek to examine briefly the historical background to the celibacy argument.

In the earliest times of the Catholic Church priests were married, even Pope Hormisdas was married and was the father of Pope Silverius his successor. (Vatican Website, *Priestly celibacy in patristics and in the history of the Church*

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_0101_1993_chisto_en.html). It would seem, however, that even if a priest were married it was expected of him to remain in a state of continence at least definitively from the 4th century onwards when the law of continence (*lex continentiae*) was imposed. This term can also be called the law of celibacy. Thus to remain married yet abstaining from conjugal (sexual) relations, was not

uncommon in patristic times according to the Vatican. "Tertullian, himself a married man, informs us in his Catholic period, of lay people who practice continence within marriage (*pro cupiditate regni coelestis*). So do Jerome and Augustine in the following century. The rapid growth of monasticism and an attraction to the ascetic life led many couples to renounce their intimacy and to enter a monastery or to live in continence within more domestic settings" (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_01011993_chisto_en.html).

There are a number of expostulations to the above effect from as early as 307 in what was considered to be one of the earliest Councils of the Church, Elvira and again in ⁸314 at the Council of Aries (314), reminding priests that they are serving the ministry everyday and that they must not beget children.

"We decree that all bishops, priests and deacons in the service of the ministry are entirely forbidden to have conjugal relations with their wives and to beget children; should anyone do so, let him be excluded from the honour of the clergy." And again, "Moreover, (concerned with) what is worthy, pure, and honest, we exhort our brothers (in the episcopate) to make sure that priests and deacons have no (sexual) relations with their wives, since they are serving the ministry every day. Whoever will act against this decision, will be deposed from the honour of the clergy."

(http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_01011993_chisto_en.html). Prior to the above musings on the matter, there was always the support for celibacy on the optional grounds, as Eusebius⁹ declares that it is befitting that priests and those occupied in the ministry should observe continence, St. Cyril of Jerusalem¹⁰ urges that the minister of the altar who serves God properly holds himself aloof from women. Also "St. Jerome

⁸ Held early in the fourth century at Elliberis, or Illiberis, in Spain, a city now in ruins not far from Granada. It was, so far as we know, the first council held in Spain, and was attended by nineteen bishops from all parts of the Peninsula. The exact year in which it was held is a matter of controversy upon which much has been written. Some copies of its Acts contain a date which corresponds with the year 324 of our reckoning; by some writers the council has accordingly been assigned to that year. Hardouin suggests 313, Mansi 309, and Hefele 305 or 306. Recent opinion (Duchesne, see below) would put the date considerably earlier, from 300 to 303, consequently previous to the persecution of Diocletian. (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05395b.htm>) Catholic Encyclopaedia.

⁹ Eusebius Pamphili, Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, the "Father of Church History"; b. about 260; d. before 341. (www.newadvent.org)

¹⁰ Bishop of Jerusalem and Doctor of the Church, born about 315; died probably 18 March, 386. (www.newadvent.org)

seems to speak of a custom generally observed when he declares that clerics, "even though they may have wives, cease to be husbands." (Catholic Encyclopaedia) I could point to a number of other saints and ecclesiastical notables advocating the honour of chastity even within marriage.

In his book *Sin Against Sexual Innocence: Sexual Abuse by Priests and the Role of the Catholic Church*, Thomas G Plante argues that whilst asceticism is welcomed and a natural consequence of being celibate is not unique just to Catholicism, when codified, the primary motive is no longer asceticism since its nature is voluntary rather than compulsory. It is argued that the primary reason for outlawing marriage for Catholic priests has its foundation in a more material aspect, wanting to preserve Church property from the hands of the offspring of priests and to put it beyond the reach of wives; which of course would mean that the power over such property would have to remain with a local authority (the bishop), representing a central authority (the Pope) (Plante, 2004, p.66). The Researcher will now proceed to look at the Church's reasons for making celibacy compulsory amongst the clergy.

It can most certainly be argued that the difficult time leading up to the Church's 1215 declaration of celibacy at the Fourth Lateran Council, meant that the declaration would have had more ecclesiastical moral weight than some of the earlier stated positions. The authors of the Catholic Encyclopaedia argue that the "Iron Age" in which "that terrible period of war, barbarism, and corruption in high places" and, according to which, "Impurity, adultery, sacrilege and murder have overwhelmed the world", cried the Council of Trosly in 909, according to the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*. (*Celibacy of the Clergy*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03481a.htm>). A period in which clerical morality was at a diabolical low, with Bishoprics being passed from father to son; bishops who openly took wives. St. Peter Damian¹¹, particularly in his "*Liber Gomorrhianus*" condemned vehemently the venial practices of the clergy at the time. He made an attack on homosexual practices, mutual masturbation, copulation between the thighs, anal copulation and solitary masturbation, as subversive disruptions against the moral order occasioned by the madness associated with an excess of lust (Pierre J. Payer, 1982, p. 29).

¹¹ Saint Peter Damian, O.S.B. (Petrus Damiani, also Pietro Damiani or Pier Damiani; c. 1007 – February 21/22, 1072) was a reforming monk in the circle of Pope Gregory VII and a cardinal. In 1823, he was posthumously declared a Doctor of the Church. Dante placed him in one of the highest circles of *Paradiso* as a great predecessor of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Thus against this graphically venial background, Popes St. Leo IX, St. Gregory VII (Hildebrand) and their successors took a determined and successful stand against further corruption, so from around 1018 a series of Edicts had been issued:

“In the first place, disabilities of all kinds were enacted and as far as possible enforced against the wives and children of ecclesiastics. Their offspring were declared to be of servile condition, debarred from sacred orders, and, in particular, incapable of succeeding to their fathers' benefices. The earliest decree in which the children were declared to be slaves, the property of the Church, and never to be enfranchised, seems to have been a canon of the Synod of Pavia in 1018. Similar penalties were promulgated later on against the wives and concubines (see the Synod of Melfi, 1189, can. xii), who by the very fact of their unlawful connection with a subdeacon or clerk of higher rank became liable to be seized as slaves by the over-lord. Hefele (*Conciliengeschichte*, V, 195) sees in this first trace of the principle that the marriages of the clerics are ipso facto invalid”(Catholic Encyclopaedia, www.newadvent.org).

In addition to the above, gradually married priests were forbidden from saying Mass and all other ecclesiastical functions and the lay people were forbidden to hear such Masses. Eventually in 1123 the First Lateran Council, marriages contracted by the clergy were declared invalid and by the time of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 Canon Law¹² had been firmly established *contracta quoque matrimonia ab hujusmodi personis disjungi ... judicamus -- can. xxi*

The argument may be advanced that by making celibacy compulsory it contributes to making the clergy more exclusive than it should be, by excluding lay people and is therefore contradictory to original Catholic spirituality which was to include all in the priesthood rather than make the clergy exclusive. The original Greek term *Kleros* from which the word clergy is derived, was never intended to apply to a specific group of ministers but to all believers, who were called “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own” (I Pet 2:9).

¹² The Catholic Church has its own legal system known as Canon Law. The word canon is derived from the Greek *Kanon*, which means a rule or straight line. Canon law is the oldest continuously functioning legal system in the world. Its roots go back to the fourth century when gatherings of bishops enacted rules or laws to deal with problems facing the infant Church (Plante, 2004, p. 25).

Even after the third century when the term began to be used to refer to a specific group within the Christian community, early Christian writers still acknowledged inherent dignity and priesthood of all Christians and did not use the word *lay* as a distinction. Writers such as Tertullian (ca. 160-225), Origen (185-254), the former asked are we lay people not priests also? The Bible also mentions: "He has made us Kings and Priests" (Rev 1:6). Even later writers such as St John of Chrysostom (347-407) stated that the entire people gathered in prayer constituted the fullness of the priesthood. None other than one of the foremost doctors of the Church, St. Augustine, wrote in his *City of God*, that "As we call everyone 'Christians' in virtue of a mystical anointing, so we call everyone 'priests' because all are members of only one priesthood" (*De Civitate Dei*, XX, 10: CCL 48, 720, see section 14 *Apostolic Exhortation On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI*, Proclaimed By HH Pope John Paul II, Promulgated December 30, 1988, <http://www.ourladywarriors.org/teach/chrilaic.htm>).

There may be some readers who might say to themselves: that was a long time ago, now things have changed, why then does this need to be talked about in the 21st century? The Researcher argues that celibacy having been added and made compulsory can make the clergy more exclusive. This highlights a flaw in Schuon's exoteric doctrine of "re-absorption into the centre from which it came (Schuon, 2005a, p.8); especially when some of the greatest contributors to the Church have been "lay" people like Dorothy Day¹³ and Simone Weil¹⁴ etc, to

¹³ **Dorothy Day** (November 8, 1897 – November 29, 1980) was an American journalist turned anarchist, social activist and devout member of the Catholic Church. She became known for her social justice campaigns in defense of the poor, forsaken, hungry and homeless. Day, with Peter Maurin, founded the Catholic Worker Movement in 1933, espousing nonviolence, and hospitality for the impoverished and downtrodden. The Catholic Worker movement started with the *Catholic Worker* newspaper, created to stake out a neutral, pacifist position in the incredible war-torn 1930s. For more details see the following: (Cornell, Tom. "A Brief Introduction to the Catholic Worker Movement, catholicworkers.org and *Making Saints*, K L Woodward, Simon & Schuster, 1990 New York)

¹⁴ **Simone Weil**, born in Paris in 1909 and died in Ashford, Kent in 1943, a woman of precocious intellectual brilliance possessed of innate temperament for ethical solidarity. Weil was a precocious student, proficient in ancient Greek by the age of 12. She later learnt Sanskrit after reading the *Bhagavad Gita*. Like the Renaissance thinker, Pico della Mirandola, her interests in other religions were universalist, and she attempted to understand each religious tradition as expressive of transcendent wisdom. She wrote about social and economic issues, including *Oppression and Liberty* and numerous short articles for trade union journals. This work critiqued popular Marxist thought, and gave a pessimistic account of the limits of both capitalism and socialism.

name but a few. The Vatican Council of 1962-65, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium*, promulgated by HH Pope Paul VI, adopted an inclusive stance on lay people, but not quite as inclusive as the early Christian writers, but nonetheless acknowledges their importance. Chapter II section 13 states that "all the faithful scattered throughout the world are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit"

(http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html). *The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, affirms that lay people share in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Christ.

(http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html). Yet all of this is being contradicted indirectly by the current exclusivity of the priesthood compounded by the canonic stance on celibacy; moreover, it is contrary to the lay spirituality as mentioned earlier where all believers were considered priests. The Church stance on celibacy thus makes the priesthood more exclusive, remote and harmful to Christian spirituality.

2.3 Conclusion on Exoterism

The failure of Schuon to distinguish between what has been added through policy and what is part of the exoteric core of an Orthodox Religion has proven both divisive and harmful for it is an oversight in his exoteric argument. Whilst he might be correct, to a certain extent, in arguing that the exoteric is absorbed into the greater esoteric good, this in itself inadvertently supports a free exoteric license that allows in the case of the Catholic Church to add laws to the exoteric whole, when such things should be down to individual spirituality, the argument that they will be absorbed into the greater good, places Orthodox Religions on dangerous grounds, as much in the same way as when Schuon argues that esoterism without the anchor of exoterism might lead to religious indifference (Schuon, 2005a, p.8). Again the Researcher has sought to place emphasis on the notion of form and the possible harmful effects the distortion or any addition to the latter might have, though in this particular instance the focus has been on policy. It could be argued that celibacy came from the esoteric core and is for the greater good, but not so when it is made compulsory and somewhat contrary to original Catholic spirituality.

Canon Law is devised by man to interpret Divine Law and is therefore subject to man's failings whereas Divine Law is direct from God and is therefore not subject to such human failings. It might therefore have been better to have this distinction made when formulating any kind of religious philosophical argument pertaining to the exoteric. Whilst this particular issue of celibacy in the Catholic Church is a particular argument in a strict philosophical sense, for some this does not make a general argument. It is nonetheless an actuality that cannot be ignored; for to do so would be in some ways to undermine the exoteric notion, by allowing the latter to be altered. Catholicism is one Orthodox Religion that has a central authority rather than a number of authorities, and as such, its policy decisions are more easily highlighted. Hence, any addition to policy whether from a central authority or a local one should be reconsidered if such policy causes divisions and proves harmful, in the case of the Perennial Philosophy which we will look at shortly. This is the very centre of the Researcher's argument against Schuon's notion of the exoteric. This argument is not limited to Catholicism. Islam and its stance on "the menace of grave worship" may be considered as an example to support the Researcher's view. It is considered in Islam that the Prophet Mohammed forbade praying at the graves of the deceased and holy men; apart from the funeral (*janaazah*) prayer. The Prophet Mohammed said, "All the earth is a mosque apart from the graveyards and bathrooms." (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 317; Ibn Maajah, 745; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Ibn Maajah, 606). (<http://www.islam-qa.com/en/ref/13490>). Then continuing in the same vein, "May Allah curse the Jews and the Christians, for they have taken the graves of their Prophets as places of worship" (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 435; Muslim, 529).

Thus the Prophet Mohammed was strongly opposed to any diversion of worship to anyone other than God (<http://www.fountainmagazine.com/article.php?ARTICLEID=882>). Yet centuries later some Muslims have begun to worship at gravesides and places of worship near their graves which is considered *Shirk* associating partners with God and is the gravest sin in Islam. It may be argued that such divisions (even when they are brought about by drift in policy) have caused a great deal of harm and led to conflict, with the likes of Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab¹⁵ and his

¹⁵ "Wahhabism [Wahabism] is a reform movement that began 200 years ago to rid Islamic societies of cultural practices and interpretation that had been acquired over the centuries. The followers of Abdul Wahab (1703-1792) began as a movement to cleanse the Arab bedouin from the influence of Sufism... Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab was concerned with the way the people of Najd engaged in practices he considered polytheistic, such as praying to saints; making pilgrimages to tombs and special mosques; venerating trees, caves, and stones; and using votive and sacrificial offerings. Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab's emphasis on the oneness of God was asserted in contradistinction to shirk, or polytheism, defined as the act of associating any person or object with powers that should be attributed only to God. He condemned specific acts that he viewed as leading to shirk, such as votive offerings, praying at saints' tombs and at graves, and any prayer ritual in which the suppliant appeals to a third party

movement to purify Islam and those who did not accept his teachings were put to death. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to deal with the divisions that have arisen in Islam due to a change in policy and deviations from original practices. The above is another example of divisions being introduced when the dogmatic core is deviated from. Nonetheless, one should be grateful to Schuon for trying to devise a formula that does not bog itself down in the individual doctrinal rigidity of a single Religion.

One further argument concerning the exoteric can be added to this conclusion which bears more directly on Perennial Philosophy and the harmful effects that can arise when certain individuals in the West appropriating an exoteric conceptual notion of form and seek to label it as Perennial Philosophy by using such a notion to misguide, mislead or abuse others. The British writer Kevin Shepherd complains about commercial mysticism and forms of alternative therapy. Here the Researcher shall be limiting himself to some of the criticisms that Shepherd has made concerning Perennial Philosophy in his essay *Critical Comments on Perennialist Philosophy* (<http://www.integralworld.net/shepherd.html>), especially those dealing with the controversial American guru Franklin Jones.

Shepherd argues that “some exponents of the perennial are able to chart advanced experiential states of mind”. He further states that difficulties arise when these become subject to preference. For example, the late American guru Franklin Jones (1939-2008) who has been credited with advanced experiential states by the writer Ken Wilber in “his version of the perennial” (Section 5, <http://www.integralworld.net/shepherd.html>).

Shepherd argues that Jones has adopted “the most extreme form of pseudo-perennialism known in America to date” (Section 5, <http://www.integralworld.net/shepherd.html>).

Jones has adopted various names for himself and his sect over the years, claiming that he had gained full enlightenment in 1970 (Section 5, <http://www.integralworld.net/shepherd.html>).

Furthermore Jones has claimed what Shepherd calls “the highest spiritual honours, in terms of being an Avatar who is strongly implied as the peak of perennial wisdom” and to have inherited the legacy of the late Ramana Maharisi. Jones claimed that devotional worship of himself, was the only means of gaining spiritual enlightenment for others (Gallagher & Ashcraft,

for intercession with God. Particularly objectionable were certain religious festivals, including celebrations of the Prophet's birthday, Shia mourning ceremonies, and Sufi mysticism (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/gulf/wahhabi.htm>).

2006, p 99, *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America*). Fundamental to Jones' philosophy is the view of waking to an Ultimate Reality and the purpose of human life as that of spiritual enlightenment (Gallagher & Ashcraft, 2006, p. 88) and that the ego prevents us from achieving this; through what he calls 'self-contraction'. This is defined as a psychological, emotional and spiritual dissatisfaction, which lies beneath the normal level of conscious awareness, which can lead people to think that they are limited (Gallagher & Ashcraft, 2006, p. 97-98).

There is nothing wrong with the above perennial philosophical theory, the criticism of Jones lies in how he has gone about trying to achieve such enlightenment. There have been accusations of degenerate sexual behaviour on the part of Jones and followers of his sect. Jones was accused by former devotees of having wild parties in the 70's & 80's. It is said that he had nine 'wives' and encouraged devotees to watch pornographic material, as well as drawing female devotees into intimate sexual contact. Frequently these women were the wives or girlfriends of his male devotees. Jones' argument for such behaviour was that it helped devotees to overcome sexual attachments. "He himself was, of course, beyond all attachments as a supreme spiritual authority who must not be doubted" (Section 5, <http://www.integralworld.net/shepherd.html>). One of Jones' former devotees accused him of sexual abuse besides other accusations of fraud, intentional infliction of emotional distress and brainwashing (*San Francisco Chronicle* 4th April 1985 "Sex Slave Sues Guru: Pacific Isle Orgies Charged"). Sexual degeneracy seems to have been a part of Jones' cult, in his period of 'Garbage and the Goddess' Jones started his "sexual theatre, involving the switching of partners, sexual orgies, the making of pornographic movies and intensified sexual practices" (Feuerstein, 1992, *Holy Madness: Spirituality, Crazy-Wise Teachers, And Enlightenment*, pp. 86-87). Jones is not the only guru that Shepherd attacks for misguided perennial notions; there is also the American guru Andrew Cohen who, like Jones, is accused of manipulation and physical abuse. As the nature of the accusations against Cohen are not dissimilar to those against Jones and since Cohen advocates an evolutionary collective enlightenment as distinct from personal enlightenment, the Researcher feels that Cohen's ideas do not weigh directly on the principles of Perennial Philosophy as those of Jones. It is the intention of this dissertation to remain as close as possible to the main principles of the Perennial Philosophy. Having said this it is possible to continue with two more strands of Shepherd's criticisms as they serve as useful examples of how an exoteric conceptual notion of form in terms of Perennial Philosophy can be used to mislead.

Shepherd argues that the “the popular field of ‘perennial philosophy’ likes to simplify everything and present potted explanation of questionable value” (Section 7, <http://www.integralworld.net/shepherd.html>). Shepherd’s point is that certain liberties have been taken with the notion of Perennial Philosophy from the time of Coomaraswamy onwards, to the extent that “speculations are offered without any solid reference points” (Section 7, <http://www.integralworld.net/shepherd.html>) with Perennial Philosophy regarded as what he calls a “salable value”. Shepherd argues that such example is a very shallow claim to ‘perennial philosophy’ that happened at the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland in the 1990’s. “The claimant Alex Walker was an influential figure in this ‘new spirituality’ organisation. The context was very glib. The perennial philosophy as the mystical centre of religious thought is the theory which you will work with while you live in this community” (Walker, *the Kingdom Within*, 1994, p.36) and cited in Shepherd’s *Minds and Sociocultures* Vol. One, 1995, p. 923. Shepherd who was living in the Forres area of Scotland at the time decided to check out the situation at the Foundation. In Shepherd’s own words, he found the theory at the centre so ‘Nebulous that it didn’t form part of the curriculum but which instead comprised [of] new age ‘workshops’ and alternative therapy all for a high price” (Section 7, <http://www.integralworld.net/shepherd.html>). The Foundation attracted a degree of controversy with regards to its Holotropic Breathwork, which was forced to suspend as a form of therapy after critical comments made by Dr Linda Watt of Leverndale Psychiatric Hospital and a report by Anthony Busuttill (Regius Professor of Forensic Medicine at Edinburgh University) (*The Scotsman*, 14 Oct 1993). “Alex Walker was one of those who credited the claim of Stanislov Grof that Holotropic Breathwork had a pedigree in antique shamanism. Grof sometimes made glib references to the perennial philosophy” (Section 7, <http://www.integralworld.net/shepherd.html>) which Shepherd says caused “further confusions”. So here we have an example of Perennial Philosophy being used as what Shepherd labeled a “Salable commodity”, as well as one that was proving harmful because of the possibility of seizure due to the hyperventilation techniques it was advocating.

One of the principal tenets of Shepherd’s argument is the notion of the “neo-perennialism” which has been hijacked by some Western writers such as Ken Wilber as a “new spirituality”. In particular, Shepherd accuses Wilber of what he calls “ascetic repression.” In his 1996 book entitled *A Brief History of Everything*, Shepherd accuses the author of stigmatising five major traditions in religious history, Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Theravada Buddhism and all forms of

Christianity (Section 10, <http://www.integralworld.net/shepherd.html>). Shepherd argues that “Wilber does serve to illustrate the anomalies in contemporary preferences for ‘perennial philosophy’ it has been arbitrarily”. What is being argued subtly here is that many of the exemplars of the above traditions were disciplined contemplatives committed to a strong other worldly view, which is “largely not palatable to many modern Americans” which Shepherd calls the “Post-Hippy era”. “The moderns under discussion are in no position to pass a judgment upon non-American spirituality in view of their own contrary tastes. These moderns are a product of American capitalism and the hippy generation of hedonistic values mushrooming in shallow themes of non-repression”. *Shepherd, Some Philosophical Critiques and Appraisals*, 2004, p.98).

Therefore in this section the Researcher has sought to look at one notion of Schuon's exoteric, i.e. the absorption into the greater good with a view that such a notion is somewhat dangerous when no distinction is made between core exoteric and added exoteric. Perhaps if these matters are to be absorbed into the greater good, they should be a matter for individual spirituality. Even the ideas such as those of Shepherd, Jones and Cohen could be misleading, even an appropriation of exoteric form for the Perennial Philosophy itself may also lead to harmful effects, including those who may have well-meaning intentions like the Findhorn Foundation.

In the following section the Researcher will attempt to give an explanation of the Perennial Philosophy and its importance as being the spring from which all Orthodox Religions sprang. His argument is that this perennial reality is the Real and that the purpose of Orthodox Religions is to get Man from the Illusionary back to the Real again. Also Schuon's definition of an Orthodox Religion will play an important role throughout the dissertation.

2.4 Esoteric Argument and the Definition of the Perennial Philosophy

Schuon, while accepting, honouring and respecting the diversity of Religions which are willed by Heaven, emphasises both the inner unity within this diversity and the religious significance of this diversity itself. He has written over and over again on how each Religion is *the* Religion; to have lived any Religion fully is to live that Religion, and therefore in a sense all Religions. How each religious universe is absolute for those who live within that universe and yet only the Absolute Reality which stands above all manifestation and particularisation is *the*

Absolute. How the sun of each religious cosmos is *the* sun for the cosmos while being a star in the firmament that symbolises the Divine Infinity (Schuon, 2005b, p.5). Again in the following section one returns to the central theme of form, the vitality that the formless reality gives to the outward form of an Orthodox Religion and the importance that this perennial inner form plays.

In order to fully examine Schuon's esoteric argument, it is necessary to give a general definition of the Perennial Philosophy (insofar as such a thing might be done), which is the background for the esoteric argument. Moreover having given a general definition, one needs to look at the more specific principal definitions given by Schuon, before any serious critical analysis can begin concerning his esoteric doctrine. Perhaps a good starting point is Huxley's general view of the Perennial Philosophy:

"The divine Ground of all existence is a spiritual Absolute, ineffable in terms of discursive thought, but (in certain circumstances) susceptible of being directly experienced and realised by the human being. This Absolute is the God-without-form of Hindu and Christian mystical phraseology. The last end of man, the ultimate reason for human existence, is unitive knowledge of the divine Ground—the knowledge that can come only to those who are prepared to 'die to self' and so make room, as it were, for God. Out of any given generation of men and women very few will achieve the final end of human existence; but the opportunity for coming to unitive knowledge will, in one way or another, continually be offered until all sentient beings realise Who in fact they are"(Huxley, 1946, p. 29).

Perennial Philosophy is primarily concerned with the one Divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds. But the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart and poor in spirit.

The Perennial Philosophy works on the premise that man has two natures, 'that of himself' and 'that of an inner nature;' i.e. his Intellect (Schuon, 2005a, p. xxxi). It is this inner nature that can be united with the Divine ground of reality, providing he/she is prepared to undertake certain steps to quash and put aside his egotistical nature which more often stifles his ability to see beyond self and the illusory world which surrounds him.

The idea of a Perennial Philosophy is by no means a new idea, and may well be lost in antiquity. The Roman philosopher Cicero when talking about the existence of the soul after death

said that he spoke with authority of ancient times and that "these things are of old date and have the sanction of universal religion" (Cicero, 1904, *Tusculan Disputations*, Book I, xii-xiv & *Sunrise Magazine*, April/May 1984).

The term Perennial Philosophy was first used by Leibniz, who popularised the Latin phrase *philosophia perennis*. He used it to describe what was needed to complete his own system.¹⁶ This was to be an eclectic analysis of the truth and falsehood of all philosophies, ancient and modern, by which he believed that he could separate the gold from the dross and the diamond from the mine and the light from the shadows which would then have given him a Perennial Philosophy. This is a similar aim with the goal of reconciling differing religious philosophies as was pursued by Ammonius Saccas in Alexandria (3rd century A.D), the inspirer of Plotinus and the Neoplatonic movement (Wiener, 1973, pp. 457-463, *Perennial Philosophy, Dictionary of the History of Ideas*).

Leibniz, however, laid no claim to inventing the phrase. He said he found it in the writings of a 16th-century theologian, Agostino Steuco (1497-1548), whom he regarded as one of the best Christian writers of all time. Steuco described the Perennial Philosophy as the originally-revealed absolute truth made available to man before his Fall, completely forgotten in that lapse, and only gradually regained in fragmentary form in the subsequent history of human thought. Steuco's *De perenni philosophia* was influenced by Ficino Pico's *philosophia priscorum* or *prisca theologica*, "which can be translated as ancient or venerable philosophy and theology" (Nasr, 1989, pp. 69-71). Some well-known proponents of Perennial Philosophy include René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon. The Anglo-Sri Lankan scholar and writer Ananda Coomaraswamy, associated with the Traditionalists, also wrote extensively about Perennial Philosophy. St Thomas Aquinas has been labelled as a perennial philosopher and Thomism is a body of philosophical and theological ideas, which in their 19th and 20th century revivals have been labelled as Perennial Philosophy due to its suggestion that there is a central and enduring philosophical questions about reality and knowledge. Thomism offers a relevant set of answers to these questions and that their answers constitute an integrated philosophical system.

¹⁶ See letter of July 1687 from Leibniz to Simon Foucher (*Die philosophischen schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, vol. I C. I. Gerhardt (ed), p 395).

The Perennial Philosophy is the source from which all Religions spring, the fount of all esoteric truth, without which there could be no true Religions. Such is its fundamental importance that it has been commented on by nearly all the great ecclesiastical scholars since the dawn of time. The following passage from *the Underlying Religion: An Introduction to the Perennial Philosophy*, by Martin Lings and Clinton Minnaar, helps illustrate the point:

“As absolute Truth it is the perennial wisdom (*Sophia Perennis*) that stands as the transcendent source of all the intrinsically orthodox religions of humankind. In the words of St. Augustine, it is that “uncreated Wisdom, that the same now, as before, and the same to be for evermore” (*Confessions*, 9:10). As infinite Presence it is the perennial religion (*religio perennis*) that lives within the heart of all intrinsically orthodox religions. In the words of Nicolas of Cusa: “There is...one sole religion and one sole worship for all beings endowed with understanding, and this is presupposed through a variety of rites” (Lings/Minnaar, 2007, p xii).

Schuon is very careful to say that there is an underlying Religion in every Orthodox Religion, yet is not exclusive to any one particular Religion; this is what he calls the religion of the heart, *religio cordis*, this is a transcendent element. This can only be fully understood in the contextual realisation. The function of the human intelligence is to differentiate between the Real and the Illusory or between the Permanent and the Impermanent, and that the essential function of the Will is that it attaches itself to the Real. The matter is better put directly by Schuon himself:

“The essential function of human intelligence is discernment between the Real and the illusory or between the Permanent and the impermanent, and the essential function of the will is attachment to the Permanent or the Real, This discernment and this attachment are the quintessence of all spirituality; carried to their highest level or reduced to their purest substance, they constitute the underlying universality in every great spiritual patrimony of humanity, or what may be called the *religio perennis*” (Schuon, 2006a, p.119-120).

It can be argued then from the above that the Perennial Philosophy has some of the following definitions, a metaphysical discernment between the Real and which is referred to as the aspect of Presence or unitive Prayer (Lings/Minnaar, 2007, p.xiii), Schuon further argues that the two-fold definition contains the intrinsic orthodoxy for every Religion and spirituality. The matter is better put in the following passage from *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, in which Schuon sets out clearly the two premises upon which religious orthodoxy must be founded:

“In order to be orthodox a Religion must possess a mythological or doctrinal symbolism establishing the essential distinction in question and it must provide

a path that guarantees both the perfection of concentration and its continuity; in other words a religion is orthodox if it provides a sufficient, if not always exhaustive, idea of the Absolute and the relative, and thus of their reciprocal relationships and a spiritual activity that is contemplative in its nature and effectual with regard to our ultimate destiny" (Schuon, 2006a, p.121).

Thus an Orthodox Religion need not be one that has been established in antiquity, but merely one that provides continuity and allowing a path that leads to man's ultimate destiny which is to be reunited with the Absolute. This gives even greater clarity and weight to the Perennial Philosophy, for Religions may come and go with the passing of time and civilisations; but the intrinsic premise upon which they are based does not change. Of course it is not the purpose of this research to examine every Religion since the dawn of time, but it is nonetheless an important point to bear in mind when wishing to argue for the transcendent unity of Religions. In addition, it must be noted that each Religion, in its outward form as stated above, will be like water manifested in a variety of colours and is still water in the end. In order to emphasise the unique spiritual contours of each Religion, not forgetting the twofold theme of the Real and the unreal; one may quote Schuon at length when he talks comparatively of the two manifestations in Christianity and Buddhism:

"In Christianity-according to St. Irenaeus and others-God "became man" that man might "become God". In Hindu terms one would say: *Atma* became *Maya* that *Maya* might become *Atma*. In Christianity, contemplative and unifying concentration is to dwell in the manifested Real-the "Word made flesh" – in order that this Real might dwell in us, who are illusionary, according to what Christ said in a vision granted to St. Catherine of Siena: "I am He who is: thou art she who is not." The soul dwells in the Real-in the Kingdom of God that is "within us"- by means of permanent prayer of the heart, as is taught by the parable of the unjust judge and the injunction of St. Paul¹⁷"(Schuon, 2006a, pp. 123-124).

In the passage about the judge, it merely places an emphasis on the importance of the prayer of the heart, one can see from the above passage a reinforcement of some of the orthodox

¹⁷ Luke 18

1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;
 2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:
 3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.
 4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;
 5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.
 6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.
 7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?
 8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

principles of Religion, the discernment between the Real and the Unreal a perennial theme so to speak, along with the eschatological purpose of religious orthodoxy Schuon continues his argument in the continuation of the passage when talking about Buddhism:

"In Buddhism the two terms of the alternative or of discernment are *Nirvana*, the Real, and *Samsara*, the illusory" in the last analysis the path is the permanent consciousness or *Nirvana* as *Shunya*, the "Void," or else it is concentration on the saving manifestation of *Nirvana*, the Buddha, who is *Shunyamurti*, "Manifestation of the Void." In the Buddha-notably in his form *Amitabha-Nirvana* became *Samsara* that *Samsara* might become *Nirvana*' and if *Nirvana*, is the Real and *Samsara* is illusion, the Buddha is the Real in the illusory The passage from the illusory to the Real is described in the *Prajnaparamitra-hridaya-sutra* in these terms: Gone, gone, gone for the other shore, attained the other shore, O Enlightenment be blessed" (Schuon, 2006a, pp. 123-124).

Schuon argues (and the Researcher is in agreement with him) that "for those with eyes to see" the reading of the above two passages "unveils a satisfying dimension of transcendental unity." The discernment between the Real and the Unreal are the fundamental blocks of every Orthodox Religion, at the same time the outward forms and rites of each Religion are not to be dismissed or debased, on the understanding that they have this goal of moving from one form to another (Schuon, 2006a p.124).

In the following chapter, the five pillars of the Perennial Philosophy as laid out by Schuon are identified (Having previously defined the Perennial Philosophy in so far as that is possible). These five pillars are, Prayer, Truth, Virtue, Beauty and Religion. The latter two (Beauty, Religion) shall receive their own individual chapters, whilst the other three (Prayer, Truth, Virtue) shall be dealt with on the chapter concerning mysticism; this is because path of prayer, truth and the way, are part of the common ground to mystical union. It would be nearly impossible to deal with the last two pillars and not involve the first three.

2.5 Five Pillars

Schuon further argues that unless the soul conforms with the Real, through Truth, Way (or Prayer) and Virtue (or Life), then the spiritual life risks becoming a mental play of the mind or a

technical effort of the will (Schuon, 1981, pp. 93-100). The effacement of self, charity and the giving oneself to others are matters that will be explored later, especially in the section on mysticism.

There remains one more basic pillar of the Perennial Philosophy, and that is Beauty, the exultation of truth that gives the soul the occasional platonic glimpse of what it once knew so well before its Fall. Schuon argues that it provides the soul with an "exteriorisation with a view to an interiorisation". For Schuon, its importance is that it reminds us of what we must love and is therefore moral; it communicates to us in this world of accidental aspects of the Divine, without having to address itself to abstract thought (Schuon, 1981, p. 179). For Schuon, the most direct manifestations of Beauty are firstly in virgin nature, then sacred art, and lastly holy company and as "exteriorisations of the Inward"; they encourage the "interiorisation of the outward" (Schuon, 2009, p 190). In the following passage from *Light of the Ancient Worlds*, Schuon speaks of a concordance of *Religio Perennis* and virgin beauty:

"There is a concordance between the *religio perennis* and virgin nature and by the same token between it and primordial nudity, that of creation, birth, resurrection, or the high priest in the Holy of Holies, a hermit in the desert, a Hindu *sadhu* or *sannyasin*, a Red Indian in silent prayer on a mountain. Nature inviolate is at once a vestige of the earthly Paradise and a pre-figuration of the heavenly Paradise; sanctuaries and garments differ by virgin nature and the human body remains faithful to the initial unity. For primordial peoples such as the Native American Indians, virgin nature is the primordial "book" or revelation; it is also the Divine Art" (Schuon, 2006a, pp 25-26).

Continuing with his interpretation of the Perennial Philosophy, Schuon argues that it is necessary that one adheres to conventional Religions, when dealing with the four pillars, Truth, Prayer, Virtue and Beauty, because the Truths conveyed by the Intellect, (in what Schuon terms the super-rational faculty of transcendent knowledge within man) have been occluded since the Fall. It is the role of Revelation to remind us of these truths from the "outside". The religious traditions are providential vehicles which have been initiated by Heaven and not by man (Schuon, 2006a, p. 119), and therefore, Orthodox Religion has a crucial part to play in the Perennial Philosophy and may be regarded as its fifth column. It will now be the purpose of this work to examine the arguments concerning these five columns as defined by Schuon and to see how far they are realised and how they lead to the transcendent unity of Religions. It would be best to start with the Religion itself as this is the vehicle through which all the other four pillars/columns are supported and without which the realisation of the others is near impossible.

3 Chapter III the Pillar of Religion

“Independently of doctrinal atheism and cultural particularities, modern man moves through the world as if Existence were nothing or as if he had invented it; it is for him a commonplace thing like the dust beneath his feet- more especially as he is no longer aware of the Principal at once transcendent and immanent-and he makes use of it with assurance and inadvertence in a life that has lost its sacredness and thus become meaningless. Everything is conceived through a web of contingencies, relationships, prejudices; no phenomenon is any longer considered in itself, in its being, and grasped at its root; the contingent has usurped the rank of the absolute; man scarcely reasons any more except in terms of his imagination, which is falsified by ideologies on the one hand and by his artificial surroundings on the other. Now eschatological doctrines, however exaggerated they may appear to the sensibilities of those whose only gospel is their materialism and dissipation and whose life is nothing but a flight before God, provide the true measure for the cosmic situation of man; what the Revelations ask of us and what Heaven imposes or inflicts on us is what we are in reality, regardless of our own opinion; we know it in our heart of hearts, if only we can detach ourselves a little from the monstrous accumulation of false images that have become entrenched in our mind. What we need is to become once again capable of grasping the value of Existence and, amid the multitude of phenomena, the meaning of man’ we must once again find the measure of the real” (Schuon, 2006a, pp 30-31).

In examining Religion the question must be asked how far has it strayed from tradition in terms of perception, the decline of the Sacred from a modern perspective, its effects, misguided notions and what it should be from a perennial philosophical point of view.

Whilst it may have been previously dealt with by numerous authors as to why there has been a decline in the Sacred, it is nonetheless an important issue that needs to be dealt with in this work in order to show why the perennial reality is on the whole ignored, the perception of Religion distorted and, as a consequence, leading only to disunity where there should otherwise be inward rejoicing at the perennial certitude as an anchor in an otherwise illusory reality. The first question to be asked and analysed is Religion as originally perceived and as is now perceived by the majority in our modern age? The question can only be answered by taking a look at what tradition was and how far Religion was part of that tradition.

The Researcher would do well to first begin this analytical examination by turning to Hossein Nasr and his perception of tradition. In pre-renaissance times, all was perceived, to a large extent, to be part of tradition--a tradition that encompassed all. In an Islamic Sufi parable, once a baby fish asked his mother what the nature of water was and got the reply that she would explain this to him providing he could first find something that was other than water. This would perhaps have been the general pre-renaissance perception of the world. There would have been little need for the distinction as to what tradition is and what it encompassed. In other words, there was an awareness of revelation of traditional wisdom and the Sacred but not a near total secularisation of society as we have in the 21st century West at least. The Researcher does not wish to talk about the modern perception of tradition as being that of custom and habit or inherited forms of thought.

According to Hossein Nasr, "tradition is a living presence that leaves its imprint but is not reducible to that imprint" (Nasr, 1989, p.66). In light of the above what then seems to have gone wrong with Religion and the change of perception about it? The point that the Researcher wishes to emphasise here is that in the pre-modern period the perception of the world was one in which God played a central role; He was not a mere theory or possibility. The terrestrial hierarchy was a reflection of the Celestial one. The Devil was as real as the sun, no doubt, such times had their problems and were not perfect by any means. There might have been some who doubted but they would only be in the minority. Questions of the day could have been asked and answered by the authority of tradition rather than the ingenuity of man. The 4th Baron Northbourne in his *the Profane Point of View*,¹⁸ criticises the modern world for being anti-traditional and being nearly universally dominated by progressive humanist, rationalist, materialist, experimentalist,

¹⁸The Right Honourable, Walter Ernest Christopher James, 4th Baron Northbourne (18 January 1896-17 June 1982), was a British peer, agriculturalist, Olympic medallist, and author. (*Debretts & Burkes Peerage*)

individualist, egalitarian, free-thinking, and intensely sentimentalist (Lings/ Minnaar, 2007, p.12). Northbourne argues that there is a profane point of view about the modern world that is sapping the sources of the strength of Religion. In fact Lord Northbourne argues that the world has been reduced to a state of proofs and the Researcher is here in agreement with him, as we are now in a state of where all is proved or not proved and that which is not proved is, to a large extent, no longer of importance to us in our fast modern lives, in which the vast majority believe themselves to be the masters and the measurers of all things. The matter is put more succinctly by the peer himself:

“The profane point of view applied to Religion has caused everything not susceptible to direct proof based on evidence of the senses to be called in [to] question. Many things that are by their nature not accessible to the understanding of the masses have been set aside yet these things tend to be the intellectual elements that are really fundamental. The result is the growing prevalence of a religion that is reduced to its third element, the ethical or the moral.

With the weakening of the directing influence of the more intellectual elements everything tends increasingly towards a more sentimental humanism, confined in its outlook to the things of this world, and therefore defenseless against the assaults of its enemies. It becomes a Religion without mystery, denuded of most of its essentials. Nothing greater than man remains, very soon happiness rather than salvation is the biggest and final goal, and pain rather than damnation becomes the greatest evil and the ultimate dread. It is scarcely too much to say that Religion has been virtually ceased to be Religion, although it still professes a belief in God” (Lings/Minnaar, 2007, p.12).

Whilst the above may sound harsh to the most modern practitioners of Religion in the West, the sentiments nonetheless possessed more than a grain of truth. It would be a simple matter to look at the decline in church attendances in the West, over the last 100 years or so, and the more exoteric stand that the modern Catholic Church has taken since, say, the 16th century. Some of these arguments will be dealt with later. For now the Researcher just wishes to argue what the traditional view of Religion was in comparison to what it is now, and to give weight to his arguments in this vein. The Researcher shall take a cursory look at the traditional perception of Religion in Europe before its decline into what it is today. Yet before coming to this stage some further points need to be looked at. One of the problems with Religion and its perception is the belief that Religion needs to become more progressive as we increase our progressiveness through rationality, scientific advancement and economic prosperity. This of course could not be

further from the truth. This is not to mean that one should approve and encourage some of the barbaric and prejudices of Religion in the past as these are often used as an excuse for why Religion should be progressive. The Researcher wishes to argue that by eliminating the carriage of Tradition we have divorced Religion from that which perpetuates Revelation. After all salvation is still salvation, it has not progressed, and the attempt to modernise Religion in the belief that it might be an improvement on an ancient one is a misconception, as it misses out on the notion of the original Revelation and the main duty of man is to lose as little of that completeness over the lapse of time.

In the following chapter the Researcher will press forward his case by arguing how important Religion was in the fabric of mediaeval society for both high and low, and how essence was often placed before substance. One speaks here of substance being the material world and its physical attributes, the belief in the knowledge that a more Real world exists behind the physical world. Moreover that this Real world is an eternal timelessness which would one day remerge with the Absolute/God, "He is the cause of time (Hebrews 1:2 and 13; Colossians 1:16). The Bible also says that this world emanated from an Absolute/God and, "Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Psalms 90:2). And how the exoteric was nearly always balanced with the knowledge that there was an esoteric form which could not be denied and that the esoteric form was essence that was ultimately an inescapable truth; so much so that there were those who were prepared to turn to a life of extreme contemplation, hardship and isolation to prepare themselves for the next life. One could argue that now perhaps such people might be regarded as mad or mentally deficient, yet in mediaeval times such practices were regarded as a means of preparing oneself for near certain salvation. One can now contrast this acceptance of the formless truth with that of the modern existentialism of Sartre, who is perhaps the epitome of the reversed notion of the perceptive form, by putting the ephemeral before the perennial as a reminder of the decline of the Sacred in the West and the sorry state by which it is now generally regarded.

3.1 Religion in the Mediaeval World

The Researcher will now turn his attention to that period in Europe known as the Middle Ages or the Mediaeval period roughly from the time of the fall of the Roman Empire to around 1485. The Researcher does not seek here to undertake a history lesson, but merely to examine and paint a picture of a world in which Religion and the Sacred was the dominant theme in the lives of many, if not all, inhabitants of Europe during that period. The purpose of undertaking such a depiction is both to show how Religion has lost its importance in general comparison to what it once was, and in turn, to argue that one of Schuon's fundamental pillars of the Perennial Philosophy has been undermined severely in the modern world in which man seems to be the measure of all things. The Researcher will attempt to examine briefly the arguments of Bernard Hamilton and Patricia Rosof whose ideas are in keeping with those of the Researcher as to why there has been a decline in the Sacred. In the final part of this chapter the Researcher will examine one of the antitheses of the Perennial Philosophical arguments, e.g. Existentialism as espoused by the 20th century philosopher Jean Paul Sartre and his concept of substance before essence.

Though the main aim of this section is to give an overview of the social perception of Christianity as a Religion in this period, it is necessary to briefly talk about the expansion of Christianity throughout Europe. By around 1050, most of Central and Northern Europe had been converted to Christianity, by 1400 there were no Pagan enclaves in Europe save for the Lapps who lived north of the Arctic Circle. The only other exceptions were the Muslim enclaves in countries like Spain, Portugal, and Southern Italy, which were eventually captured by the Crusaders. By the end of the Middle Ages, the only major dividing line in Christianity was that between the Orthodox Christians and the Catholics, and of course, those who practised Judaism, though for the purposes of this section the Researcher shall confine himself to Catholicism in Northern and Southern Europe as these countries are, generally speaking, considered to be "the West".

It may be safely argued that the Middle Ages were a time in which almost everyone's lives were touched by Religion of some kind or another, directly or indirectly. How then was this so? Just take a look at how deep the clergy extended into mediaeval society? Take, for example, those who were tonsured. These were men who intended to take Holy Orders but who did not necessarily have to do so; yet by being tonsured they were considered to be minor clergy. This

accorded them the privilege of being exempted from the jurisdiction of the secular courts. Since many tonsured men were actually lay people like university students and those in the lowest four holy orders who were free to marry, it was possible for ecclesiastical authorities under Canon Law to increasingly interfere in the lives of those lay people in terms of morality, religious observance, property etc. Of course one must not forget the influence of the Inquisition instituted by Gregory IX in 1233. However, Bernard Hamilton in his excellent book *Religion in the Mediaeval West*, points out that the influence of the Inquisition has often been exaggerated, for it did not exist all over Europe; for example, Castile or England was not affected, for the main purpose of the Inquisition was to reconcile heretics to the Church rather than have them condemned.

It could be argued from the above that the influence of Religion and the Church only came about due to the enforcement of ecclesiastical law. No doubt, it would be foolish to deny that it had no influence; but were the influence of the Sacred merely down to the enforcement of law, then there would be little point in undertaking this study as no such study would be of any worth were it to ignore the law as it then stood. The Researcher is seeking to both show and argue here that the Sacred permeated and influenced mediaeval society in a way that has yet to be seen again in the West, from both the highest to the lowest, and to ask why this was so.

3.1.1 Cult of Saints

One of the ways in which it could be argued that mediaeval people had their minds turned towards the Sacred as a means for succour is by examining the cult of saints. In fact it might be said that the mediaeval minds were turned towards piety and contemplation over materialism.

If one were to take the biblical tale of the two sisters Mary and Martha of Bethany when Christ on a visit to their house found Martha going to a lot of trouble to prepare a meal, whereupon Christ pointed out that she should seek to imitate her sister Mary who sat and listened to what he had to say. Christ was pointing out that what Mary sought could never be taken away

from her. "Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke, 10, 41-2).

This has often been interpreted as those who trouble themselves too much with the material life and do not listen to the word of God. This Mary of Bethany is sometimes identified as Mary Magdalene the reformed sinner who washed Christ's feet. This Mary was lauded during the Middle Ages as a contemplative of the highest order who spurned the material world for the spiritual one. In her essay *Mary Magdalene and the Contemplative Life, (Mediaeval Religion, New Approaches)* Katherine Ludwig Jansen mentions a mediaeval Franciscan priest by the name of Luca da Padova who ended one of his sermons on how Mary Magdalene's life filled the "*ordo contritum*"--order through opposition, the opposition being the material life in favour of the contemplative one, a life in which she spurned all material comforts in favour of spiritual ones. It is this point that permeated mediaeval thought when talking about Mary and Martha.

One has only to look at some of the great saints of the period and the backgrounds from which they sprang and how they spurned wealth in favour of the Sacred, not to say that such a thing would be almost impossible today. The examples below would suggest that it was more possible in the Middle Ages than it might be now. St. Hugh of Cluny¹⁹ was one of the greatest political figures in Europe for around sixty years and was praised for his secret fasting and mortifications. St. Antoninus²⁰, archbishop of Florence, was admired for despising wealth that his office entitled him to, giving away his surplus income to the poor and employing only six servants in his vast palace. Even at the very highest echelon of society one finds four mediaeval kings who were canonised: King Edward the Confessor of England²¹ known for his strong

¹⁹ **Hugh of Cluny** (May 13, 1024 - April 28, 1109) was an Abbot of Cluny. He is sometimes referred to as "Hugh the Great" or "Hugh of Semur" and was canonised by the Roman Catholic Church as Saint Hugh (the Great). He was one of the most influential leaders of one of the most influential monastic orders of the Middle Ages.

²⁰ **Saint Antoninus** (Anthony of Florence, Antonio Pierozzi, also called De Forcigliani) (March 1, 1389-May 2, 1459), archbishop of Florence, was born in the city of Florence. He entered the Dominican order in his 16th year, and was soon entrusted, in spite of his youth, with the government of various houses of his order at Cortona, Rome, Naples and Florence, which he laboured zealously to reform. He was consecrated Archbishop of Florence in 1446, and won the esteem and love of his people, especially by his energy and resource in combating the effects of the plague and earthquake in 1448 and 1453. He died on May 2, 1459.

²¹ **Saint Edward the Confessor** (c. 1003 – January 5, 1066), son of Ethelred the Unready, was the penultimate Anglo-Saxon King of England and the last of the House of Wessex, ruling from 1042 until his death. Edward succeeded his half-brother Harthacanute, who (c. 1003 – January 5, 1066), "son of Ethelred the Unready, was the penultimate Anglo-Saxon King of England and the last of the House of Wessex, ruling from 1042 until his death. His reign is characterised by a period of almost unbroken peace and he was known for his chastity (even though he was married) and was generally said to be devoid of personal ambition. St. Edward was the first King of England to be touched for the "king's evil", many sufferers from the disease were cured by him. He was canonised

monastical nature; Emperor Henry II²² who with his wife Saint Cunigunde of Luxemburg took a vow of mutual chastity; Humbert III,²³ Count of Savoy, another monarch with strong monastical tendencies, and finally there is the example of the Hungarian King Stephen²⁴. There are of course other monarchical saints of the Middle Ages like Louis IX of France. The argument for the permeation of piety and the Divine amongst all levels of mediaeval society is given such weight not only by the above examples but also by the fact that one had to wait until the 20th century to see a further example of a Head of State being made a saint, in the person of the Blessed Emperor Karl²⁵. The Researcher does not wish to get ahead of himself, yet it is a thought worth pondering when considering the decline in the Sacred in the West.

As stated earlier the particular object of this section is to examine the cult of saints and how they are examples of piety in Western mediaeval society. The Researcher wishes to argue that these saints were examples of the Sacred and the Divine to all because they came from every

by Alexander III in 1161. His feast is kept on the 13th of October, his incorrupt body having been solemnly translated on that day in 1163 by St. Thomas of Canterbury in the presence of King Henry II." See (Catholic Encyclopaedia) for more details.

²² **Saint Henry II** (May 6, 973 – July 13, 1024), called the Holy or the Saint, was the fifth and last Holy Roman Emperor of the Saxon (or Ottonian) dynasty from his coronation in Rome in 1014 until his death a decade later. He was crowned King of Germany in 1002 and King of Italy in 1004. He was the only German king to be canonised. Henry was canonized in the year 1146 by Pope Clement II, and his spouse, Cunigunde, was canonised in the year 1200, by Pope Innocent III. Henry is buried in Bamberg Cathedral, which also has the tomb of Pope Clement II. He is the patron saint of the city of Basel, Switzerland, and of St Henry's Marist Brothers' College in Durban, South Africa. (Catholic Encyclopaedia)

²³ **Blessed Humbert III** (1135–1189), was Count of Savoy from 1148 to 1189....he was a man of irresolute spirit who was disconsolate at being born a prince and preferred the seclusion of a monastery. He only renounced his chosen state of celibacy so as to give his land an heir.

²⁴ **Saint Stephen I** (Hungarian: I. (Szent) István) (967/969/975, Esztergom, Hungary – August 15, 1038, Esztergom-Szentkirály or Székesfehérvár, Hungary), "was Grand Prince of the Magyars (997-1001) and the first King of Hungary (1001-1038). Stephen I was canonized, together with his son and Bishop Gerard of Csanád, on August 20, 1083, becoming one of the most popular saints in Hungary. When this Christian King mounted the throne, much of his country was pagan, and many of those pagans were fierce and violent. Placing his entire kingdom under the protection of Mary, Mother of God, his reign was blessed and many came into the faith. The Pope sent him a special blessed crown that is treasured to this day. Saint Stephen loved the poor and would often go about in disguise, giving out gifts of money to the destitute. One day, some ruffians knocked him down and beat him, taking his money pouch. They had no idea this was their king. He did not become angry, but prayed to the Blessed Virgin, and forgave them. He gave support to Christian leaders, upheld the Holy See, and was a patron who built many Churches." See (Catholic Encyclopaedia & www.catholichomeandgarden.com) for more details

²⁵ **The Archduke** (later emperor) **Charles** was born on August 17, 1887-1922, last emperor of Austria Hungary, came to the throne in 1916 on the death of Franz Josef generally considered a man of peace. Declared 'Blessed' by Pope John Paul II on 3 October 2004. For further details see the Vatican website: http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20041003_charles-austria_en.html

echelon of society and were an example to all, especially the wealthiest members spurning their wealth or power for the sake of the Divine. It would be ridiculous to suggest that those in the mediaeval West were not motivated by self-interest or that they all sought to live like saints, but it could be argued that they were all aware that mortal achievements were not permanent or only of a transitory nature; the only real satisfaction for a man might be that which awaited him in Heaven. Hamilton in his book *Religion in the Mediaeval West* puts forward a similar argument, when he says that the majority of people in the Middle Ages looked up to contemplatives and saints, but didn't necessarily want to follow in their footsteps and were still guided by self-interest. Yet despite this, the contemplative ideals could sometimes make them change the course of their lives or leave their families and set aside their self-interests. There was awareness amongst those in mediaeval society that human achievements were temporary and passing (Hamilton, 1986, p.83).

In turning back finally to the matter of saints, the Researcher will just comment on the typical mediaeval minds, their perception of saints and how it was genuinely believed that saints could protect people from earthquakes, acts of violence, ward off temptation and the diabolical. Hamilton tells us that "Saints were very real to mediaeval people. They moved through the world and could, if they wished, manifest themselves to the faithful" (Hamilton, 1986, p.125). One would not wish to suggest that saints are not believed in, on the contrary, they are; but if we ask the average Westerner in the street who was the patron saint of hopeless cases they would perhaps be unlikely to know. But it is doubtful if this would have been the case with the average mediaeval person. The reason could be that for a mediaeval person the Divine was as real as the breeze in the air, not visible but most certainly perceived and felt.

3.1.2 The Awareness of the Diabolical

The Researcher asks any reader to try and imagine a society where the Divine is considered to be just as real as the rationality of mechanisation is for the majority of the people in the West today. It is necessary to include this in this study since it highlights further the decline in the

Sacred in the sense that nowadays the greatest fear of man is perhaps physical suffering; as long as he can continue to strive to reduce this through the advancement of science etc, it is easier for him to believe that this is the greatest evil that he has to overcome. As such, he need not rely on anything but his own technical skill for his well-being, which he limits to the physical world. The more he does this, the less he feels he needs God or Religion. The more the Religion is reduced to proofs which are reducible to empiricism of a scientific nature, the less important the Sacred seems to him. Yet in mediaeval society, the greatest fear was not physical suffering which was considered something that would end, but it was eternal damnation, the permanent fallen state, which would be worse than the suffering in this temporary fallen world. Thus the opposite of the Divine, the diabolical, was never dismissed as it might be today, whereas a Freudian psychiatrist might dismiss it as a mere neurosis or some form of primeval fear. It is important to touch upon this because it is one of the reasons that might be cited as to why the Divine was considered so important in mediaeval times. The average mediaeval mind believed that there was a constant war going on between good and bad, the good being represented by God and his Angels and the bad by the Devil and his cohorts who were always seeking to tempt Mankind; and that this battle was taking place in this universe where a spiritual creation did exist. Hamilton argues that the devil and his cohorts occupied just an important part in belief as heaven did, and that people in general were aware of the influence of the diabolical and wanted to be protected from it as much as possible:

“Although the church said little in its official teaching about the devil and his angels, they occupied almost as important a place as the hosts of heaven in popular belief. This can be seen from the services which lay people required from the priesthood: rites of blessing, invariably accompanied by rites of exorcism, abound in mediaeval service books. People wanted their houses blessed, their fields blessed, their food blessed, their weapons blessed. The assumption behind all those rites was that the devil was very powerful and that his influence must be excluded by the stronger rituals of the Christian faith” (Hamilton, 1986, p.106).

As a result of being aware of the opposite to the Divine, it could be argued that sin itself was taken more seriously, for example, the brother-in-law of St. Edward the Confessor having killed a man walked bare-footed from Bruges to Jerusalem in 1052 and died on the return journey. The penance for sin often accompanied long periods of fasting or some other physical hardship (Hamilton, 1986, p.117). Even feast days such as Good Friday, one would desist from such activities like sex or going to war. Such was the level of permeation of the Sacred in mediaeval society.

3.1.3 Contemplatives

In the final part of this portrayal of the Sacred in mediaeval Western Europe, the Researcher will argue that the depth of the Sacred and the Divine was such that there were people who were prepared to be anchored to a church and some others who were prepared to be religious hermits. With all the blessings of the Church so steeped in esoterism these people were not perceived as a threat to the established order. The Researcher will just take the opportunity here to mention briefly these two groups and what they stood for and why they were so highly respected. These arguments are in keeping with Schuon's notions of the life of the monk or the hermit in which he argues that such a life is an antechamber to Heaven, and for those monks and contemplatives time would stop on a unique and blessed day:

“The monk or hermit-and every contemplative, even a king-lives as if in an antechamber of Heaven; on this very earth and within his mortal body he has attached himself to Heaven and enclosed himself in a prolongation of those crystallisations of Light which are the celestial states. This being so, one understands how monks or nuns can see in the monastic life their “Paradise on earth”; all things considered, they are at rest in the divine Will and wait for nothing in this world below except death, and in this way they have already passed through death; they live here below in keeping with eternity. The days as they succeed one another do nothing but repeat the same day of God time stops in a unique and blessed day and is thus joined once again to the Origin, which is also the Centre. And it is this Elysian simultaneity that the ancient world has always had in view, at least in principle and in their nostalgia; a civilisation is a “mystical body”: as far as possible it is a collective contemplative” (Schuon, 2006a, pp 16-18).

The anchorite or anchoress is an example of the recluses who decide to confine themselves in order to assure themselves of salvation and who in turn are supported by others who wish to assure themselves of salvation as well. These recluses usually lived in a cell built against the wall of a church sometimes with door walled up and food being received through a window, or sometimes with access to a tiny walled garden upon which the cell opens out. Through a tiny window known as a “squint” the contemplatives could provide advice and counsel as they were known for having a reputation for wisdom, the most famous anchorites and anchoress are Julian

of Norwich²⁶ and St. Anthony the Great²⁷ The life of an anchor or anchorite was an austere one even by mediaeval standards, let alone those of the 21st century. Yet such was their devotion to the Divine. Some would live for 30 or 40 years in austere conditions; the likes of which would undoubtedly spur human rights activists in the West to protest if prisoners were kept in such conditions today, yet this was all voluntary. As an illustration of the general daily conditions, Patricia J. F. Rosof in her essay *The anchoress in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries (Peace Weavers, Mediaeval Religious Women Volume II)*, tells us of the kind of temptations an Anchor was susceptible to and the need to remember their mortality:

“She was to live in the world of church services and in the world of her mind and spirit. If she was reminded of the temporal world, it was to know that sooner or later she would have to leave it physically as she had already done in part. Eve of St Eutrope was told “What if you think you are buried here or if you consider this cubicle your tomb? By bearing the cross after Christ, you will rise from the tomb. Do not fear the burial of resurrection.” The English author of the thirteenth century *Ancrene Riwe*, writing to the three recluses in his care tells them that anchoresses should think often about death. “They should scrape up the earth every day, out of the grave in which they shall rot” Death was a constant reality to an anchoress from the time of the enclosure ceremony, when the Mass for the Dead might have been celebrated, her cell sealed, her body powdered with dust. The fact that this very cell might be her place of burial and certainly of her death, was a constant reminder whether or not she actually dug up the earth or prepared her tomb. Her cell’s decoration was the cross, an instrument of death and a sign of life after death. Her view was of the altar with the Holy Sacrament, again a reminder that her true life was after bodily death. Even alive the anchoress was sealed off from the world as in a tomb” (Nichols/Thomas-Shank, 1987, p. 132).

²⁶ **Julian of Norwich** (c. November 8, 1342 – c. 1416) is considered one of the greatest English mystics. Little is known of her life aside from her writings. Even her name is uncertain, the name "Julian" coming from the Church of St Julian in Norwich, where she was an anchoress, meaning that she was walled into the church behind the altar during a mass for the dead. At the age of 30, suffering from a severe illness and believing she was on her deathbed, Julian had a series of intense visions of Jesus Christ. (They ended by the time she overcame her illness on May 13, 1373. She recorded these visions soon after having them, and then again twenty years later in far more theological depth. They are the source of her major work, called *Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love* (circa 1393). This is believed to be the first book written by a woman in the English language. Julian became well known throughout England as a spiritual authority. (Encyclopedia Britannica Online & Catholic Encyclopaedia)

²⁷ **Saint Anthony the Great** (c 251–356), also known as Anthony the Abbot, Anthony of Egypt, Anthony of the Desert, Anthony the Anchorite, Abba Antonius (Ἀβᾱς Ἀντώνιος), and Father of All Monks, was an Egyptian Christian saint and the prominent leader among the Desert Fathers. (White, Carolinne (1998). *Early Christian Lives*. London: Penguin & Catholic Encyclopaedia)

These hermits were generally considered to be people who had gone off to live in solitude and contemplation to await God, for they had taken their Religion so seriously in having made up their minds to do so, Dante in his *Divine Comedy* says that the contemplatives occupy the Seventh Heaven and are only outranked by the Apostles, the Virgin Mary and Christ for such is the high regard the contemplatives had held. The importance of the hermit was so high that the Emperor Otto III in 1001 was known to consult with the hermit Romuald. By the late 1400's contemplatives and anchoress were more under direct Church control, and by the end of that century were regarded more as eccentric than seekers of the Divine, a reflection of the changing times; but that is really beyond the scope of the present section of this research.

As the primary purpose of this work is not to undertake a study of Religion and the Divine in their entirety in mediaeval Europe, it is therefore beyond the scope of this work to detail the opposition to the Church from such groups as the Lollards, Hussites, Waldensians and the Cathars. Suffice it to mention them, but the real argument for opposition against the Sacred and the Divine comes from the argument that will be dealt with later in the form of Sartre's existentialism.

It must be remembered that the Church would preach against violence and usury, yet these things still occurred, and at times were even perpetrated by the Church itself. However it is safe to say that the average mediaeval man viewed the whole of creation, both visible and invisible as the work of God; and that all would ultimately have to answer to God for what they had done or failed to do. The following passage from Julian of Norwich and her vivid perception of the world perhaps sums up the way things might have been perceived:

“And [God] showed me a little thing, the size of a hazel-nut, on the palm of my hand, round like a ball. I looked at it thoughtfully and wondered, 'What is this?' And the answer came, 'It is all that is made'. I marvelled that it continued to exist and did not suddenly disintegrate; it was so small. And again my mind supplied the answer, 'It exists, both now and for ever, because God loves it' In short, everything owes its existence to the love of God” (Hamilton, 1986, p.187).

It may therefore be reasonably argued that the mediaeval West is perhaps the best example of the Divine and Sacred at their height and the period when the fundamental pillar of Religion as defined by Schuon was at its uppermost supported by a deep-seated awareness of the esoteric nature of the Divine, a period in which the saints were well known to all from the highest to the lowest, a period in which examples of sanctity abounded through all the echelons of society, a

period where man realised that all mortal things were just temporal, the contemplative was seen as the near perfect example in which life should be led and permanently turned towards the Divine. It is an important part of this philosophical religious study to look at the counter arguments to this thesis; therefore the Researcher will now turn to why there has been a decline in the Sacred and the Divine in the West.

3.2 The Existential Argument

If one were to speak in the language of existentialism, it most certainly could be argued that in mediaeval society essence was considered more important than substance. The Researcher wishes to argue why the Perennial Philosophy or wisdom is so neglected and also the general decline in the Sacred. There would no doubt be numerous arguments that might be advanced, yet the Researcher feels that the existential argument of man being the measure of all things is perhaps the most succinct example of all that he wishes to argue against. Whilst the Researcher shall be focusing on Sartre, it must be remembered that the argument is not new and has existed long before the largely pious Christian West that is depicted above; the Researcher will just mention briefly the history of existentialism before focusing on Sartre's argument²⁸ and its various merits and demerits in the context of the Perennial Philosophy and how it undermines Schuon's first pillar. It must be stated here that the Researcher will not be dealing with theistic existentialism but only with the atheistic kind as put forward by Sartre, as the Researcher feels that this is a more trenchant argument against the Perennial Philosophy.

It might logically be argued that existentialism in the Sartrean sense can also be found amongst the Sophists, and one of the most prominent and the first amongst them is Protagoras who stated "Man is the measure of all things: of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not" (from Plato's *Theaetetus*, (152a)). Now then let us take a look at the Sartrean argument and its various merits and demerits.

Sartre argues that existence precedes essence and "Man is nothing else but what he purposes; he exists only in so far as he realises himself, he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is" (Kaufmann, 1956, p.300 *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to*

²⁸ We are here making use of the lecture given by Sartre on 28 Oct 1945, to a Parisian crowd entitled *Existentialism and Humanism*, (though the literal translation is Existentialism is a Humanism, *Existentialisme est un Humanisme*) it is said that this was the only publication that Sartre regretted seeing in print form. According to Professor Bob Zunjic, of the University of Rhode Island, mainly because of the misinterpretations brought about by "ambiguous formulations" see (<http://www.uri.edu/personal/szunjic/philos/human.htm>).

Sartre).²⁹ Sartre then proceeds to say that man will be what he has planned to be. Sartre says that it is impossible for man to transcend human subjectivity (Kaufmann, 1956, p.291). Moreover "...We are unable ever to choose the worse. What we choose is always the better; and nothing can be better for us unless it is better for all"(Kaufmann, 1956, p.292). "If, moreover, existence precedes essence and we will to exist at the same time as we fashion our image, that image is valid for all and for the entire epoch in which we find ourselves"(Kaufmann, 1956, p.292).

Let us see how it is possible to lend support to Sartre's argument as put forward above that essence precedes substance. If things were to be measured along the lines of the physical only, then it would be plausible to say that the physical element of things takes precedence over the essence of things if things are thought to have an essence, which, of course, would be possible to deny entirely, or even argue that any such essence is man-made and therefore subjective; reducing the value of any associated essence. Sartre's argument is that there is nothing greater than man lest he choose that there should be. After all we now live in an age of proofs and rationality, if you can't prove it how do you know it exists, therefore wouldn't it just be easier to say that it did not exist? We have made proof our master at the highest levels, but the Researcher is not trying to argue that we should not have proofs. Nobel Laureate Richard Feynman pointed out that. "A very great deal more truth can become known than can be proven" (Smith, 1996, p. 119) but proof does not have to be the ultimate arbitrator, yet in Sartre's argument it seems as though it is, for substance can be proven and from substance essence follows.

The Researcher would not wish to argue that if a man's neighbour came to him and told him that he had twelve bars of gold in his cellar and wished these converted to cash, that his neighbour should not seek some visual evidence of the matter before parting with his aforementioned cash. (Who is to say that the visual evidence might not be illusionary? But that would be straying too far from the scope of this work) It is not the intention of this study to confine itself to what might be called the mundane physical, but to concentrate on those matters where the physical might not necessarily be the 'be all and the end all' like life itself, unlike in the case of the gold bars.

It might be nice if we were the measure of all things and substance came before essence, then we might act with moral impunity (as the misguided often do) and we could be certain of all we

²⁹ First published in French as *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme* (Editions Nagel, 1946); the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy lists a 1946 English publication of the lecture in Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, the 1956 edition has been used as source.

know, and what we did not know we might be certain that such a thing was of no relevance as long as we did not know it. Such a world could be comforting for we would be the ultimate arbitrators. We could totally ensconce ourselves in our own rationality, pat each other on the back and know that there was nothing to our existence but the here and now. It might be a comforting thought for many to live in the self-made velvety world that Sartre's existentialism wishes to lead us into--an escapist existence. If one looks at Sartre's existential moral argument one gets some good evidence of this, we always choose what we deem good and nothing can be good for us without being good for all.

This would lead to a unilateralist's paradise (if the word might not be used without contradiction); this is good, I know that it is good for all because I have chosen it; I am the ultimate arbitrator of what is good or is not good, I need answer to none other than myself. The Researcher need not list through some of the current and past atrocious events that have stemmed from such an attitude, nor does he wish to imply that Sartre is condoning evil, but if the argument is taken as *prima facie* that is what it can lead to and most likely will lead to. The morally self-justified world of self is the antithesis of the first pillar of the Perennial Philosophy, which in turn is the setting aside of self. Sartre's argument is to make the temporal self into a perennial here and now self!

Sartre continues his argument by saying that nothing would change if God did not exist. We would still find ourselves with the same norms of honesty, progress and humanism and we would then have made of God an outdated thesis, which would be allowed to quietly die off (Kaufmann, 1956, p.294). A complete contrast to the belief in the diabolical was so evident in mediaeval society, therefore here the Researcher would argue that this is a total denial of the Divine. Moreover, this is an absurdity too because the non-presence of the Divine usually equals Hell in the orthodox sense of things, but for Sartre this does not matter as the Divine does not exist:

"The most terrible pain in hell is the pain of perdition- namely, the loss of God those who have gratuitously betrayed Him in time have to bear in hell His eternal privation, and this torment surpasses all their torments. Since in scorning God they have burnt for creatures with an unjust fire...He who loves not God and who dies in coldness will eternally shiver to the depths of his being in a cold without end. He will be frozen for having scorned true love and will be burnt for having adorned to false love..." Ruysbroeck (Perry, 1971 p. 262).

“See here the whole truth in short. All sin, death, damnation, and hell is nothing else but this kingdom of self, or the various operations of self-love, self-esteem, and self-seeking which separate the soul from God and end in eternal death and hell” William Law (Perry, p. 265).

Sartre argues that neither with Him nor without Him does man find anything to cling to and that man can't start making excuses for himself. Did man make excuses for himself in mediaeval times? He may have done that but he knew his limitations (Kaufmann, 1956, p.295). Sartre is correct to say that if man wishes to make technological progress to help alleviate suffering of all kinds and improve the quality of the lives of all, then he must forge forward and make little excuses for his failures to do so. Yet does this imply that he should be without the Divine? Surely the moral precepts of the Divine are a necessary guide if one's objective is to foster the greater good, as the Divine is about the ultimate good for all. At no time has it overtly suggested that suffering in the here and now must not be alleviated when and where possible. No doubt, there have been occasions where Religion and science have clashed in the West, and such occasion still arise and will do so in the future. But this does not imply that man is making any excuses or clinging, but he is simply trying to find answers whilst being aware of a higher authority. It might be the arbitrator of physical form only to a certain extent; he is not the arbitrator of Divine form.

If existence precedes reality then what are the implications for this in modern society when contrasting it with mediaeval society? Sartre argues that man is condemned to be free and is responsible for everything that he does, on this I agree, but Sartre fails to talk about the consequences and whether it is real freedom? But Sartre himself is not free from death and suffering and never will be in this world. All the material pleasures are revealed for what they are in the face of suffering and death, as they are only temporal and therefore ultimately illusory. The Researcher is in agreement with Sartre that man is responsible for what he does, we are taught about this time and time again along the lines of reward and punishment. Yet might it not be argued that true freedom is to be free from all that might interfere, impede or diminish that freedom? Man is condemned to a freedom of a kind in the here and now, he must not mistake that freedom as being the ultimate freedom, yet Sartre's existentialism would have us believe that we have true freedom in the here and now.

Man is now the new god; he has become supreme in his own self-assurance, this self-assurance has led to the insistence that all must be rationalised and anything that falls beyond the capacity of the human mind is either rationalised or rejected. The matter is put more succinctly

and poignantly in the following: "God must either be rejected or be rationalised and humanised, and the consequence is that Religion is eventually reduced to the status of an unproved hypothesis, 'improbable' first in the etymological and then in the contemporary sense of the world. Thence it is but a step to the total rejection of Religion, or its substitution by ideologies or fancies originating exclusively in the brain or the sentiments of men" (Lings/Minnaar, 2007, p. 27). Sartre's existentialism has done precisely just that, what it could not reduce to its own terms it has rejected.

There are without doubt other means by which Sartre's existentialism might be criticised, but as the primary focus of this study is on his existentialism as an antithesis of the Divine, all other means are excluded from this work.

3.3 Comparative Conclusion

The Researcher would not by any stretch of the imagination wish to say that Religion is dead or the Sacred is dead, for in the 21st century there are certainly more weeds that seek to stifle the flower before it even has a chance to bud, let alone bloom. If one takes the mediaeval world in which hardly any man would not have been aware of God or the Divine and contrast it with the existential argument above, it seems like a black and white contrast.

In a society where man is aware of the temporal nature of all that he sought to achieve and one in which the temporal seems to be, the be all and the end all where man is the measure of all things, and where the seeking of knowledge is now almost totally divorced from the Sacred, how many national leaders today are prepared to put God before politics? Very few, if any. Compare that to their mediaeval counterparts, where kings with absolute power chose the path of God rather than the material one, Stephen of Hungary going round in disguise handing out money to the poor. It would seem as though we are now spiritually lost in the West in comparison to our mediaeval counterparts. Yet the perennial wisdom has not diminished or changed with the passing of time, it is there for all to discover once again; the inversion needs to be reversed between the material and the contemplative, with the balance in favour of the latter. Whilst there may be leaders who would have used Religion for their own ends, even in the Middle Ages, the Researcher cited the life of St. Stephen of Hungary who was Head of State, as it is a fitting

example of those who did not use Religion for their own ends when they might easily have done so with impunity.

The following quote from Huston Smith's *Beyond the Post Modern Mind* best sums up the argument:

"From the fourth century triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire through the Middle Ages and the Reformation, the Western mind was above all else theistic. "God, God, God; nothing but God"-in the twentieth century one can assume such an exclamation to have come, as it did, from a theologian. In the Middle Ages it could have come from anyone. Virtually without question all life and nature were assumed to be under the surveillance of a personal God whose intentions toward man were perfect and whose power to implement these intentions was unlimited"(Smith p. 4, 1996).

Therefore the Researcher wishes to state again that the first pillar for the Perennial Philosophy is being undermined due to the overwhelming secular nature of the West. This is not to suggest that the mediaeval period is one that we should seek to emulate materially with all its disease and hardy existence; but it was a world in which the highest activity was contemplation. Though this level of contemplation may have been reached by only a few, yet this awareness was on the whole an undisputed common awareness that did not detract from man's role as the master craftsmen on earth (Lings/Minnaar 2007, p.72). In this sense, and to a large extent, the modern world is one that is largely inorganic, in which there seems to be little place for the Sacred or God. It is as though man (in the West) has sought to make the world his own and less one that contains God, unlike the mediaeval world which reflected God in an organic integrated order, in which even man and nature were signs of things sacred (*signa rei sacrae*), a society that the Researcher might argue was dedicated to that which was beyond this world--supra-terrestrial and non-temporal (Lings/Minnaar 2007, p.71). The highest type of activity was contemplation and holy men moved freely amongst the population as easily as squirrels amongst trees, yet this didn't mean that man forgot that he was a creature of the Earth and would have to physically return to it, but it did mean that he was looking beyond it, rather than seeing it as his ultimate goal.

The Researcher has argued that the importance Religion played in the West has diminished and subsequently this has led to a decline in the perception of the Divine. The Researcher has sought to argue for a world in which nearly all was measured by God, and from the greatest to the lowest there was an awareness of the limitations of what this world has to offer. If one thinks

of the argument substance before essence, it is not surprising that the notion of the essence of the Perennial Philosophy is largely ignored and, as such, the ground of common unity plays little part in the minds of Westerners. For the Sartrean argument is one upon which man has to find his place in the world without the aid of God--a world in which truth is that of a human setting and human subjectivity, where any notion of the transcendent is dismissed; either through denial of its existence or irrelevance if it does exist! A world in which man has no *a priori* features, but is just a chronology of historical events, a world in which man has no *a priori* limits whereas the Researcher has sought to argue that in the mediaeval world, man sought his place in the world through God, and that the centre of human existence was through God, whereas Sartre's existentialism argues for an abolition of the transcendent as the centre of man's existence and replaces it with human subjectivity.

4 Chapter IV Sacred Art and Beauty

Beauty Serves to remind us that God is not only transcendent, beyond even the loftiest thoughts we might think, but also immanent, and thus immediately present even in the very least of all material forms (Cutsinger, 1997, p.113).

I would like to remind readers again of what was discussed thus far and how it fits in my overall objective which is that the exoteric value or form can only be given meaning through the esoteric--the formless reality that overlaps into each Religion--and where the transcendent unity is to be found. Having followed Schuon's arguments concerning the exoteric form and having criticised his failure to make a distinction between core and added exoteric and the harmful effects that can sometimes arise because of this, I have also identified Schuon's five pillars of the Perennial Philosophy and described them (in so far as that is possible) as part of Schuon's esoteric argument. These five pillars have already been dealt with in chapter three where I opined that the height of the notion of the Sacred in the West was best epitomised by the mediaeval period--a period in which form was perceived as an outwardly manifestation of the Divine

essence. This is a world in which the Sacred was perceived in almost every facet of life! This chapter will focus on the pillar of beauty and its relation to the Sacred and the increasing rationalisation and humanisation in terms of visual sacred form, and the importance of sacred art as an important clothing of the Divine! The main theme is that sacred art cannot go beyond the categories that spawned it, for only amongst those exoteric categories can it be described as Sacred Art:

“Beauty is a reflection of divine bliss and, since God is Truth the reflection of His bliss will be that mixture of happiness and truth which is to be found in all beauty. Forms allow of a direct, ‘plastic’ assimilation of the truths- or the realities of the spirit... Beauty mirrors happiness and truth. Without the element of ‘happiness’ there remains only bare form- geometrical, rhythmical or other-and without the element of ‘truth’ there remains only a wholly subjective enjoyment or, it might be said, luxury...Beauty is a crystallisation of some aspect of universal joy; it is something limitless expressed by means of a limit...Different tastes should be derived from pure aesthetic and should be of equal validity, just as are the different ways in which the eye sees things. Myopia and blindness are certainly not different ways of seeing- they are merely defects of vision...When man surrounds himself with the ineptitudes of an art that has gone astray how can he still ‘see’ what he should ‘be’? He runs the risk of ‘being’ what he sees and assimilating the errors suggested by the erroneous forms among which he lives”(Schuon, 2005b, pp. 370-71).

4.1. Perennial Philosophical Definition of Beauty

It will now be the task of the Researcher to critically examine, from the perennial point of view, the importance of beauty and its importance in sacred art as a vehicle towards the Divine/Absolute and how far it helps or hinders a transcendent unity. Having done that the Researcher will return to Schuon's expostulations on art and say how far they are valid in the formation of this unity and then the Researcher will look to Çoomaraswamy for some supporting arguments. The Researcher is of the view that sacred art is an essential exoteric garment of any Orthodox Religion, but in being so it must be conducive towards contemplation of the Divine; and as such must be as un-academic as possible so as to appeal to simple piety. The Researcher will have to limit himself to sacred art alone (and then primarily visual art, as this comes more readily to the mind of the general reader as it is usually the most noticeable), due to the limitations of space and time. The Researcher will have to look at what the traditional perception of beauty is from the point of view of some of the other perennial masters and then (as far as possible) look for examples in sacred art. The question that may be asked is how far the

secularisation of sacred art has contributed to the rationalisation of Religion? Finally the Researcher will attempt to look very briefly at religious symbolism in 20th century 'sacred' art, and how we can define it? How far does it conform or not conform to the theories of beauty as expounded by St Thomas, along with that of Frithjof Schuon? How they conform to a sacred traditional form? The Researcher will take a brief glimpse at some of the forms of Oriental art in the form of the Hindu Temple. The Researcher would like to remind readers that this chapter is presented within the framework of the esoteric and the exoteric as laid out above, i.e. sacred art is part of the exoteric garments that clothe an Orthodox Religion as defined by Schuon and therefore they play just as equally an important part as, say, the scriptures, and to distort or dilute them is considered heretical on the part of perennial philosophers.³⁰ In this chapter it will be argued that the sentimentalisation of religious forms and the projection of individualism, the distortion of sacred artistic form through ornamentation have overall led to its rationalisation and humanisation.

It would perhaps be useful to start with a clear perennial definition of beauty so that reference can be made to it as a guiding star throughout this part of the work. The Researcher would like to make it clear from the outset that when talking about beauty and good, it is the former that he wishes to focus on though not in anyway to suggest that the latter is not of equal importance. In defining or attempting to define beauty it is necessary to come to a definition that is both universal and perennial and not one that can be both beautiful and ugly at the same time. The following are expostulations by Dionysius, who advocates a universal immutable beauty as a reflection of an ultimate beauty, a beauty that cannot be both beautiful and ugly at the same time, a beauty that is also transcendental, it is more than the object in which it is reflected or projected:

"The Super-Essential Beautiful is called 'Beauty' because of that quality which it imparts to all things severally according to their nature, and because It is the Cause of the harmony and splendour in all things, flashing forth upon them all, like light, the beautifying communications of Its originating ray: and because it summons all things to fare unto Itself (from whence It hath the name of 'Fairness'), and because It draws all things together in a state of mutual interpenetration. And it is called 'Beautiful' because It is All-Beautiful and more than Beautiful, and is eternally, unvaryingly, unchangeably Beautiful" incapable of birth or death or growth or decay and not beautiful in one part and foul in another; nor yet at one time and not at another; nor yet beautiful for one thing but

³⁰ The Researcher uses the term philosophists as an adjective to refer to those who adhere to the Perennial Philosophy and not in any way to refer to the sophists of the platonic era, the term is perhaps more suitable than philosophers as not all the adherents of the Perennial Philosophy can always strictly be categorised as being philosophers.

not to another; nor yet beautiful in one place and not in another (as if It were beautiful for some and not for others); nay, on the contrary, It contains in a transcendent manner the originating beauty of everything that is beautiful. For in the simple and supernatural nature belonging to the world of beautiful things, all beauty and all that is beautiful hath its unique and pre-existent Cause. From this Beautiful all things possess their existence, each kind being beautiful in its own manner and the Beautiful causes the harmonies and sympathies and communities of all things. And by the Beautiful all things are united together and Beautiful is the beginning of all things, as being the Creative Cause which moves the world and holds all things in existence by their yearning for their own Beauty. And It is the Goal of all things, and their Final Cause (for it is the desire of Beautiful that brings them all into existence), and It is their Exemplar from which they derive their definite limits' and hence the Beautiful is the same as the Good, inasmuch as all things, in all causation, desire the Beautiful and Good. And we make bold to say that the Non-Existent also participates in the Beautiful and Good; for then it is at once truly the Beautiful and the Good when it is praised Super-Essentially in God by the subtraction of all attributes. The One Good and Beautiful is in Its oneness the Cause of all the many beautiful and good things" (Dionysius, from Perry's, *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* 1971, p.664).

The theory of perennial beauty is a timeless one that has been echoing since the dawn of time. In his *Symposium*, Plato tells about an ascent of beauty by degrees; an ascent that leads to a perfection of absolute beauty, from the material to the subliminal, it will be one of the objectives of the Researcher to argue that one of the purposes of sacred art is to help man realise this beauty of ascent. What then of this subliminal beauty that Plato speaks of in such mellifluous and alluring tones? It is an everlasting beauty that neither grows nor decays and just is and always has been. It is just like Dionysius from whom we heard above, i.e. it is not foul in one place and beautiful in another but is an absolute; moreover Plato argues that this beauty is imparted to all other things, though one is concerned here with sacred art. The steps that Plato speaks of paint an achievable path that all might possibly be able to follow "...and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute Beauty, and at least knows what the essence of Beauty is" (Plato, 1953, *Dialogues of Plato*, trans Jowett). Is sacred art then not to be exalted above all others if it helps achieve the latter objectives of ascent from glimpses of the reflexion of the Real to the Real? A matter that will be discussed later once the Researcher has fully formulated his theories on beauty, without which it would be like trying to steer a ship without a rudder and therefore one would find it difficult to have a true course of argument.

If one picks up the theme of the esoteric vs. the exoteric again, one could argue that sacred art is in the ultimate scheme of things moving towards the same perennial goal that will in time

render each individual piece important only in so far as it contributes to the whole. The following passage by the 17th century Chinese philosopher Chin Shengt helps illustrate the point:

“Thirty spokes are grouped around the hub of a wheel, and when they lose their own individuality, we have a functioning cart, we knead clay into a vessel and when the clay loses its own existence we have a usable utensil. We make a hole in the wall to make a window and door, and when the windows and doors lose their own existence, we have a house to live in...”(Perry, 1971, p. 666).

This theme is continued when it is argued that the whole (beauty) is greater than the parts, and that all the beautiful things make up a whole in which we can all participate. Coomaraswamy, in his book *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought? The Traditional View of Art*, argues for this case when he quotes Augustine and Dionysius. He states that, “...individual things subsists there is a certain goodness of the universe, so also beside the beauty of individual things there is one beauty of the whole universe, which beauty results from the integration of all that is beautiful in any manner to make one most beautiful world, wherein the highest and divine Beauty can be participated in...” (Coomaraswamy, p.50, 2007). Does this theory then not lend weight to the transcendent unity of Religions, the whole being greater than the parts, i.e. the esoteric being the whole and greater than the exoteric, if one takes Schuon's definition of beauty in which he argues that it is the intersection between a phenomenon and an “ontological ray” (Schuon, 1984, p.77) that connects us with the summit of Reality to the edge of nothingness. When we perceive the beauty it is an invitation for us to move from the phenomenon of this world to a celestial model and in turn to its supra-ontological source (Cutsinger, 1997, p.124 *Meditations on the Teachings of Frithjof Schuon*). This is a point that the Researcher will return to in time when one examines carefully some of Schuon's comments. Beauty is that which transcends this realm in which it manifests itself (Cutsinger, 1997, p. 111).

4.2 Tria Requiruntur (Three Requirements)

St. Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*, states that beauty has three distinguished characteristics (requirements). These three requirements are: 1 Proportion: The senses delight in rightly proportioned things. What are not in right proportion would not be pleasing to us when we see them. 2 Integrity or Completeness: For things that are lacking in something would be

ugly. 3 Clarity: For a thing to be beautiful it should be brightly coloured. It is on this basis of these three requirements that the perennial notion of beauty is primarily founded.

In terms of sacred works of art, proportion (symbolism) should be within the confines of the Religion that spawned it, and so should its visual harmony. The Researcher would like to remind readers that in this work there is less emphasis on the third requirement – clarity- in the strict literal sense, although the attractiveness of the sacred work of art as a vehicle for contemplation to the Divine with a given religious framework is alluded to.

It would be absurd to say that beauty was only confined to the visual arts, when it can be mystical, literary, mathematical etc. Yet it is the visual that this dissertation is primarily concerned, though not wholly exclusively. Coomaraswamy has commented on Aquinas' theory of beauty and his three requirements. The Researcher will offer his own observations before looking at those of Coomaraswamy. The following are a selection from the source for readers to see the words of the great master untainted, unimpeded and in their august purity:

“The good and the beautiful are the same in substance, for they are established on a single real form; but they are different in meaning, for the good answers to appetite and acts like a final cause, while the beautiful answers to knowledge and acts like a formal cause. Things are called beautiful which give delight on being seen.

Summa Theologica, 1a. v. 4, ad 1 (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Philosophical Texts*, trans, Gilbey, 1951, p. 77).

There is nothing that does not share in goodness and beauty. Each thing is good and beautiful by its proper form.

Opusc. XIV, Exposition, de Divinis Nominibus, iv, lect. 5

Three conditions of beauty -- first, integrity or completeness, for broken things are ugly; second, due proportion and harmony; third, brightness and colour.”

1122 *Summa Theologica*, 1a. xxxix. 8 (Aquinas, p 77)

“Clearness and proportion go to compose the beautiful or handsome. Dionysius says that God is beautiful for He is the cause of the consonance and clearness of all things. Bodily beauty consists in well shaped members with freshness of complexion; spiritual beauty, which is the same as honourable good, in fair dealing according to the candour of reason.”

Summa Theologica, 2a-2ae. cxlv. 2

“Clearness and proportion are both rooted in mind, whose function it is to order and light up a symmetry. Hence beauty, pure and essential, dwells in the contemplative life, wherefore it is said of the contemplation of wisdom; and I became a lover of her beauty. Beauty is shed on the moral virtues in so far as they shine with the order of reason, especially on temperateness, which clears the lusts that fog the light of intelligence.”

Summa Theologica, 2a-2ae. clxxx. 2, ad 3 (Aquinas, 1951, p.78).

“Homes are not beautiful if they are empty. Things are beautiful by the indwelling of God.” *Exposition, in Psalmos, xxv. 5* (Aquinas, 1951, p 79)

The above is a clear definition of beauty from St. Thomas. Though everything shares in beauty it could be argued that when there is an adherence to symbolic form of a Religion, the clearness and proportion of these forms is a greater spur to the Intellect than when they do not conform to an orthodox religious symbolism. It may also be argued then that the aforementioned is in keeping with the main theme of this part of the dissertation that sacred art cannot go beyond the categories that spawned it, for only amongst those exoteric categories can it be described as Sacred Art.

The beautiful illuminates our *intellectus* with the intuition of understanding. The eyes and ears of our soul enable our vision to see the transcendent beauty present ontologically in all being. (Saward, *the Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty*, 1997, pp. 40-47), Sister Thomas Mary McBride in her paper on *Beauty Contemplation and the Virgin* (www.christendom-awake.org/pages/mcbride/beauty.htm) quotes Swiss theologian and Priest Hans Urs von Balthasar, that beauty is above all form and that light of beauty is that that radiates outward from the forms interior. Let us then turn briefly to Coomaraswamy's views on St. Thomas' theory before examining those of the Researcher. First the saint tells us that beautiful things must have integrity and completeness, as broken things are ugly. Coomaraswamy tells us that *integritas* is really the correctness of iconography. “All things being beautiful to the extent that they imitate or participate in the beauty of God, the formal cause of their being” (Coomaraswamy, 2007, p. 62). In talking of beauty, Coomaraswamy examines in great detail the significance, of the key word “beauty” in Sanskrit, Greek and Latin, that one understands the magnitude of the word beauty and its proportions, and by doing this, the word also has other significance meaning the healthy nature of art as opposed to its opposite which is unhealthy or ugly. It may be asked why is this included? It is necessary to examine the views of a modern perennial master who has the advantage of looking back as well as those of St. Thomas and Dionysius who were examining beauty from their point in time as well as perennially. For if one

is to examine Schuon's views on sacred art, iconography and their decline, then one needs to view matters from the perceived ideal, therefore the Researcher will continue with Coomaraswamy's insights on beauty.

We are told that proportion in mediaeval and similar arts is relative to its importance and that the "*debito proportio* and not perspectively determined by its relationship to other figures", the purpose of this argument is to show that beauty is a formal cause that is deeply imbedded in language, as ugly is considered sinful, in Greek *kalos* and *aischros*, the *kalos* in Greek is considered Hale and Hearty and therefore due proportion is necessary to beauty (Coomaraswamy, 2007, pp. 62-63).

Clarity (*Claritas*) is the illumination of the object itself and not the effect of external illumination, hence the importance of Gold and the Sun, at least according to Coomaraswamy. Pleasure is not a criterion for the adequacy of a work of art according to Coomaraswamy, unless one knows the original intent of the work. This leads to the view that the modern judgment of art is based a great deal on what Coomaraswamy calls sensationalism, in that the modern aesthetic differs considerably from the traditional doctrine; therefore I have sought to argue for a perennial notion of the form of beauty that is in due proportion and one that possesses no notion of ugliness or even implied disproportion.

4.2.1 Schuon's Arguments Concerning the Intellectual Decline of Sacred Art

Let us now turn to Schuon's arguments concerning art and religious unity. Schuon makes it clear that he is speaking about forms in art and not just forms, i.e. not abstract forms, but with things that are sensible in nature. Schuon argues that he wishes to avoid using the term artistic forms because the word artistic carries with it, in the modern sense, the notion of luxury and superfluity which he says is diametrically opposed to what he has in mind (Schuon, 2005a, p. 61). Though he does admit that it is difficult to dissociate the form of art from art itself, as art is a principal manifestation of forms, it is necessary especially due to modern misinterpretations of the term. Sensible forms correspond directly to the Intellect and that the highest realities are manifested in their remotest reflections.

"...In speaking of 'forms', there is a matter of terminology that calls for a few words of explanation: in speaking of 'forms in art' and not just form, but on

the contrary, with things that are sensible by definition; if on the other hand, we avoid speaking of 'artistic forms,' but on the contrary, with things that are sensible by definition; if on the other hand we avoid speaking of 'artistic forms,' it is because the epithet 'artistic' carries with it, in present-day language a notion of luxury and therefore of superfluity..”(Schuon, 2005a, p.61).

The importance of Schuon's argument is that traditional art has rules that apply to the cosmic laws and universal principles of the domain of forms. “If the importance of forms is to be understood, it is necessary to appreciate the fact that it is the sensible form that, symbolically, corresponds most directly to the Intellect by reason of the inverse analogy connecting the principal and manifested orders” (Schuon, 2005a, p.62).

Therefore when art ceases to be traditional it becomes human, individual, and therefore arbitrary, that is infallibly the sign and secondarily the cause of an intellectual decline. (Schuon, 2005a, p.62). Schuon uses the example of religious art in the Gothic³¹ period having to give way to neo-antique, naturalistic, individualistic and sentimental art, which Schuon says contains nothing miraculous about it. He speaks mainly of the later Gothic period giving way to the Renaissance, and the art springing from this period as being quite unfitted for the transmission of intellectual intuitions and that such art has given way to no more than what Schuon terms “collective psychic aspirations” and as such is given to sentimentality only, and a “sentimentality that debases itself in the measure that it caters to the needs of the masses, until it ends in saccharine and bathetic vulgarity” (Schuon, 2005a, p. 63). The exhibitionism of the Louis XV period in France is given as an example of this “vulgarity” which helps drive away souls from the Church as they feel literally choked in such surroundings (Schuon, 2005a, p.63). A question might be raised can one condemn vulgarity or is it part of the cycle of the spiritual itself? And if so, is modern art an appropriate spiritual response to decline? It must be borne in mind that the definition of beauty as laid out by Dionysius is one of unchanging beauty and one that is incapable of decay. Thus vulgarity would itself not be in keeping with this form of beauty, and would be a form of decay from the unchanging perfection of beauty as defined by Dionysius. The only problem with vulgarity is that it might distort or detract the devotee from that immutable beauty or at least the notion of it. It might be argued on the other hand that, vulgarity has to exist in order to act as a counter weight as to what beauty is not, and if in so doing, it

³¹ Painting, sculpture and architecture, from western and central Europe which was prominent in the mediaeval period, the term stems from Italian writers of the Renaissance.

brings one to the greater good then it might be considered good in a round about way, though it could not be deemed beautiful in the Dionysius sense. Yet if this argument were to be taken logically, some people might consider that evil is necessary in order to make the distinction of what is good. The Researcher will not stray into that realm as it is beyond the core scope of this work. Suffice to say that Schuon's condemnation of vulgarity is its off putting effect in sacred art and the general disinclination he feels that it has in keeping one away from the Divine. This argument about individualism rearing its head in sacred art is made clearer in the following passage, which lends weight to the theory advanced above that sacred art cannot go beyond the categories that spawned it:

"From the time of the Renaissance, which represents a sort of posthumous revenge on the part of classical antiquity, European idealism flowed in the exhumed sarcophagi of the Graeco-Roman civilisation. By this act of suicide, itself at the service of an individualism in which it thought to have rediscovered its own genius, only to end up, after a number of intermediate stages, in the grossest and most fantastic affirmations of that individualism. This was a double suicide: firstly, the forsaking of mediaeval or Christian art, and secondly, the adoption of Graeco-Roman forms that intoxicated the Christian world with the poison of their decadence... Was not the art of the first Christians in fact Roman art? The real beginnings of Christian art are to be found in the symbols inscribed in the catacombs, and not in the forms that the early Christians, themselves in part belonging to the Roman civilisation temporarily borrowed in a purely outward manner from the classical decadence by an art springing spontaneously from an original spiritual genius, and if in fact certain Roman influences have always persisted in Christian art this applies to more or less superficial details" (Schuon, 2005a, p.70).

What Schuon is trying to argue for is that traditional art is virtually dead, and form is invaded by everything that is contrary to spirituality where most formal expression is corrupted at its very roots. This makes traditional form more important, as the absence of spirit was inconceivable when traditional form was first made use of:

"In order to forestall any possible objection, we would stress the fact that in intellectually healthy civilisations- the Christian civilisation of the Middle Ages, for instance-spirituality often affirms itself by a marked indifference to forms and sometimes even reveals a tendency to turn away from them, as shown by the example of St. Bernard when he condemned images in monasteries, which, it must be said in nowise signifies the acceptance of ugliness and barbarism, anymore than poverty implies the possession of things that are mean in themselves. But in a world where traditional art is dead, where consequently form itself is invaded by everything that is contrary to spirituality and where nearly every formal expression is corrupted at its very roots, the traditional regularity of forms takes on a very special spiritual importance that it could not have possessed

at the beginning, since the absence of the spirit in forms was then inconceivable” (Schuon, 2005a, p.63).

In slightly more mundane terms, Schuon is criticising the projection of self in art and the over ornamentation in some forms of sacred art, while Coomaraswamy is quite scathing about individuality being projected in art and being sought out too in the artist. He says that styles are the basis of our histories of art and are by no means the essence of it. Our views of genius or the artist's private life, for Coomaraswamy, are a perversion of individualism and prevent our understanding of the nature of mediaeval and oriental art. The modern mania for attribution is an expression of Renaissance conceit for Coomaraswamy and 19th century humanism has nothing to do with the nature of mediaeval art as they become, in his words, “a pathetic fallacy” when applied to it. The traditional artist, in other words, dedicates himself to the work at hand and does not seek to express him or herself in it, not, “who said what” but, “what was said” (Coomaraswamy, 1956, p.46). Hence, it could be argued that along with the exhibitionism that Schuon condemns there is also the exhibitionism of self in later sacred art, which was alien to the majority of mediaeval artists. This theme of projection of self in sacred art is given much further weight when examined in terms of the depiction of the *Madonna* in the mediaeval period in comparison with the Renaissance, in that one sees a projection of self on the part of the artist that had hitherto on the whole not been present.

The reader must bear in mind that the arguments advanced above, whilst concerning art, are all within the frame of the Perennial Philosophy, and the lament concerning the rationalisation and the decline of the sacred must be seen in a wider context as well as artistic context. In his book *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, Coomaraswamy echoes this theme in the following quote. “The secularisation of art and the rationalisation of religion are inseparably connected, however unaware of it we may be”. (Coomaraswamy, 1956, p.46)

The Researcher would therefore wish to continue with this theme of the projection of self and how it is in keeping with Schuon's thoughts and, to some extent, those of his own. It is said, to some extent because to separate self from any sacred work of art might be existentially impossible from a practical point of view, though possible from that of an intended projection of self, therefore, if one takes up Coomaraswamy's theme, “that the artist is a servant and not a doer and should seek to liberate himself from self,” (Coomaraswamy 1956, p. 41)--he serves a higher cause and should wish to be liberated from self. Human individuality is not an end in itself but

the purpose of which should be that of individual consciousness and to lose or find itself in what is its beginning and last end. All that is required of the instrument is efficiency and obedience, Christ said "I do nothing of my own self," Krishna said "the Comprehensor cannot form the concept." Coomaraswamy gives further examples of this artist leaving the self behind when he says that the signing of works was done for the practical purpose of distinction rather than projection. (Coomaraswamy 1956, p. 41)

Here Coomaraswamy laments the sentimentalisation of Christian sacred art when he says: "the Crucifixions are made to exhibit human suffering, what happens is that we start to anthropomorphise abstract symbols of the deity which in turn falls into sentimentalisation." (Coomaraswamy 1956, p.45). This, he argues, leads to the situation where one has the artist's mistress posing as the Madonna and the representation of the Baby Jesus as being a human baby rather than a man-God, but a man of whom we can approve. Hence we take what we see as noble in the human form to represent the Divine. St. Thomas tells us, according to Coomaraswamy, that we should use the lower forms rather than the nobler forms as symbols of the Divine, especially if we are warned by those who think of nothing nobler than bodies (Coomaraswamy, 1956 p. 44). This theme continues when we are told that the hero is an imperfectly remembered historical figure around which there have gathered mythical and miraculous accretions; the manhood of the hero we are told interests us more than his divinity. The importance of this theme from the perennialist's points of view is that it all contributes to the secularisation of the esoteric aspect of Religion.

We are told that the above is invariably connected with the rationalisation of Religion too, an argument that is advanced by Coomaraswamy (Coomaraswamy, 1956, p.46) that any man who can still believe in the eternal birth of any avatar the contents of sacred works of art cannot be a matter of indifference. Their seeing the artistic humanisation of the Virgin Mary or Christ is a denial of Christian truth as much as a verbal expostulation of rationality or a heretical position. This argument is also echoed by Schuon,³² "Art, as soon as it is no longer determined,

³² The Researcher can testify that the music on Sunday at his local church leaves a lot to be desired and can in no way be compared to the traditional chants of Hildegard von Bingen, for such chants are uplifting towards God in a way that a lot of modern hymns are not.

illuminated and guided by spirituality, lies at the mercy of the individual and purely psychic resources of the artist, and these resources must soon run out..."(Schuon, 2005a, p.77).

Examples of the individualism that is being alluded to can be seen when we frown upon the depiction of Christ as the Man-God-Child that we have so often seen in mediaeval iconography and think of the lack of three dimensional representation as a lack of skill on the part of the artist; we demand that things have a "realistic" representation instead of light that Coomaraswamy calls the gnomic *aorists*³³ of the legend itself and we forget that shadows belong to momentary effects. We forget that our perspectives serve representations that we are interested in; the Divine is more than that (Coomaraswamy 1956, pp. 41-47). This is a serious argument that does not apply to Christianity only, if one takes the depiction of the Buddha on a "Lotus Leaf" the latter of course is not really a leaf in the strictest sense "The Lotus on which the Buddha sits is not a botanical specimen but a universal ground of existence inflorescent in the waters of its infinite possibilities, therefore it would be inappropriate to represent him in the solid flesh precariously balanced on the surface of a real and fragile flower" (Coomaraswamy 1956, p. 48). It is argued by Coomaraswamy that the anthropologist who is interested in studying the folklore or culture is better suited to studying such art than the art historian who is only interested in the aesthetic surfaces. To give some illustrative weight to this argument, one has but to look at the five pictures below which show the Madonna and Child:

³³ The term aorist comes from the Ancient Greek *aóristos* (indefinite) it expresses a manner of action that is pure and simple (see ᾠρίστος. Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon* at [Perseus Project](#), Frank Beetham, *Learning Greek with Plato*, Bristol Phoenix Press, 2007, p. 362. And Maria Napoli, 2006, *Aspect and Actionality in Homeric Greek*, p 67).



The Madonna with Canon van der Paele (detail)
1436

Oil on wood

Groeninge Museum, Bruges

Note the man face like features of Christ

2nd picture: The Virgin Gardiotissa

1400-50

Tempera and leaf on panel, 121 x 96,5 cm

Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens

Again look at the depiction of Christ reaching almost up to God



The picture on the left: Madonna and Child
13th century
Mosaic icon
Chapel of the Crucifix, San Paolo fuori le Mura, Rome

On the right: Virgin and Child
1280s
Stained glass window
Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Cologne

Note the almost non human depiction of the virgin and child in terms of size and perhaps a holy man worshiping and adoring, yet virtuous as he is he cannot be compared in stature. An illustration perhaps of the mediaeval perception of the distance between man and the Sacred.



Madonna and Child with the Young St John
c. 1518
Oil on wood, 154 x 101 cm
Galleria Borghese, Rome

Note the more human depiction of the Madonna and the more human joyous expression on Christ's face, here we are moving from the mediaeval period to the early renaissance.

All pictures courtesy of <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html> (Web Gallery of Art)

4.2.3 Diluting the Language of Traditional Christian Art

Schuon now goes on to argue that esoterism was deprived of a direct means of action by abandoning sacred art, thereby forcing the outward Religion to rely more and more on its own "peculiarities" or its limitations. It would then seem that the main premise of Schuon's argument (which he does not state at the beginning) is that the Beauty of God corresponds to a deeper reality than His Goodness:

To return to our initial idea, it may be added that the Beauty of God corresponds to a deeper reality than His Goodness, no matter how paradoxical this may appear at first sight. One has only to recall the metaphysical law in virtue of which the analogy between the principal and the manifested orders is reversed, in the sense that what is principally great will be small in the manifested order and that which is inward in the Principle will appear as outward in manifestation, and vice versa. It is because of this inverse analogy that in man beauty is outward and goodness inward- at least in the usual sense of these words –contrary to what obtains in the principal order where Goodness is itself an expression of Beauty (Schuon, 2005a, p.66).

Schuon takes the view that modern religious art tends to ignore the importance of forms and will therefore find it difficult to admit to the ugliness of the modern world and as such will use the terms aesthetic, picturesque or romantic with a derogatory nuance, so that they may find themselves more "at ease in their own barbarism" (Schuon, 2005a, p. 69). What Schuon is attacking here is not the modernist themselves but those of the Christian civilisation for reducing the spontaneous and normal language of Christian art, a language that he says can hardly be reduced to a mere matter of taste. Using the argument that mediaeval art could not have been produced by mere caprice, what then are the principles of traditional art? According to Schuon, the work of art must conform to the uses to which it will be put and it must express that conformity, any added symbolism must conform to the symbolism in the object; there must be no conflict between the essential and the accessory, they must be in hierarchical harmony so to speak:

"In order to give an idea of the principles of traditional art, we will point out a few of the most general and elementary ones: first of all, the work executed must conform to the use to which it will be put, and it must express that conformity; if there be an added symbolism, it must conform to the symbolism inherent in the object; there must be no conflict between the essential and the accessory, but a hierarchical harmony, which will moreover spring from the purity of the symbolism; the treatment of the material used must be in conformity with the nature of that material in the same way that the material itself must be in conformity with the use of the object; lastly, the object must not give an illusion of being other than

what it really is, for such an illusion always gives a disagreeable impression of uselessness, and when this illusion is the goal of the finished work, as it is in the case of all classicist art, it is the mark of a uselessness that is only too apparent" (Schuon, 2005a, p.71).

4.2.4 Ornamentation in Proportion to Inherent Symbolism

Ornamentation when out of proportion contributes to the decline of the sacred in its own way by detracting from the originality of form of the sacred work of art and its proper function as a vehicle conducive towards piety and contemplation. One needs to bear in mind Schuon's comment: "if there be an added symbolism, it must conform to the symbolism inherent in the object" (Schuon, 2005a, p.71). Below the Researcher argues for what ornamentation should be if it is to remain in proportion and not detract from the pious nature of the sacred work of art.

It might be argued that the uselessness and saccharine like qualities in some sacred works of art which Schuon decries, is perhaps down to ornamentation that serves no purpose and, therefore, is a mark of "uselessness" in the sacred work of art. How then is this so? What does one mean by ornamentation? Here it is argued that the word originally meant to adorn a thing or a person with the thing that was necessary for its proper operation. Significantly that the aesthetic sense of the word is secondary to the practical sense of it. Later on it is argued by Coomaraswamy that these ornaments become regarded as a thing that could be left out or in at will (Coomaraswamy, 2007, p.72), therefore I advanced the argument that ornamentation had a purpose that served the art work itself, or the thing itself. This matter is more clearly put in the following quote from Coomaraswamy "...Originally implied a completion or fulfilment of the artefact or other object in question, that to "decorate" an object or person originally meant to endow the object or person with its or his "necessary accidents", with a view to proper operation..."

I will continue with Coomaraswamy and enlist the help of St. Thomas of Aquinas and St. Augustine to help me along. Coomaraswamy advances St. Augustine's view that ornamentation exceeding the bounds of responsibility to the content of the work, is naught but mere sophistry (extravagance and superfluity). This is termed a moral and artistic sin by Coomaraswamy and even the views of St. Thomas on the matter of ornamentation as advanced by Coomaraswamy are most interesting and perhaps deserve to be expounded upon by all husbands to their wives. "Since Women may lawfully adorn themselves, whether to manifest what becomes (*decentiam*)

their estate, or even by adding something thereto, in order to please their husbands, it follows that those who make such ornament do not sin in the practice of their art, except insofar they might perhaps contrive what is superfluous and fantastic" (Coomaraswamy, 2007, p. 81)

The argument is that whatever applies to the ornamentation of persons should also apply to the ornamentation of things all of which are original decorations in the original sense of equipment, of the person to whom they pertain (Coomaraswamy, 2007, p. 82).

Coomaraswamy's whole idea on ornamentation can really be summed up by saying that ornamentation is really only appropriate when essential to utility, beauty and for it to fulfil a given function. Therefore it could be said that the trills in a Scarlatti Harpsichord sonata are appropriate as they help sustain the note where it could otherwise not have been done; but to play the same piece on a piano and play the same trill serves no practical function for the thing in itself. The Scarlatti harpsichord sonata without its trills would be to deprive it of an essential decoration or ornament; it would then sound somewhat plain and incongruous from its original intent. It is here implied that the term ornament is something that is essential, though the word *ornamentum* in its original Latin form can mean equipment (essential) as well as decoration. Though in this particular argument it is the deviation from the essential that is being emphasised and with it the superfluous and distorting kind of ornamentation. Coomaraswamy gives a more practically identifiable example when he speaks of Hindu women and how they feel undressed and disorderly without their proper jewels and regalia:

"The Hindu women feels herself undressed and disorderly without her jewels, which, however much she may be fond of them from other and "aesthetic" points of view, she regards as a necessary equipment, without which she cannot function as a womanTo be seen without her head gear would be more than a mere absence of decoration, it would be inauspicious, indecorous, and disrespectful, as if one should be present at some function in undress or have forgotten one's tie..." (Coomaraswamy, 2007, p.79).

The example of symbols of office were once more than just symbols, therefore the Researcher will argue that sacred art with ornamentation is superfluous to its functions and is part of the argument that Schuon is seeking to advance, as it then leads to distraction, though some of this argument might appear elitist, a point that Schuon acknowledges, as stated earlier.

In fact St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine are quite clear that ornamentation without function is a kind of sophistry and sinful, an extreme position from a 21st century perspective.

Although this position is directed to art in general, it is even more applicable to sacred art, adding greater weight to Schuon's argument about uselessness (Schuon, 2005a, p.71).

"..Irrational curves elude every intelligible standard of measurement. The eye seems to be led into the abyss of a false infinity, instead of being at rest in a simple and perfect form; the paintings on the ceiling appear to lie open towards a sky full of sensual and mawkish angels..." (Burckhardt, 2001, p.207). No ceiling but a sense of what Burckhardt implies can be gained from looking at the picture below:



Alegia:
the sectioned plaques with their multiplying effect strengthen the chiaroscuro and relief on this Baroque façade. © Jonathan Bernal (<http://bertan.gipuzkoakultura.net/es/21/en/9.php>)

A good example I think of the sophistry of ornamentation that St. Thomas and Coomaraswamy decry, from a Baroque church. The church of Santa Maria in San Sebastian, Spain 1774
 (<http://www.ingeba.euskalnet.net/argazkia/arkit/smaria.htm>)

Thus the Researcher gives a perennial definition of the notion of beauty by St. Thomas and Dionysius as emanating from a perennial beauty and each part being a representation of a greater whole (esoteric). The Researcher has also examined Schuon's notion of the importance of traditional form, when the latter is invaded by everything that is contrary to spirituality which is the projection of self; all this follow the theme that argues against the sentimentalisation of sacred art and its dilution.

4.2.5 Naturalistic and Symbolic Art and their Implications

Let us continue with some of Schuon's expostulations. I will examine his arguments on the distinction between natural and symbolic art and their significance. As Schuon makes a distinction between naturalist and symbolic art, the latter supports a contemplative metaphysical truth, whilst the former is used primarily to record features. Moreover these distinctions will weigh upon my later arguments about sacred art and its need to appeal to simple piety and not be grounded in academia.

Schuon opines that beauty in naturalistic art does not reside in the art itself but in the object that it copies, that with symbolic and traditional art it is the work itself that is beautiful. One of the best examples of his argument in terms of naturalist art vs. symbolic art is when he tacitly claims the superiority of Byzantine or Romanesque art. The Virgin when depicted in the latter genre resembled no more than her naturalistic image. But the Byzantine goes back to the time of St. Luke and is infinitely closer to the truth of Mary than a naturalist image which is always that of another woman (Schuon, 2005a, p.72). So Schuon gives two options either the portrait is the Virgin from a physical point of view or the artist represents a perfect symbol of the Virgin; the physical resemblance is no longer really in question because it is what is expressed in terms of

the abstract and the immediate language of symbolism--a language which is built of precision and imponderables which is what happens in Icons. This is then reflective of the Ultimate Reality as it "transmits the holiness or inner reality of the Virgin and hence the universal reality of which the Virgin is an expression" (Schuon, 2005a, p.73). He further goes on to talk about how the icon supports a contemplative and metaphysical truth "the icon becomes a support for intellection, whereas a naturalistic image transmits--apart from its obvious and inevitable falsehood--only the fact that Mary was a woman" (Schuon, 2005a, p.73). So here one has a clear distinction between naturalist art and symbolic art, a distinction that Schuon argues should allow the former to be "legitimate" if used to record the features of saints as the outward appearance of the latter helps to convey "the perfume of their spirituality" (Schuon, 2005a, p.73).

The argument continues further with the view that the ability to perceive the spiritual quality of an icon or symbol is a matter of contemplative intelligence and not one of academia. This argument is reinforced by Schuon when he talks about the Renaissance and its platitudinous nature and that such art is "an offense to piety of the simple person" (Schuon, 2005a, p.74). Moreover the Virgins drawn by the unskilled are truer than those of academia, if only in a subjective way and even if the majority of people demanded a shallower kind of art, should the needs of the elite be neglected?

Schuon takes the distinction between profane and sacred art further. He mentions that the former is brought into contempt even if it is held to be of psychological value by those of "inferior intelligence", as its vulgarity and superficiality become apparent (no doubt to those of higher intelligence?)--a contempt which sacred art was held by profane artists. When he speaks of the insipid hypocrisy of profane art that was meant to stimulate piety in the believer, he states that it only served to confirm the unbeliever in their impiety! (Schuon, 2005a, p.74). We are not given any solid examples but can safely assume that he might be referring to the academic or classical art mentioned earlier. The argument is later advanced that there is an elite that does exist and needs something that does not just convey human platitudes and that such art is to be found and undertaken by those in a state of grace. We are then told about the icon painters who were monks and who fasted before undertaking their works (Schuon, 2005a, p.77). Though it should not be forgotten that the argument is advanced that even in sacred art there is a profundity and a naïveté too, as sacred art is able to transmit psychological attitudes and spiritual states that are accessible to all.

The Researcher would perhaps do well here to give as concise as is possible a definition of Sacred Art along perennial philosophical terms, which he feels is summed up quite well by Professor Cutsinger in his *Advice to the Serious Seeker, Mediations on the Teachings of Frithjof Schuon*, that good art is not to be judged as that which conveys the experiences or the feelings of the artist or for that matter, neither is it that which conforms to the individual preferences of those who encounter such a work. If it is judged upon the latter criteria, Cutsinger says that such a judgment looks to whether the work in question conveys the “sincerity, originality, and intensity of the artist’s perception, and the degree to which he is able to evoke in his audience a kind of sympathy by giving form to their own moods, expectations, or emotional needs.” Even if the audience for such art say to themselves that the artist was a pious man and his works are able to stir in them a degree of piety, this is not sufficient to make the work a piece of sacred art, for it has only been accidentally conducive to faith and has no deep meaning to what the perennial philosopher would mean by sacred. “However religious its theme or content, such art has no necessary connexion with the spiritual path. On the contrary, sacred art is art which points us towards God through the force of quality or energy inherent in the form of the art itself, and independently of both the artist’s individuality and our own personal likings or sympathies” (Cutsinger, 1997, pp. 124-125). As stated previously, sacred art is no less important vehicle towards Truth than metaphysical doctrine itself and as Schuon (says in) *From the Divine to the Human: Survey of Metaphysics and Epistemology*, “it represents an adequation to the Real” (Schuon, 1982, p. 103).

This chapter on art is concluded by referring again to the limitation of errors of naturalism in art, and that as soon as art is no longer determined, illuminated, and guided by spirituality it becomes a decomposing body, that leads to a surrealism; the naturalist art having exhausted itself through having reached the extreme limits of its own platitude naturalism. Schuon sounds most extreme when he refers to this naturalism as being luciferian in trying to imitate the creations of God and he exalts man to imitate the creative act and not the thing created, which is what is done by symbolic art, and the results are “creations” “that are not would-be duplications of those of God” (Schuon, 2005a, p.77).

“In sacred art genius seems hidden, what dominates is a vast, impersonal, mysterious intelligence. The sacred work of art has a perfume of infinity, an imprint of the absolute” (Schuon, 1969, pp.47-48).

Sacred art is made to convey spiritual presences, it is made at the same time for God, for angels and for men; profane art on the contrary exists only for men, and by that very fact betrays man. Sacred art helps man find his own centre, this centre which by nature loves God" (Schuon, 1969, pp.36-37).

The Researcher has examined Schuon's notion of the sacred and what it should be as opposed to naturalist art which only conveys forms and is in danger of somewhat exhausting itself and that even if the majority prefer the naturalist art, there is a spiritual elite for whom the symbolic art is of great importance and that it is the symbolic art which is reflective of the Ultimate Reality.

4.2.6 Spirituality in Sacred Art *à la* Schuon and Burckhardt

Schuon says that when art is no longer determined, illuminated, and guided by spirituality, it becomes a decomposing body which leads to surrealism. We are here faced with two immediate tasks, first to determine what spirituality is *à la* Schuon and how far such a thing is found in 20th century Western sacred art that purports to possess it and then, how far does such art conform to the perennial notion of beauty *à la* Aquinas, Dionysius the Areopagite and, to some extent, Coomaraswamy. Moreover can such art be labelled "academic art" and is such art an "offence to the piety of the simple person" (Schuon, 2005a, p.74).

The premise upon which the Researcher starts is very powerful one. Schuon argues that, in terms of sacred art, modern art is possessed of a platitudinous quality that is not conducive to worship. This argument is made extremely effective despite its somewhat prejudicial overtones, especially when he says that "nearly all the miraculous Virgins to which the people flock are Byzantine or Romanesque" (Schuon, 2005a, p. 74). So modern art would have a lot to live up to, but what of this question of spirituality; how is it to be clearly defined? Schuon is not so explicit about this since he merely quotes St. John Damascene, "that our thoughts must be drawn up in a spiritual flight and rise to the invisible majesty of God" (Schuon, 2005a, p.77). Could not the modern sacred artist claim to possess such spirituality by saying that his or her eyes are turned towards God? At times the Researcher has found Schuon somewhat lacking in clarity in his definitions, as they seem to be occluded in an opaqueness of piety. Yet what is needed are

specific individual examples³⁴ rather than talk of how things were and now how they are not; let us turn to another perennial art philosopher and look at what he has to say, before returning to Schuon again.

Titus Burckhardt in his *Sacred Art in East and West*, says that the sacred work of art need not be one of genius but one that finds a certain monotony that safeguards against spiritual poverty; one where that traditional sacred art is subject to a spiritual economy that sets limits to its themes and the means used for their expression, (Burckhardt, 2001, pp. 197-8). Burckhardt talks about a changeless reality of spirit of reason in a mediaeval sense, "which has been lost since art has been uprooted from the soil that fed it" (Burckhardt, 2001, pp. 197-8). So at least there is a strong implication that there was a spirit, or still is a spirit, but that this spirit, to a large extent, is now lost because of what Burckhardt terms a "cleavage", a course I have already mentioned with the changes brought about at the start of the Renaissance, but what is argued here is that whilst we moved from the Divine Mysteries to the ideal man of the Renaissance, the split, for Burckhardt, becomes more radical with the advent of the 19th century. This period is mentioned because up until that time, as he argues, the world remained within the reach of man from the point of view of his psychic and physical needs (Burckhardt, 2001, p. 211). In other words, the displacement effects of the Industrial Revolution were in full swing. This argument detracts somewhat from my earlier one with its break-off point at the Renaissance, but it is necessary to enter into it if we are to take a credible approach to spirituality in 20th century sacred Western art, though I am not changing the position of my earlier arguments concerning the mediaeval and the periods starting from the Renaissance onwards. Another theme to emphasise is the rise of individuality in art, which Burckhardt puts down to a lack of a craft foundation that was found in the mediaeval period, therefore I would argue that part of the definition of the spirituality in sacred art in the mediaeval period was the lack of individuality rearing its head. The anonymity of the artist has already been mentioned, but I need to be as clear as I can for there are those who would seek to reduce and dispute the nature of the argument for the sake of modernism. Burckhardt argues that the artist "...fell back into the domain of pure individual subjectivity all

³⁴ Examples of 8th century Christian art of which Schuon speaks of as being a period when the Christian authorities Nicaea of that period in contrast to after 15th "Who betrayed Christian art by abandoning it to the impure passions of worldly men and the ignorant imagination of the profane." (Schuon, 2005, p.75): Icon showing *Christ with saints Sergios and Bacchos*, Constantinople, 6th or 7th century. Encaustic and gold on pine, 28.5cm x 41.8cm, 6th-century mosaic of *Jesus at Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo* in Ravenna, *Saviour-Not-Made-By-Human-Hands* Russian icon from Novgorod c.11th century. Such art should then be contrasted with: *Crucifixion of Christ* by Theophanis the Cretan, 1567, Mount Athos, Greece; *the Annunciation*. Double-sided tablet icon. Novgorod School Late 15th-16th. See: <http://aj.tudury.net/?p=25>

the more deeply because of the curb of a universal or collective language was no longer operative" (Burckhardt, 2001, p. 212).

Returning again to Schuon and Burckhardt but this time from another source *The Underlying Religion*, one falls back on the exoteric and esoteric, in that the former, when talking of beauty, "represents an excusable or inexcusable pleasure or an expression of piety and thereby the expression of a theological symbolism; esoterically, it has the role of a spiritual means in connexion with contemplation and interiorising" (Schuon, 1981, pp 177-182). Therefore might it not be argued that spirituality in sacred art is that which is conducive to religious contemplation? Some important points are raised by Burckhardt that will need to be addressed when looking at 20th century sacred art. He states that art cannot be called sacred merely because "its subjects originate in a spiritual truth; its formal language must bear witness to a similar origin" (Lings/Minnaar, 2007, p. 258). He then goes on to say "... that is by no means the case with a religious art like that of the Renaissance or that of the Baroque period, which is in no way distinct, so far as style is concerned from the fundamentally profane art of that era.." (Lings/Minnaar, 2007, p. 258). Burckhardt adds that even if the work of art has devotional feelings which permeate it or even nobility of soul about it, "...no art merits the epithet unless its forms themselves reflect the spiritual vision characteristic of a particular religion" (Lings/Minnaar, 2007, p. 258). The latter needs to be borne in mind when talking of 20th century sacred art and its spirituality, along with the view that no sacred work of art has a profane theme, even though profane works might have a sacred theme.

An even more profound observation to be noted and defined as part of the spirituality of sacred art is its function in the liturgy. "Art forms part of the liturgy-in the broadest sense-for like the liturgy, it is "public work"; this being so one cannot leave it to the arbitrary disposition of men. Art, like the liturgy properly so called, constitutes the terrestrial "garment" of God; it both envelops and unveils the Divine Presence on earth" (Schuon, 2006b, p.105).

What follows are some further remarks about the nature of sacred art and its immutable character along with the observation that it is supposed to represent truths that we are to adapt to and not adapt the truths to ourselves. This will need to be borne in mind when looking at modern sacred art and its spirituality:

"We have had occasion at various times to underline the sacred, hence immutable character of religious art: it is not a purely human thing and above all

it does not consist in seeking impossible mysteries in nonexistent profundities, as is the intention of modern art, which instead of adapting "our times" to the truth aims at adapting the truth to "our times". In relation to artistic or artisanal-hence "liturgical"-expression, the terms "Christian" and "mediaeval" are in fact synonymous; to repudiate Christian art on the pretext that Christianity stands above "cultures" is a failure to see the context and value of this art; it is to repudiate elements of truth and thereby also of sanctity" (Schuon, 2006b, p.105).

One of the aspects of the spirituality of art (sacred) is to lead us towards the path of perfection and truth in an ever ascending spiral, to a truth that is far from human and one that is perhaps beyond our ken. Thus sacred art is limited in that it cannot stretch its creativity into infinity but perhaps can reach an end if it achieves its purpose of propelling one to salvation. The following quote talks of an artist who achieved that perfection in visual terms and then was able to ascend to a higher level:

"As the author of the Chieh Tzū Yüan expresses it, "When painting has reached divinity (shên) there is an end of the matter." A conception of this kind can be recognised in the Chinese story of the painter Wu Tao-tzū, who painted on a palace wall a glorious landscape, with mountains, forests, clouds, birds, men, and all things as in Nature, a veritable world-picture; while the Emperor his patron was admiring this painting, Wu Tao-tzū pointed to a doorway on the side of a mountain, inviting the Emperor to enter and behold the marvels within. Wu Tao-tzū himself entered first, beckoning the Emperor to follow; but the door closed, and the painter was never seen again. A corresponding disappearance of the work of art, when perfection has been attained, is mythically expressed in other legends, such as those of painted dragons that flew from the walls on which they were painted, first told of the artist Chang Sêng Yu in the Liang Dynasty" (Coomaraswamy, 1956, p. 22).

So in the preceding section the Researcher has argued that spirituality in sacred art is one which is conducive to religious contemplation and, moreover, the spirituality in sacred art is that which guards against spiritual poverty; this is necessary if such art is not to be uprooted from the soil it feeds upon. Furthermore, the exoteric nature of sacred art must be one that is an expression of piety and theological symbolism and one that leads to religious contemplation.

4.2.7 Spirituality in 20th Century Art

It is not within the scope of the following section to give a comprehensive view of spirituality in modern art, but only to give a sufficient view as to allow both sides of the argument to be heard.

The trouble with the task ahead is that there is no universally accepted classification of Western religious art in the 20th century; there are, however, elements of spiritualism that are referred to as being evocative of a religious nature, though not necessarily possessing a visual religious symbolism in the mediaeval sense. In the following section the Researcher will try to look at some of these 20th century works of art and ask the question how far can it be argued that they match the ideals of what sacred art should be or not be from the perennial points of view. "One of the tasks of the spiritual in art is to prove again and again that vision is possible: that this world, thick and convincing, is neither the only or the highest, and that our ordinary awareness is neither the only awareness nor the highest of which we are capable. Traditionally, this task falls under a stringent rule: the vision cannot be random and ephemerally subjective, but must be capable of touching a common chord in many men and women" (Lipsey, 1988, p.92).

Delaunay's view of painting is that it should be... "The goal of painting is to represent the Universe." (Lipsey, 1988, p. 94). Below is a copy of Delaunay's painting Sun and Moon from 1913, which is an early example of abstraction which, Lipsey argues, is diagrammatic and with the task similar to mediaeval diagrammatic in that it seeks to represent a reality. Delaunay was considered a pioneering artist in seeking to use the diagrammatic in art again. This is the beginning of a trend taking place in modern art at the start of the 20th century. Many abstract paintings of a spiritual nature would follow this trend and speak of representing a reality diagrammatically. http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/e/ea/%27Simultaneous_Contrasts-Sun_and_Moon%27%2C_oil_on_canvas_painting_by_Robert_Delaunay%2C_1912-13%2C_Museum_of_Modern_Art%2C_%28New_York_City%29.jpg



http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/e/ea/%27Simultaneous_Contrasts-Sun_and_Moon%27%2C_oil_on_canvas_painting_by_Robert_Delaunay%2C_1912-13%2C_Museum_of_Modern_Art%2C_%28New_York_City%29.jpg

Robert Delaunay (1885-1941)

Simultaneous Contrasts: Sun and Moon [Soleil, lune, simultane 2]

1913; dated on painting 1912 Oil on canvas, 53" (134.5 cm) diameter

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund

(<http://www.moma.org/explore/collection/provenance/items/1.54.html>)

The Researcher does not wish to argue that sublimity and the seeking of transcendence in 20th Century art that purports to be sacred in nature is non-existent. The individualist ephemerally subjective approach is more liable to be arbitrary and therefore misleading to the seeker of the Divine along traditional religious lines. It should be kept in mind that this dissertation argues for the transcendent unity of Religions and must therefore be seen to counter those aspects that arise herein that weaken the Researcher's argument. Perhaps it would not be

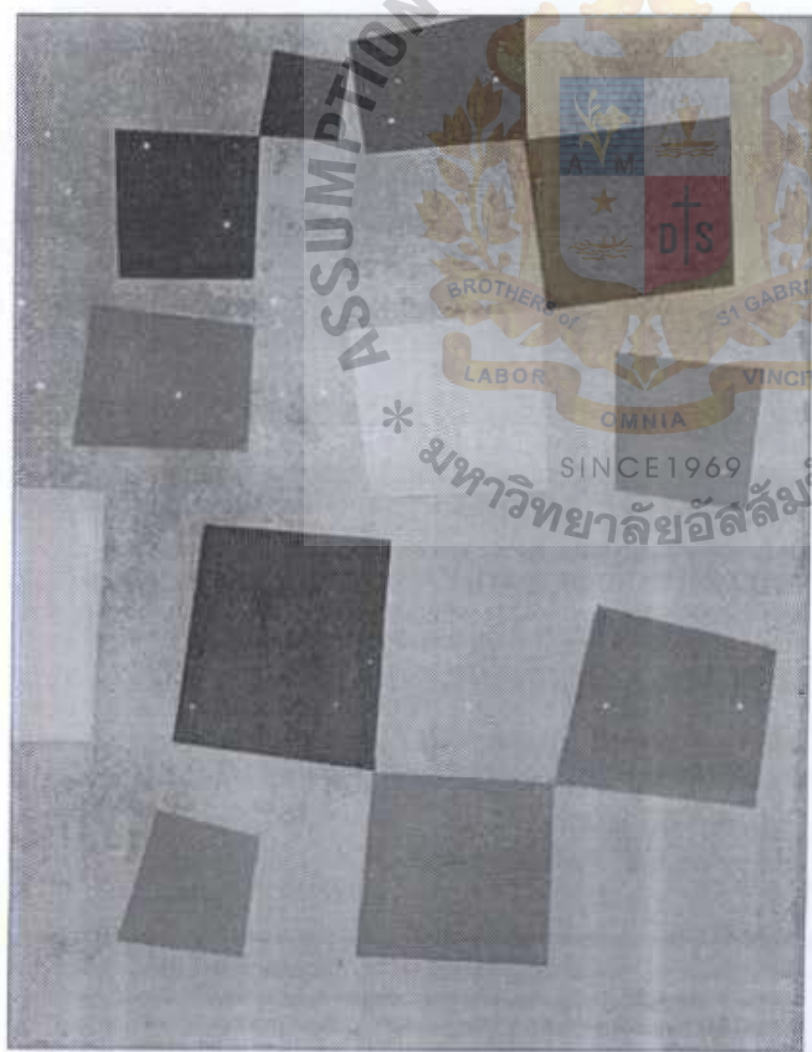
too bold to say that the attitude of Kandinsky,³⁵ mentioned in Lipsey's book on the spiritual in 20th Century art, seems to imply that an artist who cared for the spiritual in art would have an aversion to organised religion and conventional sacred religion (Lipsey, 1988, p. 45). There is no denying the spirituality of his 1913 painting *Black Lines*:



Kandinsky, *Black Lines*, 1913 Oil on canvas, Guggenheim Museum New York source: www.galleryofart.us

³⁵ Wassily Wassilyevich Kandinsky "(Russian: Василий Васильевич Кандинский, *Vasilij Vasil'evič Kandinskij*, first name pronounced as [vassi:li]) (16 December [O.S. 4 December] 1866 – 13 December 1944) was a Russian painter, printmaker and art theorist, one of the first creators of pure abstraction in modern painting. After successful avant-garde exhibitions, he founded the influential Munich group *Der Blaue Reiter* ("The Blue Rider"; 1911–14) and began completely abstract painting. His forms evolved from fluid and organic to geometric and, finally, to pictographic (e.g., *Tempered Élan*, 1944)." "<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/310922/Wassily-Kandinsky>

Lipsey argues that Kupka's *Disks of Newton. Study for "Fugue in Two Colours"* brings to his mind, "the undeniable manifestation of spirit in art" (Lipsey, 1988, p. 103). Spirit, perhaps, but surely not one of a religious nature? What about the spirituality in art by chance? Arp wrote "...the law of chance, which comprises all other laws and surpasses our understanding (like the primal cause from which all life arises), can be experienced only in a total surrender to the unconscious." He claimed that whoever follows this law will create pure life. Today, as in the days of the early Christians, the essential must become known. "The artist must let his work create itself directly (Lipsey, 1988, p.121)." Jean Arp's *Collage Arranged According to the Laws of Chance*, 1916, contrasting the actual work of art itself with the premises laid out by the perennial masters, might possess spirituality of an individualistically designated kind, but not the kind that is likely to spur one on to the Divine; it may induce a self-perpetuated catharsis for some, but it certainly possesses no outward religious form.



Jean (Hans) Arp (1886-1966), *Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance*, 1917. French, German birth. Cut-and-pasted papers, ink, and bronze paint. 33.3 x 26.0 cm (cover). Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art.

(<http://www.moma.org>), New York, New York; gift of Philip Johnson (496.1970). Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York, New York.

Sourced from: (<http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/extract/300/16/1850>)

As previously mentioned, Schuon comments that modern religious art tends to be at ease in its own barbarism, and that he would find it difficult to admit to the ugliness of the modern world. The following quote from the *avant garde* Russian early 20th century artist Kasimir Malevich is, perhaps, an example of the existentially outlandish irrationality, egotistically distorted by self perception. This seems not to be untypical of the spiritual in modern art and in this case, while “form” has not been ignored, it is highly unlikely that such art is likely to inspire one to turn towards the Absolute/God:

“I have transformed myself *in the zero of form* and have fished myself out of *the rubbishy slough of academic art*. I have destroyed the ring of the horizon and got out of the circle of objects, the horizon ring that has imprisoned the artist and the forms of nature...

To produce favourite objects and little nooks of nature is just like a thief being enraptured by his shackled legs.... *Objects have vanished like smoke to attain the new artistic culture*...the square is not a subconscious form. It is the creation of intuitive reason.

The face of new art.

The square is a living, regal infant.

The first step of pure creation in art. Before it there were naïve distortions and copies of nature.

Our world of art has become new nonobjective, pure... A surface; it has been born” (Lipsey, 1988, p.138).

It would neither be possible nor prudent to entirely dismiss the spirituality in 20th century art as not seeking some form of absolute through another means other than religious orthodox forms. The only real complaint is that within the context of the Perennial Philosophy and its, quantification of Orthodox Religions etc, there is very little place, if any, for 20th century artistic spirituality. I would argue that there is far too great an attempt to adapt truth to our times, rather than our times to truth. Nonetheless, the following passage from Malevich shows that the

Absolute is not far from the mind of the artist despite whatever forms he might use to try to express what he thinks it is:

“Nothing but the expression of the pure feeling of the subconscious or super-conscious (nothing, that is, other than artistic creation) can give tangible form to absolute values. Actual utility (in the higher sense of the term) could therefore be achieved only if the subconscious or super conscious were accorded the privilege of directing creation” (Lipsey, 1988 p.146).

The existentialistic outlook of the modern artist that has been alluded to above leads to an individualistic creativity, which seems hell bent on projecting self, and is given some credence when Malevich says that “Art no longer wishes to serves the state and religion, it no longer wishes to illustrate the history of manner, it wants to have nothing further to do with the object as such, and believes that it can exist in and for itself, without things...” (Lipsey, 1988, p. 148).

How then does this look when we return to Coomaraswamy's statement that pleasure is not an adequate criterion upon which to judge art, unless one knows the original purpose of the work? If the original purpose of the work is for the work itself, can the label of sensationalism be correctly attached to the work? The voice of the perennial philosopher in decrying most of the modern works of art is given some further ammunition by the statement of Mondrian below, when he says that art is an end in itself³⁶ like religion. For the perennial philosopher, this cannot be so; sacred art is the garment, so to speak, in which God is clothed. Any such art that purports to be an end itself is a self-serving art; self-serving that is given existentialist modern weight. The voice of modernism cries out from its self-created summit and dismisses criticism of itself as coming from those who are old-fashioned. I do not say that such art is not uplifting, nor do I say that such art is without purpose even if it is a self-serving one. But in the context of art bringing man closer towards the Divine in the orthodox sense of the word, such art would have a far greater task than that of the mediaeval period, in an era where secularism is virtually the measure of all things in the West.

I am in no way attempting to deny the importance of art as a gateway to the transcendental in the loose term of the word, and I would be in agreement with Mondrian's³⁷ basic views on form

³⁶ See the preface of Oscar Wilde's the *Picture of Dorian Gray*, for similar view to those echoed by Mondrian, in which Wilde says that art is surface and symbol and we go beyond that at our peril (xxiii, *Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde, Oxford University Press 1998)

³⁷ **Pieter Cornelis (Piet) Mondriaan**, after 1912 **Mondrian**, (pronounced: Dutch IPA: (March 7, 1872–February 1, 1944) was a Dutch painter. He was an important contributor to the De Stijl art movement and group, which was

in the following statement: "That art although an end in itself, like religion, is the means through which we can know the universal and contemplate it in plastic form" (Lipsey, 1988, p. 67). Yet, one would argue that in an increasingly predominantly secular world such transcendence without the guide of Orthodox Religion is bound to simply give rise to existentially individualist forms of truth which would not be in keeping with the ethos of the Perennial Philosophy.



A painting by Kazimir Malevich, titled *Mystic Suprematism* (black cross on red oval) 1920-1927, oil on canvas 100.5 x 60 cm from the Collection of the Heirs of Kazimir Malevich.

(<http://www.usatoday.com/travel/cruises/item>)

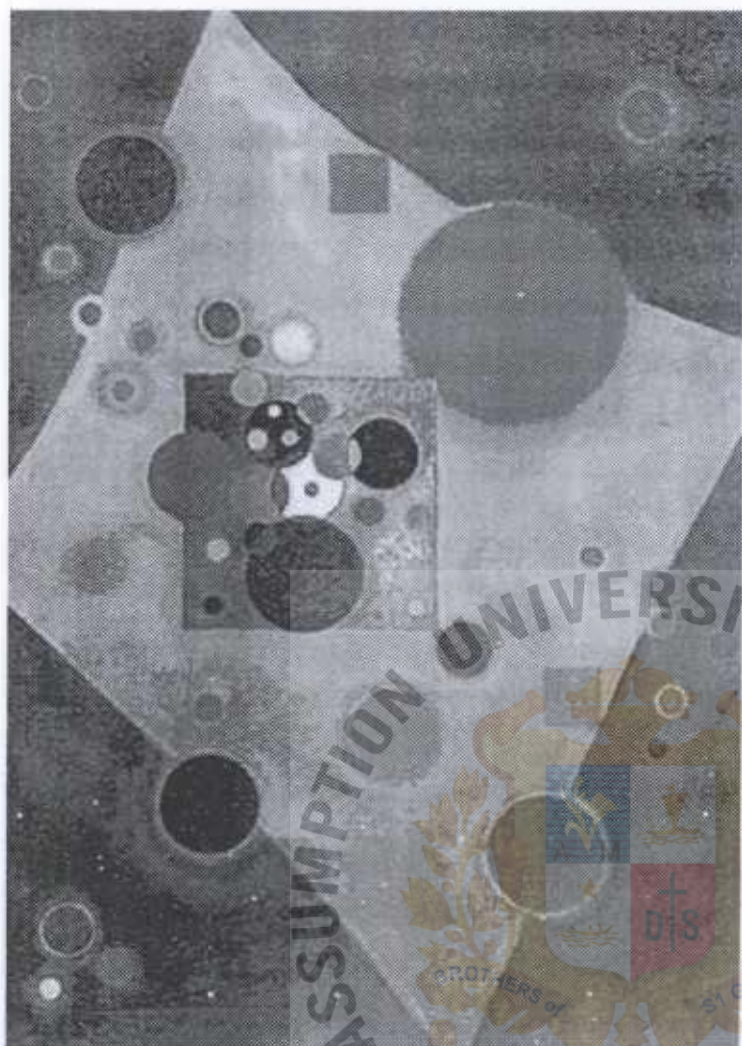
founded by Theo van Doesburg. He evolved a non-representational form which he termed Neo-Plasticism. This consisted of a grid of vertical and horizontal black lines and the use of the three primary colours.

This brings us to the interesting statement made by Thomas Merton that Christianity without convention, would be like milk without bottle (Lipsey, 1988, p.149). Is Merton's quote about the work of Malevich (as above) applicable? The answer is in all likelihood no! For could there be Christianity without convention? It may well do for a few of the intellectual and spiritual elite, but would probably just lead to an even greater manipulation of conventional Religion to the point where nothing is left. Moreover, even the great spiritual masters are conscious of the need for outward conventions despite having already superseded them, although they are never bypassed by them. That however is an argument for another part of this work. The Researcher feels that the matter has to be mentioned now because there are some modern works of art that claim to be religious but only from the ground of individualist insight into an interior reality.

Guillaume Apollinaire³⁸ wrote that "contemporary art borrowed not from the reality of sight but from the reality of insight ...and that all men have this insight". Whilst this might not be disputed, however, when Kandinsky's *Accent Pink* is labelled as a religious work by Lipsey and that the work proclaims the light from light (Lipsey, 1988, pp. 59 & 212), the individualism of such works does more to distort than to foster the religious and is a perfect example of just what the perennial philosophers complain about. I do not say that such works do not possess a subliminal overtone that can be labelled as religious from a subjective point of view, for Religion has manifested itself in many different forms throughout the millennia; but if each man is to create his individualism in art and label it as religious, then we are once again adapting the truth to ourselves rather than ourselves to the truth--a trend that has long since led to rampant secularism in the West. So the answer to the question posed above by Merton, would be no, we cannot have milk without bottle, for without bottle how are we to hold milk. Moreover, without a label on the bottle no matter what it might be, only the very minority of the spiritual elite might have a chance of recognising the milk in the first place. Milk without bottle would be like the esoteric without the exoteric, though the esoteric has existed without the exoteric and will do so again; it would just be asking too much in modern Western society to take milk without the bottle approach. This matter will be discussed again from a slightly different approach, later on.

³⁸ Wilhelm Albert Włodzimierz Apolinary de Wąż-Kostrowicki, known as Guillaume Apollinaire (in French) (August 26, 1880, Rome – November 9, 1918, Paris) was a French poet, writer, and art critic, who coined the term 'surrealism' in his 1917 play *The Breasts of Tirésias*.

Read more: http://great-writers.suite101.com/article.cfm/guillaume_apollinaire_biography#ixzz0UbyqR6WX



www.wassilykandinsky.net Musée Nationale, Paris

4.2.8 Conclusion for Western Art Section

“The work of art may point beyond itself, but it points to itself as well” (Lipsey, p. 307)

Where then to begin the conclusion? Perhaps it might be argued that religious symbolism has moved on from an academic perspective since some of the things we call religious or sacred art in the Western world would make our forefathers gasp for breath at their sheer audacity. The question to be asked is whether academic art is really the art that people seeking out a religious path really need to follow? This art as such was not devised for them. A lot of the modern abstract religious art that I have looked at would find it difficult to appeal to the ordinary man in the street. Any image that purports to be of a sacred nature must surely strive to instil piety in the beholder of the image, a piety that is not in itself individually subjective, but one that embodies a

universal appeal; otherwise the said art could be considered presumptuously blasphemous as they may confirm unbelievers in their impiety. I do not say that a man might not be divinely inspired in his creativity unless such creativity embraces the outward forms of the Religion that he/she claims inspired him/her. In such case it has little place in the scheme of the Perennial Philosophy, despite what other subjective virtues it might be said to possess. The 20th century artists referred to here are, without doubt, creative geniuses in the general artistic sense of the word, but perhaps sacred art requires more than just that; it needs to be one possessed of a language that goes beyond human platitudes and one that is speaking of Divine depths:

“...No matter what may be the theories that attribute to the people the need for an unintelligent and radically falsified imagery, the elite does exist and certainly needs something different; what is required is an art that evokes not human platitudes, but Divine depths. Such a language cannot spring simply from profane tastes, nor from genius, but *most proceed essentially out of religion*-which demands that the work of art be executed by an artist who is saintly, or at least in state of grace” (Schuon, 2005a, p.77).

Even though Schuon in his thoughts concerning forms in art speaks of the need for spirituality in sacred art and there is spirituality in most of the art that I have looked at, who can deny that it has not been divinely inspired. When the artist is engaged in a naturalist form of art which is what abstract art is, to a certain extent then individualism is bound to rear its head. Moreover, it is argued by the perennialist that it is only a superficial copying of Nature that reaches a limit and is trapped in its own platitudinous naturalism, which in turn “engendered the monstrosities of surrealism” (Schuon, 2005a, p.77). Whether one could agree with the extreme position when Schuon calls naturalism luciferian because of its seeking to imitate the creations of God, and its affirmation of the psychic elements to the detriment of the universal and the bare fact to the detriment of the symbol, is another matter. Nonetheless, the profundity of his comments cannot be ignored “that man must imitate the creative act and not the thing created”. Rather, we are told that [religiously] symbolic arts are creations that are not would-be duplications of those of God, but a reflection of them according to a real analogy, revealing the transcendental aspects of things; and this revelation is the only sufficient reason of art, apart from the practical usefulness of its objects... (Schuon, 2005a, p.78).

“It is told of *Til Eulenspiegel* that having been engaged as court painter to a prince, he presented to the assembled company a blank canvas, declaring that whoever was not the child of honest parents would see nothing on the canvas.

Since none of the assembled lords was willing to admit he saw nothing, all pretended to admire the canvas" (Schuon, 2005b, p. 514).³⁹

How much of the above sums up the perception of modern art, I will leave the reader to be the judge.

Thus I have attempted to argue that the rise of individuality in the Sacred is, as stated in the previous section, to divorce it from the soil that fed it. Even though it may encompass spirituality, the individuality of its form is far too arbitrarily subject to little appeal beyond the corridors of academia. Moreover, rather than appeal to contemplative intelligence as stated earlier, it merely appeals to artistic academia.

4.2.9 Arguments for a Revitalisation of Christian Art

One of the problems with Western sacred or spiritual art in the modern age or at least what calls itself that, is reduced to academia; so many of the modern abstract paintings that the Researcher has examined require some artistic training in order to appreciate the understanding of them. Even to give them value in and of themselves, they are rarely produced by men of orthodox religious disposition, but men who seek to find the Divine in some form of existentialist manner. If sacred art, spiritually sacred art or whatever you wish to call it, is to fulfil the function of sacred art from a perennial philosophical perspective, then it must convey transcendent values as well as supernatural values because, as Schuon puts it, it is the "form beyond the form" (Schuon, 1982, p.4), it must have a universal appeal. It cannot be an art that leads us to turn towards our egos and based upon sentimentality only, or relativities that bear justification within themselves and their own relative nature. Such art, Schuon argues, degenerates into "monstrosities of surrealism" (Schuon, 2005a, p.77). There is no use going to a gallery and seeing a Mondrian or Kandinsky and trying to work out its spiritual implications, with the thought going through one's brain, this is all beyond me, I know nothing of art. A sacred art with universal appeal should not engender such thoughts, but merely suggest to the beholder this is my bridge to the Divine; therefore, it would need to conform to the exoteric religious forms of the Religion to which it purports to be a manifestation. Equally the problem in our secular age is that when a perennial philosopher harks back to the mediaeval period, one needs to bear in mind that such a comparison might serve as a guide but are virtually impossible to return to. For one speaks of an age where Religion had permeated almost every facet of society,

³⁹ Not too dissimilar to the *Emperor's New Clothes*

and nearly all art was for the glorification of God, no man had to stand in a cathedral and wonder what is this about, who is this, what has the artist tried to represent? It would have been clear that, this was such and such a saint or this is the Trinity and so on. I will end this section with some of the thoughts below by Thomas Burckhardt which may prove interesting though not necessarily a feasible solution. I shall emphasise the perennial notion of Sacred Art, which is that, that "points us towards God through a quality or energy inherent in the form of the art itself, and independently of both the artist's individuality and our own personal likings or sympathies" (Cutsinger, 1997, p. 125).

"...The church must retire within itself modern and spurious artistic movements for the sake of religious propaganda are only likely to accelerate the intellectual dissolution that threatens to engulf religion itself" This is a recent expostulation by Pope Benedict XVI on modern instruments being used in churches such as electric guitars in order to attract people to Mass⁴⁰. Moreover, he continues that "the church must give full value to anything that affirms its own timelessness". "But the renewal of Christian art is not conceivable without an awakening of the contemplative spirit at the heart of Christianity in the absence of this every attempt to revive Christian art must fail".

Again we hear talk of a formal approach to painting and the need for its forms to be recognisable. "Christian painting must be figurative". Can Christian mediaeval art be revived? Only from within and not from without, according to Burckhardt, otherwise it is the anti-Christ. (Similar to Schuon, in his Luciferianism, see above). Another possible solution is copying. "If today we were to copy ancient Christian models, the very choice of those models, their transportation into a particular technique and the stripping from them of accessories would in itself be an art. Burckhardt further argues that, in order for Christian art to rise from its individualist relativism it must turn back to those timeless sources that had previously inspired it (Burckhardt, 2001, pp. 212-216). This last point is most important, as very few of the 20th

⁴⁰ Posted on 27 June, 2006 # ANI

The Pope wants 'Pop' music banned from Churches!

London: Guitars and modern music, may soon be out the doors in Roman Catholic Churches, for it seems that Pope Benedict XVI doesn't quite approve of them, preferring the 'traditional' Gregorian chants or sacred polyphonic choral music to it. The Catholic Church has started using modern musical instruments such as electric guitars in a bid to make more people attend masses. And though these measures were proving to be successful, the Pope doesn't think that they are appropriate within the walls of the Church. At a concert conducted by Domenico Bartolucci the director of music at the Sistine Chapel, Benedict XVI said that within the church walls the only suitable music was the 'traditional' type. (http://popebenedictxivblog.blogspot.com/2006_06_01_archive.html)

spiritual pieces that I have looked at conform to the Thomasian/Dionysian view of beauty, as laid out above. Wonderful though they are as works in themselves, this now leads us to turn to an art that is almost by its very nature contemplative.

We should bear in mind that the nature of the Perennial Philosophy is such that it cannot be removed for it will always be there. Thus even if we have the most outrageous and profane modern art it will still be there; yet we should posit ourselves the following question. If a man sickened through disease to which there was a cure, but he occluded his mind with all sorts of fancies that prevented him from finding this cure, how then would the cure have benefited him? The purpose of Schuon, Burckhardt, Coomaraswamy and the Researcher, is to remind mankind of the cure and the importance that sacred art is a vehicle towards that cure.

4. 3 Arguments Concerning the Preparations of the Artist and the Hindu Temple

It is impossible to complete this chapter on sacred art and not mention Oriental art, i.e. Indian or Hindu art, yet where to begin so vast a subject? It must not be forgotten that this dissertation is arguing for the transcendent unity of Religions, therefore some mention of Hindu/Indian art is a necessity. Though in doing so I do not wish to suggest that Chinese, Japanese or, for that matter, Islamic sacred art is not of equal importance. The limits of scope and space prevent me from including them in this study, and the Oriental art will have to be dealt with in a cursory manner in comparison with my work hitherto. I wish here to stress the contemplative nature of Indian or Hindu art, as a vehicle towards the Divine and some of the guiding parameters upon which the art is brought about.

How then is such art to be viewed and understood? We'll need to transcend our perception of surfaces when viewing such art, for it was never intended to be viewed as such in a museum or some such other places, otherwise, as Coomaraswamy puts it, we will reduce ourselves to magpies with baubles in the nest that we just admire because they shine, but nothing of them beyond what we see:

“...We also pretend to study and aspire to understand the works of this other kind that are assembled in our homes and museums. And this we cannot do

without taking into account their final and formal causes' how can we judge of anything without first knowing what purpose it was intended to serve, and what was its makers intention..." (Coomaraswamy, 2007, p. 142).

Each of the great Religions has its own sacred art which is an esoteric means or bridge to the esoteric. Yet each of these arts must stick to its formal outward forms of the Religion, and play equally as important a part in the great game as do the scriptures and other exoteric forms.

Concerning *Maya* and the Hindu artist, the latter is the power which is often referred to as illusory but it allows the world to exist outside the Divine Reality, and at the same time it is from *Maya* that all illusion and duality spring, in her more positive aspect the Divine of Art which produces all form (Burckhardt, 2001, p. 14). Thus the sacred Hindu artist manifests in his work certain aspects of himself as well as that of the Divine itself which does not change. I am basically arguing that the Hindu artist knows that it is God who expresses Himself through his work so that the work surpasses the ego of the artist. This may not be just applied to the Hindu artist alone. "In other words, it must not be the "T", that root of illusion and ignorance of oneself, which arbitrarily chooses those means; they must be borrowed from tradition, from the formal and "objective" revelation of the Supreme Being, Who is the "Self" of all beings (Burckhardt, 2001, p.15).

I shall continue with some more thoughts on the Hindu artist before turning to make a brief examination of the Hindu temple and the part that it plays in contemplation. Dehejia in his book *The Advaita of Art*, argues that "The Indian artist used their visionary gifts, their own method of observation to determine what lies beyond physical appearances. Indian art along with aesthetics is an attempt to reach that *guhyesu vratesu* those hidden realms...the whole basis of Indian artistic creation... is directly spiritual and intuitive...and its highest business is to disclose something of the Self, the Infinite, the Divine" (Dehejia, 2000, p. 3). My purpose here will be to look at some of the contemplative principles that motivate the Indian artist and how far they manifest themselves in their art. Are they also an intended bridge to the Divine?

It would seem that Indian art has sought to dominate aesthetic emotion of the art object (*Rūpa*) through the internal as opposed to through the external aspect. We need to see how this *rāsa*⁴¹ can be viewed contemplatively in regards to Indian art's role in leading the devotees towards the Divine. The whole subject of *rūpa* (in the Vedic concept) is most interesting as it is

⁴¹ *Rāsa* रस lit. 'juice' or 'essence' means the state of feeling that is evoked in a person by a work of art, when they read, hear or see it.

argued that it moves from the formless to form and from thereof back to the formless again. Thus outward appearance (*rūpa*) is a vehicle for contemplation, whereas in mediaeval art we move from the outward religious form as a bridge to the formless Divine. In Indian art, if I can use that term loosely, it moves from formless to form and to formless again. In fact there is an overwhelming argument that Indian art cannot be studied if separated from its religious aspect, for to do so is to truncate it. "The Indian view point generally is very often a holistic one, and to sequester one activity or principle and study it in isolation, is to truncate and distort the Indian view of life" (Dehejia, 2000, p. 15). Thus here we can see common ground with the majority of the art of the mediaeval period in that it all points towards the Sacred, though it would be naïve to make a generality no matter how well based it might be into an absolute.

It is upon the principles laid out above that a brief view of Indian art and the motivation (*artha*)⁴² behind it is considered. I wish to talk about some of the preparations and motivations behind the Indian artist, so as to highlight the almost all permeating contemplative nature of Indian art, and to give greater weight to my understanding of it and its importance as a vehicle towards the Divine. Firstly, here are some comments on the Indian sculptor and his desire to represent the spiritual as opposed to the physical. The reader will recall some of the comments listed above concerning the preparations that the artist undergoes when wishing to represent the Sacred in art. Here are some comments on the purification process that the Indian artist undergoes, all of these give a greater weight to the understanding of these artistic matters, rather than simply dealing with "aesthetic surfaces."

"The greatness and continuity of Indian sculpture is due to the close connexion between the religious and philosophical and the aesthetic mind of the people; the Indian sculptor is concerned with embodying spiritual experiences and impressions, not with recording or glorifying what is received by the physical senses; the Indian sculptor stresses something behind, something more remote to the surface imagination nearer to the soul and subordinates to it the physical form" (Dehejia, 2000, p. 70).

⁴² **Artha** (Devanagari: अर्थ) is a Sanskrit term meaning "purpose, cause, motive, meaning, notion".

"The artist performs purifactory ablutions and sits down to focus his attention on...a *dhyāna* -*mantra*⁴³. He then offers flowers, incense and other gifts to the form conceived. The mental picture is thus seen in all its details and the work of art is complete in the mind even before being translated into form. The artist then begins the task of technical elaboration, during which time he must hold fast to the conception evolved through yoga... The kind of mental state designed to be secured through the practise of *yoga* can also be cultivated by the artisan through tuning up the functions of the body and the mind into perfect obedience to the faculty of intuition an through the deliberate invocation of dreams" (Dehejia, 2000, p. 74).

What then of beauty, what are the motivating dynamics behind the Indian artist's concept of beauty? I have started out this chapter by looking at the traditional Western ideal from a perennial point of view. Some brief comments and observations on the Indian tradition might serve to give greater clarity and understanding. We need to understand that any artistic object must first be understood by *Pramāṇa* the correct knowledge of any object arrived at by thorough reasoning, and further more, such an object should reflect the *Purusha*⁴⁴ or the cosmic man universe. The outward appearance of an object must be in correlation to the microcosm and macrocosm of the universe. In fact it is argued by Coomaraswamy that art must move to a cosmic rhythm, "...these are the dance steps of number in the arena of time and space which weaves the *maya*, and the patterns of appearance, the incessant flow of change that is and is not. It is the rhythm that churns up images from the vague and makes tangible what is elusive..." (Dehejia, 2000, p.77). In fact the whole ideal behind the traditional Indian sense of beauty is that, there should be a harmonic balance between the inner and the outer, the *pramana* which looks beyond the imperfect world and the *sadrśya* which looks towards it. In fact altogether there are six limbs of the Indian artist, the other four are the: "*sadanga*, common to all work in line and colour; *rupabheda*, proportion, arrangement of line and mass, design, harmony, perspective; *bhava*, the seeking for beauty and charm for the satisfaction of the aesthetic spirit; *lavanya*, truth

⁴³ **Dhyāna** (from Sanskrit ध्यान dhyāna) or **jhāna** in Pāli refers to a stage of meditation, which is a subset of *samādhi*. It is a key concept in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. Equivalent terms are "*Chán*" in modern Chinese, "*Zen*" in Japanese, "*Seon*" in Korean, "*Thien*" in Vietnamese, and "*Samten*" in Tibetan.

⁴⁴ In Hinduism, **Purusha** (Sanskrit *puruṣa*, पुरुष "man, Cosmic Man", in Sutra literature also called *puṁs* "man") is the "self" which pervades the universe. The Vedic divinities are considered to be the human mind's interpretation of the many facets of Purusha. According to the Rigvedic Purusha sukta, Purusha was dismembered by the devas -- his mind is the Moon, his eyes are the Sun, and his breath is the wind.

of the form and its suggestion". (Sri Aurobindo)

(<http://www.searchforlight.org/Srijan/srijanVol1/IndianArt-4.htm>)

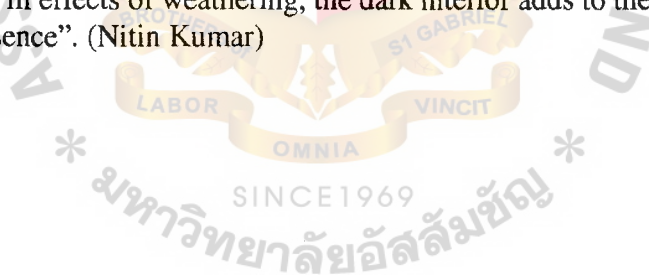
As stated previously, this topic of art and, for that matter, Indian art is of such vast proportions that I can do it only cursory justice here. In the next few paragraphs I wish to argue for the contemplative and spiritual nature of the Hindu temple, bearing in mind that this subject is discussed in regards to Indian art as being an exoteric aspect of Hindu Religions and its role as a bridge towards the Divine, which is part of the theme of the Perennial Philosophy and the overall argument for the transcendent unity of Religions. In order to lend greater weight to my perennial philosophical argument that the, "Outward forms of any sacred art must reflect the spiritual vision characteristic of a particular religion", I do not wish to speak of them as though I were some kind of expert in Indian art; such expertise is usually left to those who have had a life time of studying such matters. Therefore I will rely mainly on the observations of Titus Burckhardt and Nitin Kumar.

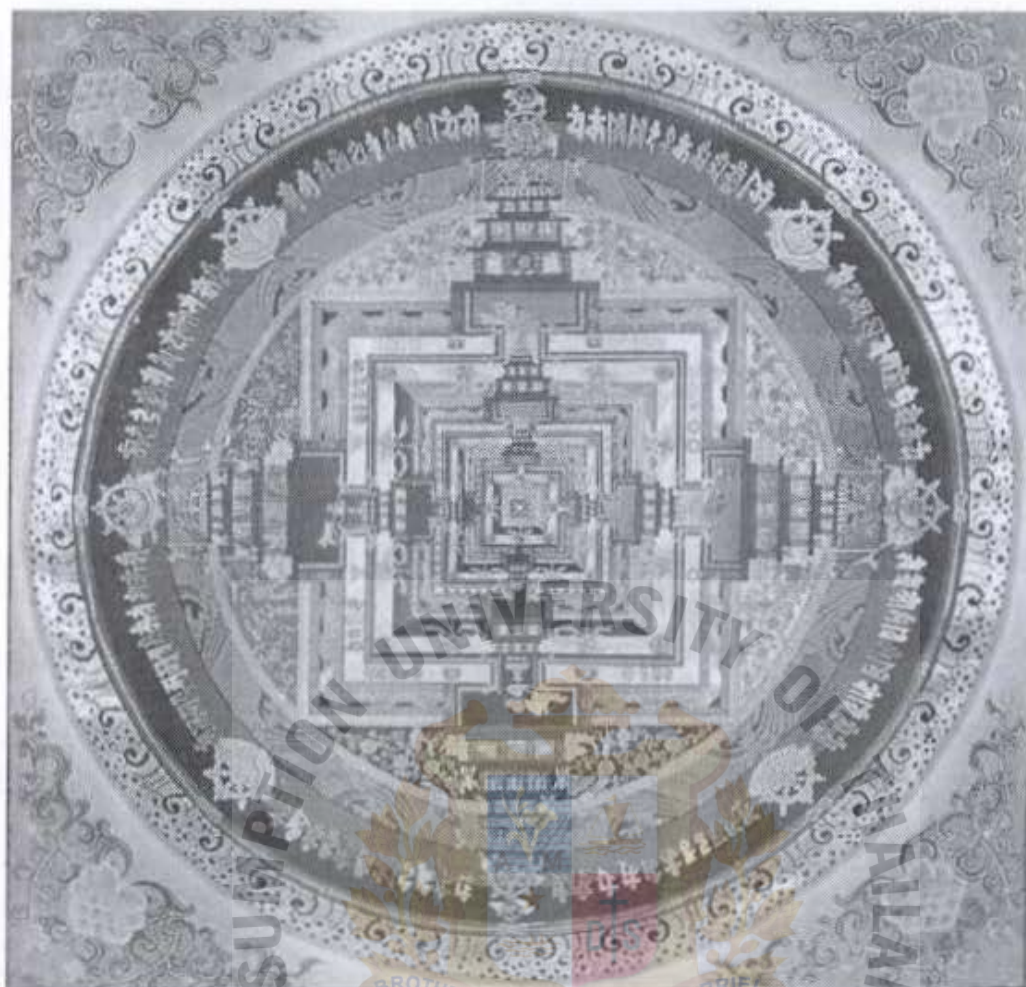
I will commence this brief and final section on sacred art by looking at the Hindu Temple and how it points to the Divine. It is argued by Burckhardt that the Hindu temple represents a *timeless aspect or final state of the world. In fact the design of the Hindu temple has not altered much since 6th century AD* (Basham, *The Wonder that Was India*, 1967, p. 356). An Indian temple, to whatever godhead it may be built, is in its inmost reality an altar raised to the Divine Self, a house of the Cosmic Spirit, an appeal and aspiration to the Infinite. (Sri Aurobindo) In fact the word temple and contemplate are derived from the same origin of the Roman word *templum* which means a sacred enclosure. So already the importance of such places with regards to the Divine is made obvious.

The Hindu temple is heavily influenced by the square and the circle (*mandala*) which represents the never ending circle that intersects with the square, the latter is symbolic of Earth and "the four directions which bind and define it" (Nitin Kumar, article, *The Hindu Temple*. (<http://www.religionfacts.com/hinduism/practices/temple.htm>) I need to continue to talk about the metaphysical influences on the Hindu Temple in order to highlight its Divine antecedences, without which it could not exist. Moreover, being thus divinely influenced, how much more so then is this exoteric structure a means to contemplation and a vehicle towards the Absolute which transcendentally unifies all Orthodox Religions. As the circle is never ending, so it is

supposed to symbolise the never ending nature of Heaven, the square and circle interacting metaphorically symbolising the meeting of Heaven and Earth. This, as stated earlier, is only a basic overview of certain aspects of the Hindu temple. I do not have the scope to talk about how the square is arrived at by the fixations of the principal movements of Heaven etc (Burckhardt, 2001, p. 26); nor need I go into details about Shiva's battle with the demon *Andhaka* and the rites that accompany the preparation of the site for the temple or position of the various deities on the *vastu-mandala* grid. The most sacred and important part of the temple; is the sanctuary at the centre of it which is the least adorned part of the temple, it is the centre of the Divine presence and where the icon is kept:

“In the central grid of the *vastu-mandala* sits Brahma, the archetypal creator, endowed with four faces looking simultaneously in all directions. He is thus conceived as the ever-present superintending genius of the site. At this exact central point is established the most important structure of the sacred complex, where the patron deity of the temple is installed. Paradoxically this area is the most unadorned and least decorated part of the temple, almost as if it is created in an inverse proportion to its spiritual importance. Referred to as the *sanctum sanctorum*, it is the most auspicious region in the whole complex. It has no pillars, windows or ventilators. In addition to a metaphysical aspect, this shutting off of air and light has a practical side to it too. It was meant to preserve the icon, which, in olden days, was often made of wood. Also, besides preventing the ill effects of weathering, the dark interior adds to the mystery of the divine presence”. (Nitin Kumar)





The basic plan of a Hindu temple is an expression of sacred geometry where the temple is visualized as a grand mandala. By sacred geometry we mean a science which has as its purpose the accurate laying out of the temple ground plan in relation to the cardinal directions and the heavens. Characteristically, a mandala is a sacred shape consisting of the intersection of a circle and a square. (www.exoticindiaart.com/artimages/sanctum_hindutemple_41.jpg)

This inner sanctuary is designed to lead the devotee on a journey in which one seeks to find the Atman, the soul or divine aspect in each of us. In fact on a most basic level there are some similarities to St. Teresa of Ávila's *Interior Castle* where the soul undertakes a journey within itself to find God in a seven-roomed mansion. I shall come to this in another chapter of this dissertation. For now I shall attempt to describe the inner sanctum of a typical Hindu temple and its outwardly sacred forms.

When a devotee enters the temple he/she is entering into the *mandala* or power field and moves along to the inner sanctum which houses the icon. It is argued by Kumar that the process of movement is not unlike that of certain yogic spiritual states, waking state (*jagrat*); dream state (*swapna*); the state of deep sleep (*sushupti*); and finally *turiya* the highest state. The devotee is greeted by a series of carved figures on the wall, which is to remind him of his mortal state (wakefulness) then it is followed by the dream state as he is greeted by carvings of mythical

beasts and the like along the walls. These, we are told, are designed to uplift the devotee from the dull and common place reality. (Kumar) This is then followed by the pavilion and the vestibule which are restrained in décor and the darkness of these areas before the icon suggest a sleep-like state:

"Finally we come to the part that is devoid of all ornamentation and is supposed to lead the devotee to the highest state of consciousness semi tranquillity, "where all boundaries vanish and the universe stands forth in its primordial glory. It signifies the coming to rest of all differentiated, relative existence. This utterly quiet, peaceful and blissful state is the ultimate aim of all spiritual activity. The devotee is now fully-absorbed in the beauty and serenity of the icon. He or she is now in the inner square of Brahma in the *vastu-mandala*, and in direct communion with the chief source of power in the temple." (Kumar)



Inner sanctum (*garbhagriha*) of Lakshmana temple. Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh, India
<http://www.terrageria.com/images/india/indi39648.jpeg>

Of course I must not omit to mention the spires at the top of temples called the *shikhara* which are supposed to be a symbol of the devotee's ascent to enlightenment.



The Temple of Mahabodhi, Bodhgaya
<http://www.religionfacts.com/hinduism/practices/temple.htm>

Thus I have argued that art of the Hindu temple is one that is conscious of and fully aware of the Divine; moreover, that its purpose is to use the outward sacred form to lead the devotee toward the Absolute. In conforming to the sacred tenets of its source Religion, it fits the perennial philosophical notion of sacred art and highlights the importance of such art as a vehicle on the road to the Absolute. There will be some who may ask why the Researcher does not make such an argument of the Catholic cathedrals. We all know that a temple must be sacred anyway. There is little weight in an argument if every example given is from the same Religion; besides, more Hindu temples survive than Hindu sacred visual art. Whilst the readers will be aware that a temple is sacred, I have sought to show how it is so, and what Divine influences are behind its construction, so as to show its continuing importance even today in the Hindu faith. Moreover that such forms are not subject to individual ephemerally subjective irrationality, which I fear, is the case with much of the so called sacred 20th century art that I discussed earlier.

In this vast section on art and beauty and how it pertains to sacred art as a vehicle towards the Divine, I have sought to argue that for such art to conform to the perennial notion of sacred art, it must also conform to the outward forms of the Religion from which it emanates. I have tried to

be as Kaleidoscopic as space will allow, and not get lost in the vast forest of art, which would blur the shape of my argument. I have in no way sought to profess myself as an art expert as the world abounds with such experts who readily seek to persuade everyone to agree that what is visually formless and aesthetically distasteful should be accepted, and failure to do so might imply that one is not of good parentage or has poor taste, just like the nobles in the quote mentioned earlier.

4.4 Conclusion: Sacred Art and Beauty

The Researcher will just conclude in this chapter what he has sought to argue and to show that for sacred art to be just that it needs to conform to the outward forms of the Orthodox Religion that it purports to support. It cannot be arbitrarily individually fantastic and hope to be sacred art even though it may point to a notion of the Divine. Sacred art is an essential garment of any Orthodox Religion and, as such, has an equally important part to play just like the scripture and the liturgy in general. It is essential because it is part of the exoteric form that leads to the esoteric, and its dilution in terms of form is liable to lead to an even greater rationalisation and humanisation of the Divine in an increasingly secular society. The perennial philosophers, like Schuon and Burckhardt, have sought to highlight deficiency and decline in what sacred art should be. Burckhardt has even suggested some possible remedies that the Church might undertake to reverse this trend. Perhaps Westerners would need to redefine these distinctions as to what is sacred art, and what is not in terms of form. It is advisable that we make a conscious effort to promote the sacred art that conforms to the outward forms of the Orthodox Religion that it represents. It would be wrong to dismiss modern art that purports to be divinely inspired, for who are we to judge? Philosophically the criteria for form in sacred art should be able to remind the beholder of the ultimate non-worldliness that Religion leads us to, whilst at the same time conforming to an Orthodox Religious symbolic criterion of form, that does not seek to reduce itself to the world, as in the case of the mediaeval art explained earlier. Yet in the context of the Perennial Philosophy, such individualist subjectivity will not do; a line in the sand has to be made for those who wish to merely praise certain types of art so that they can be accepted as being of "good parentage." What we need is a distinguishable and clear form of sacred art that can be readily recognisable and visible to the contemplative or follower of any Orthodox Religion, without the need of the art "expert" telling them what it should be. From the perennial

philosophical point of view, sacred art is light in itself and needs none to tell or to point it out! Though sadly in the current age of secularism and modernity, there is much that is platitudinous and distracting in terms of form. We are bombarded daily with false concepts in advertising and media spin, consumerism, fast foods and soap operas. These limit our access, or at least the time when we might access, those sacred forms that should be an essential part of the life of any follower of an Orthodox Religion. Beauty is essential for Westerners who no longer have the benefit of living in an integral traditional society.

Whilst some may argue that religious forms change throughout the ages and some approaches to modern art could possibly be a new form of the Sacred, unfortunately, we now live in an age where secularisation is rampant, and, unlike a thousand years ago, modern man no longer believes in the Divine as he once did, especially in the West. As such we need to take a much more careful view of what sacred art should be lest we reach the point where we fall even further into secularisation and dilute further the already vanishing forms of sacred art. The Researcher has already reflected upon the "Not to get lost," idea and to have a clear idea of the orientation towards where one wants to go, for failing this one would be in danger of blinding oneself to spiritual tendencies outside one's line of sight. There are those who might follow Walter Benjamin's insight as he wrote in his book *Origin of German Tragic Drama*:

"In the field of allegorical intuition the image is a fragment, a rune. Its beauty as a symbol evaporates when the light of divine learning falls upon it. The false appearance of totality is extinguished. For the *eidos* disappears, the simile ceases to exist, and the cosmos it contained shrivels up. The dry rebuses which remain contain an insight, which is still available to the confused investigator" (Benjamin, 1977, p. 176).

"The allegorical physiognomy of the nature-history, which is put on stage in the *Trauerspiel*, is present in reality in the form of the ruin. In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things" (Benjamin, 1977, p. 178).

To try to diminish the arguments concerning sacred art as laid out by the perennial philosophers is to say that religious approaches in the past are not applicable to our age. This is primarily the case because Symbolic redemption would involve the ability to leave behind one's earthly history, a blissful transcendent, or even tragic experience, whereas, with the passage of

history itself, we have become embedded in our historical path, with all of its failures and impurity. We are denied the transcendent experience where we can symbolically connect with the Godhead.

In other words, religious approaches of the past are not applicable to our age. Schuon and Coomaraswamy can lament all they want and advocate a purist model of spirituality but, by not acknowledging the movement of history their writings become useless; or maybe useful only as a window to the religious experience of the past. This position may be countered, for Schuon and Coomaraswamy do acknowledge the movement of history, but unlike the modernist, they lament at what has been lost as a result of the aforementioned movements. Their main complaint is that the lack of traditional religious form in sacred art is tragic, since these pieces of art are the exoteric garments of God and to distort them is equally as sacrilegious as to distort the scripture or the liturgy. As Schuon and Burckhardt say, adapting truth to our times rather than our time to truth. Also Religion is not a thing of progression in the historical sense but a vehicle that should be used for moving towards salvation. To say that religious approaches of the past are not applicable to our age is all well and good; but it is necessary to distinguish between exoteric and esoteric approaches. Esoteric approaches where the Divine is sought beyond the outward trappings should be the universal objective of all sacred art, and any art that does not foster that, should it still be called sacred? Who is to say that those past approaches do not have any validity today; it is man who has changed his values and not the esoteric nature of Religion.

Perhaps modern artists are attempting to take us beyond form through strife, contrast and chance in the same way that early religious artists were attempting to take us beyond form by iconographic means. I could attempt to argue that the modern artist is trying to take us beyond form but is it really possible to go beyond form in a religious context? Sacred art only has validity within the framework or systems in which it is set and only by reference to that form does it possess its validity. Therefore to try to go beyond form is to create a set of images that hold no more than existential individualist value. A value that is likely to appeal only to the very narrow band of those in academia, which of course does not make it irrelevant, but just limits its appeal. Sacred art cannot go beyond the categories that spawned it; it cannot be regarded as a naked thing either; for only amongst the categories that spawned it can art be described as Sacred art. A possible way forward may be to stand outside of religious forms but not above them,

hence when I speak of them above, it may be implied or inferred that the modern secular world as a whole feels that it no longer needs them and therefore puts itself in a sense above them. To stand outside of such forms is perhaps to see them as still being valid religiously and as a means by which we might be drawn to the Sacred; and how far we have strayed from the Sacred. This would in turn allow us to acknowledge their continuing validity as a means to draw us to the Divine.

On this subject of validity of sacred art, the Researcher would like to stress that such works of art are to be regarded as signs towards the Divine and are, as Earnest Cassirer would put it, "No mere accidental cloak of the idea, but a necessary and essential organ..." (Cassirer, 1955, p. 86). In every linguistic 'sign' in every mythical or artistic 'image', a spiritual content which intrinsically points beyond the whole sensory sphere, is translated into the form of the sensuous, into something visible, audible or tangible (Cassirer, 1955, p. 106).

As for adapting truth to our times or adapting ourselves to truth, who are the guilty ones here? It seems at times that perennial philosopher can also be charged with having a certain idea of what truth is, and that the function of beauty is relative to this truth. If there is a perennial realm, there is no danger of it disappearing; it will always be there, we simply need to find our own manner of reaching it, just as every great Religion of the past had their own manner, forms, rituals, insights. But what if we are in danger of never reaching it because we have so distorted those sacred forms that lead to the Divine? Also what if we have supplemented belief in the perennial truth for our own material 'truth' as this increasingly seems to be the case in today's modern Western world; therefore, would it not be better to suggest that we seek to turn to those forms of Sacred art that conform to Orthodox Religions of which they are an integral part? The Researcher will conclude by reminding readers of one of the main underlying themes of Schuon's arguments and those of other perennial philosophers that sacred art needs to seek to free itself from its individualistic relativism and turn back to its source:

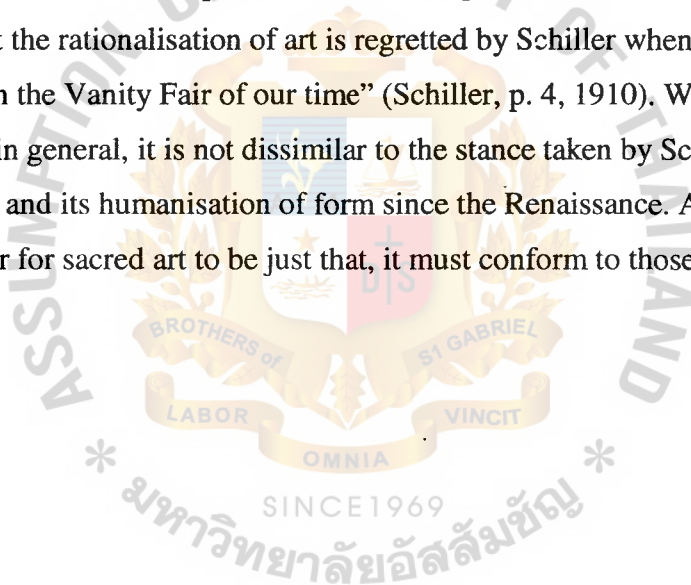
"Christian art will not be reborn unless it frees itself from all individualistic relativism, and turns back towards the sources of its inspiration, which are by definition situated in the timeless" (Burckhardt, 2001, pp. 212-216).

In the case of Malevich, perhaps he recognises the presence of God in the creative process. Perhaps for the modern decadent individualistic man, this is the highest spiritual realisation he

can achieve. But where will it lead him and who else but he or those beyond the narrow corridors of intellectualism can follow him? As to the question posed at the beginning of this section whether sacred art hinders or helps notion of the transcendent unity of Religion, the answer is that any form of unity is found in the importance that form plays in leading from the outward to the inward. It might then be argued that it is an exoteric motive that propels one up to the summit where the esoteric unity is to be found, even bearing in mind that each Orthodox Religion has its own sacred artistic forms, the whole being greater than the parts. Another important aspect of art and modernity that is raised by Benjamin and is of relevance to this work is the ease by which the art may be reproduced and as such the loss of authority of the original work as a result of this reproduction, and moreover, such work can now be viewed out of the locality for which it may have been originally wrought and therefore loses its value in terms of ritual and original use. "One might generalise by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many copies it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own situation, it reactivates the object reproduced" (Benjamin, 1935, p.3, *The Work of Art in the Age of Reproduction*). One feels that the ease by which some works of art may be reproduced may actually be an advantage rather than a disadvantage, at least in terms of making available that which might appeal to the Intellect. For example, I have never had the privilege of hearing Hildegard von Bingen performed live or in the original setting of a monastery or some other place of piety, but the Intellection of the formless reality that her hymns and chants (*Feather on the Breath of God, Gothic Voices*, with Emma Kirby, directed by Christopher Page, Hyperion) seek to convey are not lost through the CD player, even though most of us may not understand Latin. The works Intellection appeals to the simple piety of those in the Christian tradition and many other traditions. It could be argued that it would be more effective if one were able to hear such work in its original setting, but then again wouldn't the noise of a passing aircraft upset the notion of authenticity that one is seeking to recreate through hearing such works in the original. It might be argued that one of the ways forward with traditional sacred art is to try to make it available through modern means whether that be the radio or TV, as long as the piety of the work is not debased intentionally; for example Hildegard's hymns and sequences being sung to the accompaniment of an electric guitar.

I have sought in the previous chapter to argue for the importance of sacred art as a vehicle towards the Divine and that the individualisation of such art is a distraction from that purpose for the majority. I have explained the contrast between the "modern sacred" and the "traditional

sacred", and the different the individualism it projects, in addition to my argument for the importance of the sacred in the Hindu visual tradition and some of the important rules of form that it is subjected to. I have also stated and reiterated the theme echoed by Schuon, that in order for art to be traditional and sacred in the perennial sense, it must avoid becoming individualistic and arbitrary; a point made clear with my studies of the Madonna and Child and my notion of the Sacred in 20th century art. In terms of the overall theme of transcendent unity, sacred art should embody the means to that ground of transcendent unity, and as such, it should not be seated in academia but in that grove where it can have a general appeal as it conforms to the sacred forms from which it originally sprang. To add further weight to my argument concerning sacred art and to my conclusion, I would like to turn to the German poet Friedrich von Schiller who argues that art must raise itself above the necessity and need and to look towards an ideal and be governed by spirit rather than matter (Schiller, p. 4, 1910, *Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*). The argument against the rationalisation of art is regretted by Schiller when he says "the spiritual service of art is lost in the Vanity Fair of our time" (Schiller, p. 4, 1910). Whilst this view is taken concerning art in general, it is not dissimilar to the stance taken by Schuon and my own concerning sacred art and its humanisation of form since the Renaissance. Again I repeat my argument that in order for sacred art to be just that, it must conform to those categories from which it sprang.



5 Chapter V Mysticism Truth/Prayer/Virtue

“The esoterist sees things, not as they appear according to a certain perspective, but as they are: he takes account of what is essential and consequently invariable under the veil of different religious formulation. This at least is the position in principle and the justification for esoterism; in fact it is far from always being consistent with itself, inasmuch as intermediary solutions are humanly inevitable” (Schuon, 2005b, p, 88).

This aspect of the Researcher's argument is best explored through mysticism which is considered to be a natural support of esoteric unity that he has advocated throughout this dissertation and especially in the chapter on Esoterism.

“...The absoluteness of each religion lies in its inner dimension, and that the relativity of the outer dimension becomes necessarily apparent on contact with other great religions...” (Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions*, 2002, p.7).

That inner dimension is best explored through mysticism--the universal language of immutable exchange between the Religions. Schuon in his analysis of the Perennial Philosophy stated that there were five pillars, the last three pillars (truth, virtue and prayer) shall be explored through mysticism as universal truth is the objective of mysticism, prayer a fundamentally essential component and virtue inseparable from the other two. Schuon's expostulations on prayer will be covered in this chapter on mysticism, for he tells us that:

“Prayer-in the widest sense –triumphs over the four accidents of our existence: the world, life, the body and the soul’ ...It is situated in existence like a shelter, like an islet. In it alone are we perfectly ourselves, because it puts us into the presence of God. It is like a miraculous diamond which nothing can tarnish and nothing can resist” (Schuon, 1954, p. 212).

It is through the idea of mysticism that the above will be examined and comments by Schuon will be added where appropriate. I will begin by giving a background and definition of mysticism; I will look at language and the epistemology of mysticism and to find out if such experiences can really be expressed through language. This research will cover Mysticism in its

many forms to determine whether there are cross-religious similarities. It will deal with the Bible and the importance that Christ plays in Christian mysticism. Then it will examine the mystical path laid out by St. Teresa of Ávila and Sri Ramakrishna and the similarities in their experiences. I shall be arguing for the transcendent unity through mysticism. And finally I will conclude this chapter by looking at the debasement of mysticism by examining some of the arguments of the late Richard Zaehner in his *Concordant Discord* and *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*, on mysticism. In these works Zaehner takes a contrary view to that of a transcendent unity of Religions which can be found through mysticism. I would also remind readers that even access to the formless is hard to do without resorting to some exoteric forms. In my thesis statement the exoteric itself is given even more poignant meaning by that which it can guide us to.

5.1 Definition, Background and Origin of Mysticism

It might therefore be useful to begin with some background information on mysticism and its origins and definition. It is perhaps best to start with Evelyn Underhill's definition of mysticism, "The direct intuition or experience of God," (Clarke, 1925, p.9). Or to put it another way, "every religious tendency that discovers the way to God direct through inner experience without the mediation of reasoning," (Fanning, 2001, p. 2). The Researcher has noted that all Religions, as Williams James once put it, are founded on mysticism, and all that we have now is the second hand version of those Religions.

It is said that Gautama Buddha (Prince Siddhartha) the founder of Buddhism entered into a mystical trance-like state, both at his enlightenment and at his death, before entering the final peace of Nirvana. Nirvana has been described as the centre of Buddhist mysticism by Spencer, in his book *Mysticism and World Religions*, and as an immediate apprehension or supreme reality. In China, the Taoist sought union with the Tao, which is the Infinite and Eternal, the Supreme Reality. Therefore the mystical union of the individual to some ultimate form of reality is an aspect of most, if not all, Orthodox Religions. For the purpose of this work, the Researcher will endeavour to deal with mysticism ostensibly from a Christian perspective and in regard to the

monolithic God of Christianity before proceeding to non-Christian views and the perennial nature of mysticism. The Researcher will firstly give some background as to the origin of Christian Mysticism.

The early origins of Christian Mysticism begin with the decline of the early Greco-Roman pantheon of gods, which had been waning since the middle of fourth century BC. The conquest of Alexander the Great reduced the significance of the Greek city-states and in turn their public pulpits which were based on the worship of state gods. With the erosion of the city-states and the changes brought about by Alexander, these people began to identify with other similar ethnic groups and cultural groups rather than cities, and Religions appealed to people on an individual basis, throughout the Hellenistic world, often blending both Greek and non-Greek elements.

The significance of these new religions strengthened as the Roman Empire expanded and rendered less potent the regional or national cultures that had existed before. Thus what the new altered religions offered was a salvation from the sufferings of this world, immortality in the next world and direct communication with salvific deities. These new religions offered esoteric teachings that were known only to their intimates, who took oaths of secrecy pledging never to reveal their secrets to outsiders.

Hence the above cults were known as the Mystery Religions, the word mystery, being etymologically related to mysticism. Like mysticism, the Greek word *mysterion*, "mystery," was derived from *myein*⁴⁵, to close, in this case indicating the closed mouths of the initiates of the cults (Fanning, 2001, p. 6).

These new religions spread from the Eastern to the Western world, and became somewhat universal cults, an example being the mysteries of Eleusis, which developed out of an agricultural cult, celebrating the restoration of Demeter's daughter Persephone, from the Lord of Hades. The significance of this is that the subsequent annual celebrations, symbolised a cult, of what Fanning refers to as a "Vernal renewal of life," and the allegorisation into a symbol of the triumph over death, which the participants in the Eleusis mysteries believed would give them

⁴⁵ Bro.Dennis Chornenky in his paper *Initiation, Mystery and Salvation: The Way of Rebirth*, also argues that the verb means to close and might refer to the closing of the eyes and mouth before entering into darkness to re-emerge and receiving the light (<http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/chornenky.html>)

immortality. There were a number of other religions that sprang up along the same theme, for example the Cult of the Great Mother which was prevalent throughout Asia. Also worth noting is the Persian cult of Mithra. The significance and common ground that they all found themselves on was that they all offered triumph over death and achievable immortality.

All of these religions existed on two levels, one for the public and the other for those who were initiated:

“All of them, including Mithras, existed on two levels, one was a public side for the purpose of proselythization and evangelisation by which the essentials of the cult were explained and the potential initiates were recruited. At the same time there was the private aspect of the cult, wherein its inner, hidden and secret face was revealed only after the aspirants underwent elaborate ritualistic initiation ceremonies. One of the most important functions of the initiation was to bring the initiate to direct contact and communion with the deity” (Fanning, 2001, p. 9).

Part of the initiation into these hidden realms was achieved by various stages of fasting, vigils and meditation. These were all designed to produce a state of ecstasy that would result in the participants encountering or experiencing the deity, in the form of visions or dreams. For example, when Isis came to Lucius in the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius, reassuring him “I am here to take pity on your ills; I am here to give aid and solace. Cease then from tears and wailings, set aside your sadness; there is now dawning for you, through my providence, the day of salvation” (Griffiths & Brill, 1975, pp.75-7). These ceremonies might lead the believers to some form of transformation into a Divine being through Divine indwelling or the bestowal of immortality. At the climax of the initiation in the *Golden Ass*, Lucius reports the following:

“At the dead of night, I saw the sun flashing with bright effulgence. I approached close to the gods above and the gods below and worshipped them face to face. Behold, I have related things about which you must remain in ignorance (Griffiths & Brill, 1975, p. 99).

Thus the Researcher notes that this marriage between the initiate and the deity would sometimes result in union which is often expressed in terms of brightness, light, the reception of unutterable revelations and mystery, or put it another way, mysticism. Yet to reach this state of sublime and virtually inexplicable exultation, the mystic must purify him/herself of all worldly desires in order to truly bathe in the light; as Margaret Smith puts it, in her essay *Nature and*

Meaning of Mysticism which can be found in Wood's anthological work *Understanding Mysticism*:

"Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in His holy place? Even he that hath clean hands and a pure heart," sang the Hebrew Psalmist, and the Greek philosopher Plotinus says also that as the eye could not behold the sun unless it were itself sunlike, so no more can the soul behold God unless it is Godlike. So the mystics both in East and West have maintained that the stripping from the soul of selfishness and sensuality is essential for the beholding of the Vision of God. Self-loss, withdrawal from self, self-annihilation, these are essential to those who would approach the Absolute. Only when all images of earth are hushed and the clamour of the senses is stilled and the soul has passed beyond thought of self can the Eternal Wisdom be revealed to the mystic who seeks that high communion with the Unseen" (Woods 1980, p. 21).

One is given some further illumination of the God-like being beheld by the mystical vision, when Plotinus tells us that the final stage to the Unitive Life is from becoming to being:

"Man beholds God face to face, and is joined to Him in a progressive union, a union which is a fact of experience consciously realised. In terms of the most beautiful and glowing imagery have the mystics--who alone are qualified to speak, since they alone have seen and known that of which they speak--sought to describe the Beatific Vision and the Union to which it leads."

"We are further told by Plotinus, that, "Beholding this Being--resting, rapt, in the vision and possession of so lofty a loveliness, growing to Its likeness--what beauty can the soul yet lack? For This the Beauty supreme, the absolute and the primal, fashions. Its lovers to Beauty and makes them also worthy of love"" (Plotinus, 1991, *Ennead i. 7*).

In setting out the definition of the term mysticism in this section, the Researcher has noted that Christian mystics have been unable to give a rational and logical definition of God, a good example would be Francis of Assisi who, in his mystical revelation, was unable to define God. For whilst praying in the house of Bernard of Quintavalle, he was heard to say again and again, "My God! my God! What art Thou? And what am I?" (Woods 1980 p. 27).

St. Francis' mystical conundrum is further given weight in that the genuine mystic finds it almost impossible to quantify and apprehend the unapprehendable. The Researcher, in seeking to

define the term mysticism and the concomitant aspects it entails, wishes to show that any definitive logical quantification of God/Absolute is almost virtually impossible. Woods, in his *Understanding Mysticism*, argues that the all inclusive One is beyond knowing; moreover, that a mystic whether he be pantheistic or absolutist, his communion with God/Absolute is always a personal one (Woods, 1980, p. 28).

The above argues then that mysticism, places God/Absolute beyond mortal rationality and logic, which has so often been employed by men of intellect to explain the world around them; and at times, to explain the metaphysical and to devise a system to satisfy their own rationality. In terms of the mystical perception of God, we are told by Richard of St Victor "The soul gazes upon Truth without any veils of creatures--not in a mirror darkly, but in its pure simplicity" (Underhill, 1980, p.39). Thus for the mystic the perception of God/Absolute is about losing one's self in God, a God beyond rational or logical quantifications and ineffable, This self-loss, says Dionysius the Areopagite, is the Divine Initiation: wherein we "Pass beyond the topmost altitudes of the holy ascent, and leave behind all Divine illumination and voices and heavenly utterances; and plunge into the darkness where truly dwells, as Scripture saith, that One Which is beyond all things" (Underhill, 1980, p. 39).

The Researcher further notes that a lot of the great mystics when they finally came to union with God (the Godhead), found that what they had previously believed to be God was really a symbolisation of God, a rationalisation for the consumption of man's rationality. Underhill in her comprehensive book on understanding mysticism put the above point thus:

"Some recent theologians have tried to separate the conceptions of God and of the Absolute: but mystics never do this, though some of the most clear-sighted, such as Meister Eckhart, have separated that unconditioned Godhead known in ecstasy from the personal God who is the object of devotional religion, and who represents a humanisation of reality. When the great mystic achieves the "still, glorious, and absolute Oneness" which finally satisfies his thirst for truth--the "point where all lines meet and show their meaning"--he generally confesses how symbolic was the object of his earlier devotion, how partial his supposed communion with the Divine. Thus Jacopone da Todi--exact and orthodox Catholic though he was--when he reached "the hidden heaven," discovered and boldly declared the approximate character of all his previous conceptions of, and communion with God; the great extent to which subjective elements had entered into his experience. In the great ode which celebrates his ecstatic vision of Truth, when "ineffable love, imageless goodness, measureless

light" at last shone in his heart, he says: "I thought I knew Thee, tasted Thee, saw Thee under image: believing I held Thee in Thy completeness I was filled with delight and unmeasured love. But now I see I was mistaken--Thou art not as I thought and firmly held." So Tauler says that compared with the warm colour and multiplicity of devotional experience, the very Godhead is a "rich nought," a "bare pure ground"; and Ruysbroeck that it is "an unvalled world," "neither this nor that." "This fruition of God," he says again, "is a still and glorious and essential Oneness beyond the differentiation of the Persons, where there is neither an outpouring nor an indrawing of God, but the Persons are still and one in fruitful love, in calm and glorious unity. . . . There is God our fruition and His own, in an eternal and fathomless bliss""(Underhill, 1980, p. 40).

The Mystic is one who sees that which is hidden from other men, who, according to Underhill, lives at different levels of experience from other people; and this means that he sees a different world, since the world as we know it is the product of specific scraps or aspects of reality acting upon a normal and untransfigured consciousness. Hence his mysticism is no isolated vision, no arbitrary glimpse of reality, but a complete system of life--a Syntagma, to use Eucken's expressive term. As other men are immersed in and react to natural or intellectual life, so the mystic is immersed in and reacts to spiritual life. In this dissertation, the Researcher will try to show the fluidic descriptive mysticality (ineffability) of God/Absolute from the mystics' perspective and in so doing to argue the non-rationality, relativity and process of the Divine as a common ground for transcendent unity, in contrast to that of the rationalistic analytical position. One final point to highlight this ineffability let me refer to Underhill again:

"Over and over again the mystics insist upon this. "For silence is not God, nor speaking is not God; fasting is not God nor eating is not God; onliness is not God nor company is not God; nor yet any of all the other two such quantities. He is hid between them, and may not be found by any work of thy soul, but all only by love of thine heart. He may not be known by reason, He may not be gotten by thought, nor concluded by understanding; but he may be loved and chosen with the true lovely will of thine heart. . . . Such a blind shot with the sharp dart of longing love may never fail of the prick, that which, is God"" (Underhill, 1912, p. 101).

And in continuing the above theme, Ruysbroeck, in his *L'Ornement des Noces Spirituelles*, "Come down quickly," says the Incomprehensible Godhead to the soul that has struggled like Zacchæus to the topmost branches of the theological tree, "For I would dwell with you to-day. And this swift descent which God demands is simply an immersion by love and desire in that

abyss of the Godhead which the intellect cannot understand. Here, where the intelligence must rest without, love and desire can enter in" (Ruysbroeck, 1966).

5.2 Language, Epistemology, Mysticism, the Absolute, can They be Truly Defined?

If mystical experience is ineffable, how then can that which is experienced be conveyed in terms understandable to the inexperienced? Surely language must fail in that regard as it fails to convey that which is beyond words! Or should silence reign? This problem needs to be examined as it is one of the basic questions that comes up in any serious discussion about mysticism. In this Chapter, the Researcher will be looking at mysticism from the Augustinian point of view that it is better to speak rather than say nothing. Whether it is possible for man to construct a meaningful world through language remains to be seen, for whilst it is said that God made all the animals, it was Adam that gave them names which we consider meaningful. Or is Mysticism and mystical experience beyond words and, as such, should it just be left as acknowledged but unspoken. Can it truly be defined?

I will briefly attempt to examine whether the secondary nature of language from a Platonic point of view on mysticism is also of secondary nature in the grasping of reality?

In response to Thomas Aquinas's argument that religious language is analogical, that it conveys truth, but not literal truth, John Duns Scotus argued that the Thomasian view was incoherent, being of the belief that there were only two possible views on the matter, Equivocal and Univocal; for example, the word "Peer" could mean friend or contemporary or simply to take a glance at something. Now according to Scotus, should we not know to which it refers then it is equivocal, and if we do know to what it refers then it is univocal. What is the significance of this in relation to religious language? Since scripture is generally held to be meaningful, it must be either univocal or analogical; there seems to be a rejection in regard to religious language of the equivocal position. Where then is this argument leading?

All words must be denied or negated in order to understand the Ultimate Reality truly; this is a view that is often referred to as the Negative Way (Stiver, 1996, p.15). This view was also echoed by a number of leading Christian theologians, among whom Meister Eckhart (1260-1327). This view itself is not original for it stems from the Platonic view of the world that language is a reflection of a more ultimate, eternal forms or eternal ideas; these ideas were influenced by Pythagorean philosophy. Here then is one of the fundamental pillars of my argument, echoed by the master himself:

‘Seeing over speaking, speaking over writing, and direct speech over figurative speech, this last despite the fact that Plato himself was one of the greatest artisans of figurative speech’ (Stiver 1996, p. 9).

Further credence can be given to the secondary nature of language in religious experience, and experience in general, but much more so in mystical experience, from the following passage from the Master:

‘Let us suppose that to any extent you please you can learn things through the medium of names, and suppose also that you can learn them from the things themselves- which is likely to be the nobler and clearer way: to learn of the image and the truth of which the image is the expression have been rightly conceived, or to learn of the truth whether the truth and the image of it have been duly executed?’ (Plato, 1953, p.113).

The above suggest that language is secondary in nature to experience, in the same way as reality is secondary in nature to the Ultimate and, perhaps, that too might be too generous a comparison. The matter will be explored later by the Researcher.

How then does religious language, the language of mysticism, differ from that of normal language? According to Stiver in his book on the philosophy of religious language, there are five fundamental features of ordinary language. Firstly he tells us that meaning lies in individual words, that figurative language must be translated into literal language in order for it to be understood. The second is the relegation of figurative language to secondary status; the Aristotelian approach is that figurative language can only be grasped if it is translated into the literal, hence the substitutionary theory of symbolic language. The third point being that thinking is somehow separate from speaking, thinking and trying to find the right word comes to mind. The next point being Clarity, the clearer we are, the better. Again this has Platonic

overtones, with the Allegory of the Cave coming to mind. The fifth and final feature of ordinary language is certainty. Thomas Aquinas made a distinction between knowledge, which can be demonstrated with certainty, and faith which cannot, but which gains its reliance on God's authority. (Aquinas, 1952, 1a, 1, 1-8; 1a, 12, 12-13; 1a2ae, 57, 1-2; 2a2ae, 1, 1-6).

Thus it is evident that religious language, when examined through the five elements above does not fit:

“Religious language tends to be shrouded in imprecision and mystery. It can hardly be verified and is profuse with symbol and imagery. The characteristic response has been to segregate religious language as the language of faith from the language of reason in various ways such as reason preceding faith (Aquinas) or faith preceding reason” (Augustine) Stiver, 1996, p.12).

The Researcher has sought to show that religious language differs from that of ordinary language, in that it need not affirm certainty in the normal way that language is expected to, especially in this modern age of scientific verification. Let us now examine further this difference between religious language and the normal expectation of language as set out above. The real difference is that the religious language seeks to convey that which is beyond verification, and in doing so reduces the effectiveness of language in comparison to what we expect from it. How then is this so when examining the views of Dionysius the Areopagite.⁴⁶

Dionysius argues in his *Divine Names* that names of God do not literally describe God, but point to God as the cause of all things, and as such, the higher we ascend towards this cause, the more restricted language becomes, until we reach the point where words have no meaning. Thus Dionysius suggests that the way we must follow in order to reach this highest point is *Via Negativa*, which means the denial of any attribute, to assert that God is ultimately beyond any attribute. The following example from his *Mystical Theology* should help illustrate the point:

“Once more, ascending yet higher we maintain that It is not soul, or mind, or endowed with the faculty of imagination, conjecture, reason, or understanding: nor is It any act of reason or understanding: nor can It be described by the reason or perceived by the understanding, since It is not number, or order, or greatness, or littleness, or equality, or inequality, and since It is not immovable, nor in motion, or eternity, or time: nor can It be grasped by understanding, since It is not knowledge or truth; nor is It kingship or wisdom:

⁴⁶ Probably a Syrian (circa 500) monk who, known only by his pseudonym, wrote a series of Greek treatises and letters for the purpose of uniting Neoplatonic philosophy with Christian theology and mystical experience.

nor is It as Spirit, as we understand the term, since It is not sonship or Fatherhood; nor is It any other thing such as we or any other being can have knowledge of; nor does It belong to the category of non-existence or to that of existence; nor does existent beings know It as it actually is, nor does It know them as they actually are; nor can the reason attain to It to name It or to know It; nor is It darkness, nor is It light, or error; or truth; nor can any affirmation or negation apply to It; for while applying affirmation or negations to those orders of being that come next to It, we apply not unto It affirmation or negation, inasmuch as It transcends all affirmation by being the perfect and unique Cause of all things, and transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of Its simple and absolute nature- free from every limitation and beyond them all" (Dionysius, 1940 p.5).

In religious language is God then beyond all words? Is one to remain silent in the face of that which we cannot know? After all words have been used above to talk about something that is supposed to be beyond language; yet they have been used in a non-cognitive way. The above passage seeks to be evocative, rather than descriptive which is more commonly found in the normal use of every day language. Moses Maimonides, in his *Guide for the Perplexed*, puts the matter clearly, for he says that we cannot know God by the use of religious language:

"There is great danger in applying positive attributes to God. For it has been shown that every perfection, we could imagine, even if existing in God...would in reality not be in the same kind as that imagined by us, but would only be called by the same name, according, to our explanation; it would in fact amount to a negation" (Maimonides, 1904, 1.60).

In light of the above, would it be sensible to ask if some experiences are beyond words? And if so, are such mystical experiences also beyond words? In his fascinating essay, *Mysticism and Ineffability: Some Issues of Logic and Language*, Bimal Krishna Matilal asks, can a very personal and intensely felt experience, such as love, hate or some other kind of acute sensation or experience be described or expressed in language? (Katz, 1992, p.144) He asks, what is language for? Is it solely a means of communication? Can we communicate our most private and intensely felt experiences? It is the Researcher's view that we all have a private language that needs to transcend self and manifest itself in shared experiences. The 6th century Eastern writer Bhartrhari ⁴⁷ advances a theory that, as soon as sensory reaction penetrates the cognitive level, it also penetrates the linguistic level, thus one may experience the most profound sensations and will be able to express them in words, but, like a child who has not yet learnt to speak, who

⁴⁷ **Bhartrhari** is the name of a 6th or 7th century Sanskrit grammarian, and of a Sanskrit poet of roughly the same period. It is not known whether the two are identical.

would understand them? Would it then be a language at all? Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 302, <http://www.questia.com/reader/action/gotoDocId/99185244> says that it would be impossible to have such a language. Matilal, arguing in his above mentioned essay, advances the theory that the ineffable can be interpreted in several ways, that the ineffable should be a warning signal for us not to interpret too literally what the mystic says, to be alert to misunderstanding and that the words of the mystic are generated by a flash of inspiration. In fact Matilal has reduced the ineffable to a level where it is no longer a mystery but merely a matter of correct understanding, which is perhaps best illustrated by the following quote:

“The description of the alleged mystical experience in ordinary language, when treated as a description of just another (ordinary) experience, appears to be banal or even nonsensical. A poetic expression, if it is treated as a "prosaic" description of some ordinary state of affairs, would appear to be equally banal: "If my beloved is with me, the scorching rays of the sun would be as cool as the moon. But if my beloved is away, the moonbeams are as scorching as the sunrays." If we take the emotional content away, this becomes almost a nonsensical statement. But in the context of poetry, where the emotion is transmitted to the readers, this expression dons a new cloak of meaning, which is both beautiful and enjoyable. The language of the mystics has to be contextualised in the same way” (Matilal, 1992, p. 151).

Yet further still he argues that what we grasp epistemologically is first characterised by a uniqueness that is hardly conveyable to another in language. This adds further credence to the view that language captures shared similarities and experiences, but all uniqueness belongs to the one who has undergone the experience. Therefore the Researcher will argue that whilst God may be ineffable and beyond words, mystical experiences as a collective study of experiences are not beyond words, as they are shared experiences, and therefore within the scope of language. But what is experienced may be beyond language due to its uniqueness to the one experiencing it, and moreover, the experiences will have no epistemological comparison, with which to fully convey his/her experience of God. The matter is more clearly expressed in the following:

“What we grasp as the "epistemologically first" is characterised by such uniqueness that it is hardly conveyable to others in language. Language captures similarities and shared characteristics between experiences. Hence what is conveyed by a linguistic symbol is the shared or shareable part of the experience. Uniqueness belongs to the particularity of the experiencer” (Matilal, p. 145).

What then of the private language? This obviously defies the definition of language, which is to communicate meaning from an individual or group of individuals to others. Can whatever is said be understood by others? If yes, then it would refute the notion of Wittgenstein's idea of a private language (Wittgenstein, 1958, sec. 243). Let us take Bhartṛhari's example of non-sensory reaction (in fact, he gives an example of a man who, running along a village path, may have tactile sensation of the grass, which may be nonverbal), (Bhartṛhari, 1963, pt. 1). The point is that the mystic, along with the Buddhist, would regard verbalisation or description by language to be a sort of distortion of what is experienced; it has somehow had its purity contaminated by language, yet the mystic normally uses a natural language, therefore, is ineffability a natural language then? Alfred Tarski's view on the matter is that: "True in L" may not be defined in L, and no language is universal if there is any concept that is expressible in some language but cannot be expressed in the language in question. In this sense, then, as a consequence of a strict Tarskian notion of universality, as well as of the preponderance of semantical paradoxes, no language can be universal' (Martin, 1976, pp. 271-91). Perhaps the non-universality of any language means that there are concepts and certain semantic truths that remain ineffable.

What then of the Platonic view that language is merely symbols expressed in words, symbols reflecting a higher world? Surely the mystical experience is of a higher world than the Platonic world and, as such, with no comparative epistemological equivalents which renders even the Platonic symbolistic view ineffective in expressing mystical experiences. Not all that is knowable is expressible, yet is God/Absolute knowable through mystical experience? Words describing mystical experience when treated as just another experience in ordinary language can come across as being banal or nonsensical. Take, for the example, the following: "If my beloved is with me, the scorching rays of the sun would be as cool as the moon. But if my beloved is away, the moonbeams are as scorching as the sunrays" (Matilal, 1992, p.151). If one takes away the emotional content, this statement becomes rather absurd, as would a lot of poetry, but with the emotional content added, the words take on a new tangible meaning, which is both beautiful and sublime. Thus the Researcher would argue that the words of the mystic must, too, be so contextualised. But of course mystical experience is so much harder to contextualise than walking hand in hand with one's beloved.

This point about language and its nonsensical qualities are further emphasised in the *koan*, a seemingly nonsensical riddle that is to be the means of *Satori* or enlightenment of Zen

Buddhism. A well-known example is, what is the sound of one hand clapping? It is said that the disciple of the Zen Master may puzzle and ponder for years over this conundrum, until at last, when the disciple comes to the end of all rational approaches to the meaning of the riddle, perhaps precipitated by a blow from the master, at an opportune time, then the *Satori* occurs, and this goes to show how language can be valuable in the negative way, as a means rather than a description. Stiver puts the matter more succinctly when he warns against the idolatry of language:

“Language is notoriously unstable when applied to God, we are stretching it to breaking point-and perhaps beyond. It is a warning against the idolatry of language. Even religions centred on writing and speaking can see how language functions to protect the transcendence of God. An obvious example in the Jewish tradition was the earlier refusal to speak or write the name of God, with the result that today we still are not sure of what the name was” (Stiver, 1996, p. 20).

I will briefly analyse some of the paradoxes brought about, when using language to describe the mystical experience of God/Absolute. Is it possible to use language without concept? The Mystic argues that since God/Absolute is limitless, then anything that one attributes to God is to limit God to one concept or another, and to deprive him of one quality or another; if we say that he is A, that is to say that God lacks the characteristic Not A, which is therefore to limit God. Of course we may find ourselves in a position where we cannot speak of God for to do so is to conceptualise him in one way or another, therefore does the true mystic have to remain silent? As stated at the beginning of this chapter, St. Augustine tells us that it is better to “Speak than to remain silent.” Hospers, in his *Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, asks how is Mysticism to be distinguished from Agnosticism or Scepticism? He argues that the consistent mystic must be silent, for the latter says that no words can speak of God, even the use of the word God itself. He then further adds that this position is more radical than that of the sceptic who doubts if God's exists at all, or perhaps even the one who takes an agnostic position and says that he does not know.

The Researcher would argue to the contrary, for Hospers' position is a comparative one. The mystic is never in doubt about God, but how to express his experience of God and the awe of God that such experience has brought about, whereas the sceptic and agnostic are doubters in the real sense? Of course, the mystic can argue that he uses language figuratively rather than literally. Thus when referring to the ineffability of his or her experience of God, a symbolic

reference is used in order that those who have not had that experience might have some kind of conceptualisation on their level of understanding, which the mystic has transcended through his experience. For example, one might tell a child about some misfortune in the world, but one would have to use symbolic references that pertain to the level of understanding that the child has acquired. Thus if statements about God are taken symbolically rather than literally, they may be true, as the child in his mind who has limited concept of the world in comparison with an adult, might take the symbolic statement that fairies represent the unseen good in the world and that wolves represent the unseen evil.

Expanding further on the figurative or symbolic argument concerning language and mysticism, symbolic language ordinarily has a literal reference with which to back it up. If one says that someone looks like the walking dead, it does not literally mean that he is dead and walking, but may be referring to a terrible untoward appearance which also might suggest that he is very unwell and, resembles one of those corpses that one may have seen on TV or the movies. Of course this again creates a paradox of mysticism for when one uses figurative or symbolic language to talk about mystical experience, where is the literal reference to back up the symbolic?

Hospers argues that: 'The only answer that seems possible is that there is a certain analogy or resemblance that is felt to exist between things referred to in the symbols and the inexpressible, non-conceptualisation X which the symbols are said to be the symbols for.' (Hospers, 1967, p. 483) He further argues that if it were not so then one might come out with absurd statements, that God is a Donut or God is Green and there would be no grounds for saying that God is Love. To admit even the above is to compromise the purity of the mystic's position, for using an expression X is a symbolic way of referring to an inexpressible, non-conceptualisable X. Of course, one could use X W Z or whatever, if so, why is X more effective in referring to X than say Z is? If one statement is taken as a better symbolisation of the inexpressible than another, Hospers argues that we must know something of the inexpressible in order to make some kind of symbolic reference to it, and that if one knows nothing about it, then one is not entitled to say that X is a better symbol for X than say Y is for X. Most theologians have had to attribute some form of rationality when talking about God, and as such have taken a middle road, between the silence of mysticism and anthropomorphism. They could of course not be theologians if they accepted the mystical view of silence, for what could they theologise about? They would have

held that the words used to speak of God are analogies. The Researcher is here expounding the position of St. Augustine "That it is better to speak rather than to remain silent". The Doctrine of Analogical Prediction is best explained in the following quote from John Hick's *Philosophy of Religion*:

"When a word such as 'good,' is applied both to a created being and to God, it is not the being used univocally (i.e., with exactly the same meaning) in the two cases. God is not good, for example, in identically the sense in which human beings may be good. Nor, on the other hand, we apply the epithet 'good' to God and man equivocally (i.e., with completely different and unrelated meanings), as when the word 'bat' is used to refer to both the flying animal and to the instrument used in baseball. There is a definite connexion between God's goodness and Man's, reflecting the fact that God has created Man. According to Aquinas, then, 'good' is applied to creator and creature neither univocally nor equivocally, but analogically" Hick, 1963, pp.79-80).

What then is one to understand from the use of this term? Hick goes on to use the example of, a dog and his faithfulness in comparison with the faithfulness of man to highlight this point:

"We sometimes say of a pet dog that it is faithful, and we may also describe a man as faithful. We use the same word in each case because of a similarity between a certain quality exhibited in the behaviour of the dog and the steadfast voluntary adherence of a person or a cause which we call faithfulness in a human being. Because of this similarity we are not using the word 'faithful' equivocally (with totally different senses). But, on the other hand there is an immense difference in quality between a dog's attitudes and a man's. The one is indefinitely superior to the other in respect of responsible, self-conscious deliberation and the relating of attitudes to moral purposes and ends. Because the difference we are not using 'faithful' univocally (in exactly the same sense). We are using it analogically, to indicate that at the level of the dog's consciousness there is a quality which corresponds to what at human level we call faithfulness there is a recognisable likeness in structure of attitudes or patterns of behaviour which causes us to use the same word for both animal and man. Nevertheless, human faithfulness differs from canine faithfulness to all the wide extent that man differs from a dog. There is thus both a similarity within the difference and the difference with the similarity of the kind that led Aquinas to speak of the analogical use of the same term in two very different contexts" (Hick, 1963, pp.79-80).

Therefore it could be argued that the relationship of properties of a dog to man, are the same as those of man to God, but the distance or proportion being immeasurably greater, the dog being visible, and quantifiable whilst God is not. What then can be said of this? Surely it strongly

lends support to the Augustinian argument that to speak is better than to remain silent. Of course, the above doctrine is riddled with difficulties, in what way are the properties of man and those of God supposed to be similar? It is on this point that the matter is juxtaposed! Whilst it can be argued that God's nature is to God's nature and man's to man's, how can the two proportions be linked, can they be linked at all? Hospers argues that the more we say that the Goodness of man is like the Goodness of God, the more the 'otherness' of God is compromised. He further adds that, to preserve this otherness, we need to say that the properties of God's good are to God's nature as man's is to his. Of course we cannot truly know God's nature. One can only speak without truly knowing as God's nature is an incomprehensible attribute of an incomprehensible subject, according to Mills (*Mr Mansel on the Limits of Religious Thought*, Mills, <http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/wes/mill2man.html>).

The Researcher would argue that there is no knowing when one speaks of God, for there is nothing to which we can truly compare that which we do not know, nor can ever truly know. Even the great mystics, such as St. Francis of Assisi, despaired at knowing God, as illustrated by the quote above. Therefore, whatever concept of God we might have is derived only from human understanding and comparison. We cannot know God's properties and compare them to our own, unless we could observe them independently of our own. Suffice it to say that we only know of God's properties what we think we know. The matter is summed up nicely by Hospers: 'Knowledge of an alleged fact about God is cut off by the epistemological fact that we can speak meaningfully about something unknown only to the extent that it is like, or analogous, to the known. And it is surely man and his properties that we know and from which we try to make some meaningful assertion about God and his properties and not the other way round' (Hospers, 1967, p 487).

The Researcher would argue then that the essence of mysticism may be beyond words, and is best acknowledged, but attempts must be made to speak of it, if it is to have any place in the scheme of religious thought. For to remain silent would rob the wider religious community of an essential part of Religion and spirituality, after all Christianity celebrates the mystery of God everyday through Mass, and the turning of water into wine. If all that is religious is to be rationalised and categorised in order to satisfy the empirical urge of modern man, what then is left of Religion? Language is inadequate to convey the mystery of God/Absolute by those who have had a glimpse of it first hand, for language is limited to that which is in the remit of human understanding. Even the Platonic world of Form is within the remit of human understanding and,

as such, experience of such a world can be adequately conveyed in language, for all that is needed are words to speak of that which was seen, and is imitated in our material world; but when what is seen elsewhere is beyond the ken of our understanding, then words will not adequately convey it. Thus in answer to the question posed at the beginning of the chapter, can the Absolute be defined? The Researcher would argue no, not when language is inadequate to convey what the Absolute truly is and when definition means reference to one thing, or another to define another:

“An improvised version of the statement of an Indian mystic (Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa) is as follows: "I am like a doll made of salt. I went to measure the depth of the ocean full of saline water. I was dissolved completely and became one with the ocean. How can I measure the immeasurable?"”(Matilal, 1992, p.151).

In terms of my main objective I could argue that it lends weight to Schuon's argument for transcendent unity and that at the very core of an Orthodox Religion, it is a formless Absolute that is beyond rationalisation. Moreover, the use of human language is limited when trying to talk about this mysterious hidden core, and at times inadequate. Yet it is better to speak of this mystical core, as it reminds the followers of the non-rational nature of Religion. It may also be argued that the more you seek to rationalise the esoteric core, the more you have to humanise it and therefore limit the unspeakable. In mysticism one has an argument for transcending the rational notions of Religion, in moving beyond the exoteric, which should be our starting point and not our end.

5. 3 Mysticism in Scripture & Cross-Religious Similarities

The following chapter argues for the necessity of mysticism needing an exoteric starting point; a point, without which the mystic or contemplative is lost. Moreover, scripture offers an exoteric gateway to the formless and as such once again echoes my main theme of outward form

playing an essential role in leading to the formless, especially when its core content has not been remolded or diluted to suit our times.

'The Bible is a book of secrets, and the key to understanding it is an awareness that it reveals ultimate truths while concealing them and conceals them while revealing them' (Katz, 2001, p. 44). In this chapter the Researcher will argue that an appreciation of Mysticism in Christianity and other Orthodox Religions is largely impossible without the acknowledgement of the role of sacred scriptures. Especially for Christianity and its accounts of the suffering of Christ, as Christ is acknowledged by all the great Catholic mystics as being the ultimate mystic. In addition, the Researcher will also seek to argue that sacred scripture is itself full of paradoxes that have hidden meanings. Furthermore, the Researcher will argue that Christianity is not unique in its use of scripture as a foundation for mysticism, by examining the perennial philosophical⁴⁸ aspect of mysticism in scriptures only with reference to Buddhist and Indian scriptures. Perhaps the following quote will help illustrate the significance of the above statement:

"Inwardly every religion is the doctrine of the one Self and its earthly manifestation, as also the way leading to the abolition of the false self, or the way of the mysterious reintegration of our 'personality' in the celestial prototype; 'externally' the religions amount to mythologies, or to be more exact, to symbolism designed for differing human receptacles and displaying by this limitation, not a contradiction in *divinis*, but on the contrary, a mercy" (Aymard/Moore, 2004, p.24).

In his book *Christian Mysticism: The Future of a Tradition*, H.D Egan argues that mysticism is inseparable from biblical Christianity:

"The writings of the Christian mystics abound with references to the scriptures because they found there paradigms and exemplars of their own lives and experiences, as well as suitable imagery, language, and symbolism to express these. To be sure, the word 'mysticism' is not found in the Bible. Still, the reality is there, and not merely by way of exception. Mysticism is a reality connected intimately with the very essence of revealed biblical religions" (Egan, 2002, p.17).

5. 3.1 The Bible and Perennial Aspects of Scripture

Biblically it can be argued that the Mystics are simply seeking the reunion with God that Christian scripture tells us; for one is told in scripture that God created man in his own image and

⁴⁸ The notion of Perennial Philosophy (Latin: *philosophia perennis*) suggests the existence of a universal set of truths and values common to all peoples and cultures. See earlier definitions above for a lengthier explanation.

likeness, and that Adam and Eve knew God before their fall from Grace. 'Adam and Eve enjoyed without interruption God's intimate presence.' (Egan, p. 17) Thus it can be argued that the purpose of our existence here is to return to the One, the Ultimate from whence we sprang. This is a perennial theme throughout religious scripture and the underlying tone of mysticism, as evident in the following short quotes from Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*:

"*The Lankavatara Sutra*, from which the following extract is taken, was the scripture which the founder of Zen Buddhism expressly recommended to his first disciples.

Those who vainly reason without understanding the truth are lost in the jungle of the Vijnanas (the various forms of relative knowledge), running about here and there and trying to justify their view of ego-substance.

The self realised in your inmost consciousness appears in its purity; this is the Tathagata-garbha (literally, Buddha-womb), which is not the realm of those given over to mere reasoning...."

Pure in its own nature and free from the category of finite and infinite, Universal Mind is the undefiled Buddha-womb, which is wrongly apprehended by sentient beings.

Lankavatara Sutra (Huxley, 1946, p. 14).

The universal theme is echoed again in the following lines from Mahayana Buddhism when Huxley quotes Yung-chia Ta-shi as follows:

"One Nature, perfect and pervading, circulates in all natures, One Reality, all-comprehensive, contains within itself all realities. The one Moon reflects itself wherever there is a sheet of water, and all the moons in the waters are embraced within the one Moon. The Dharma-body (the Absolute) of all the Buddhas enters into my own being. And my own being is found in union with theirs.... The Inner Light is beyond praise and blame; Like space it knows no boundaries, Yet it is even here, within us, ever retaining its serenity and fullness. It is only when you hunt for it that you lose it; you cannot take hold of it, but equally you cannot get rid of it, And while you can do neither, it goes on its own way. You remain silent and it speaks; you speak, and it is dumb; The great gate of charity is wide open, with no obstacles before it."

(Huxley, 1946, p.15).

As S.H Nasr argues in his *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 'Man's sense of the Sacred is none other than his really *is*, for he carries the Sacred within the substance of his own being and most of all within his intelligence which was created to know the Immutable and contemplate the Eternal (Nasr, 1989, p.76). This theme of seeking the Ultimate is echoed in the Indian text of the *Vedas & Upanishads*, which predate Christianity by nearly 1500 years. The search for Brahman, which means that which is great, that which is recorded as being the ultimate external reality; the Brahman is indefinable, and thus could only be spoken of in a negative way: "Invisible, incomprehensible, without genealogy, colourless, without eye or ear, without hands or feet, unending, pervading all and omnipresent, that is the unchangeable one whom the wise regards as the source of beings" (Koller, 2002, p. 20).

5. 3.2 Interpretations of Scripture and Scripture as Guide to the Mystic

The following passage forms a dual role in this work. Firstly, it warns us that in seeking the Real we may easily be deceived by our ego, and that such a deception has often at times proven misleading even for those who have set out with the noblest of intentions; thus it serves as a warning. It adds depth to my arguments about a pathway to mysticism and introduces the notion of Self. Additionally, in the light of Richard Zeahner's misinterpretations concerning Śankara's notion of the Self, as well as St. Teresa's warning against being deceived into believing that one has achieved union when one has not, there is perhaps an even greater danger when the idea of the Sacred is watered down to be more accommodating. It is therefore of the profoundest importance that the passage be quoted in full:

"That Self who is free from impurities, from old age and death, from grief and thirst and hunger, whose desire is true and whose desires come true—that Self is to be sought after and enquired about, that Self is to be realized.

The Devas (gods or angels) and the Asuras (demons or titans) both heard of this Truth. They thought: 'Let us seek after and realize this Self, so that we can obtain all worlds and the fulfilment of all desires.'

Thereupon Indra from the Devas and Virochana from the Asuras approached Prajapati, the famous teacher. They lived with him as pupils for thirty-two years. Then Prajapati asked them: 'For what reason have you both lived here all this time?'

They replied: 'We have heard that one who realizes the Self obtains all the worlds and all his desires. We have lived here because we want to be taught the Self.'

Prajapati said to them: 'The person who is seen in the eye— that is the Self. That is immortal, that is fearless and that is Brahman.'

'Sir,' enquired the disciples, 'who is seen reflected in water or in a mirror?'

'He, the Atman,' was the reply. 'He indeed is seen in all these.' Then Prajapati added: 'Look at yourselves in the water, and whatever you do not understand, come and tell me.'

Indra and Virochana pored over their reflections in the water, and when they were asked what they had seen of the Self, they replied: 'Sir, we see the Self; we see even the hair and nails.'

Then Prajapati ordered them to put on their finest clothes and look again at their 'selves' in the water. This they did and when asked again what they had seen, they answered: 'We see the Self, exactly like ourselves, well adorned and in our finest clothes.'

Then said Prajapati: 'The Self is indeed seen in these. That Self is immortal and fearless, and that is Brahman.' And the pupils went away, pleased at heart.

But looking after them, Prajapati lamented thus: 'Both of them departed without analysing or discriminating, and without comprehending the true Self. Whoever follows this false doctrine of the Self must perish.'

Satisfied that he had found the Self, Virochana returned to the Asuras and began to teach them that the bodily self alone is to be worshipped, that the body alone is to be served, and that he who worships the ego and serves the body gains both worlds, this and the next. And this in effect is the doctrine of the Asuras.

But Indra, on his way back to the Devas, realized the uselessness of this knowledge. 'As this Self,' he reflected, 'seems to be well adorned when the body is well adorned, well dressed when the body is well dressed, so too will it be blind if the body is blind, lame if the body is lame, deformed if the body is deformed. Nay more, this same Self will die when the body dies. I see no good in such knowledge.' So Indra returned to Prajapati for further instruction. Prajapati compelled him to live with him for another span of thirty-two years; after which he began to instruct him, step by step, as it were.

Prajapati said: 'He who moves about in dreams, enjoying and glorified—he is the Self. That is immortal and fearless, and that is Brahman.'

Pleased at heart, Indra again departed. But before he had rejoined the other angelic beings, he realized the uselessness of that knowledge also. 'True it is,' he thought within himself, 'that this new Self is not blind if the body is blind, not lame, nor hurt, if the body is lame or hurt. But even in dreams the Self is conscious of many sufferings. So I see no good in this teaching.'

Accordingly he went back to Prajapati for more instruction, and Prajapati made him live with him for thirty-two years more. At the end of that time Prajapati taught him thus: 'When a person is asleep, resting in perfect tranquillity, dreaming no dreams, then he realizes the Self. That is immortal and fearless, and that is Brahman.'

Satisfied, Indra went away. But even before he had reached home, he felt the uselessness of this knowledge also. When one is asleep,' he thought, 'one does not know oneself as "This is I." One is not in fact conscious of any existence. That state is almost annihilation. I see no good in this knowledge either.'

So Indra went back once again to be taught. Prajapati made him stay with him for five years more. At the end of that time Prajapati taught him the highest truth of the Self.

'This body,' he said, 'is mortal, for ever in the clutch of death. But within it resides the Self, immortal, and without form. This Self, when associated in consciousness with the body, is subject to pleasure and pain; and so long as this association continues, no man can find freedom from pains and pleasures. But when the association comes to an end, there is an end also of pain and pleasure. Rising above physical consciousness, knowing the Self as distinct from the sense-organs and the mind, knowing Him in his true light, one rejoices and one is free.'

From the *Chandogya Upanishad* (Olivelle, 2008, pp.171-176)

The perennial interrelation of scripture and mysticism is given further credence, with the Upanishads in the quest for Ultimate Self, the *Atman*. It is the seeking which underpins the mystics' efforts to be free of the bondage of this world and all that it has to offer and distract. It is not so unlike the Kingdom of God is within (Luke 17:21). In the Upanishad VII.7.1 we are given a glimpse of the innermost essence. "The Self (Atman) which is free from evil, free from old age, free from death, free from grief, free from hunger and thirst, whose desire is the Real, whose thoughts are true, he should be sought, him one should desire to understand. He who has found out and who understands that Self, he obtains all worlds and desires." (Huxley, 1946,

p.236) As defined above by Underhill, Mysticism is the union of the self with the God, the Ultimate, just as the Atman seeks union with Brahman.

In seeking to argue that mysticism is fundamentally underpinned by scripture, the latter plays a dual role of both guiding and warning the would-be seeker of the Ultimate. The above passage from the Upanishads illustrates the point, that there are many conceptions of salvation as there are degrees of spiritual knowledge. The points argued above are that without the guidance of scripture the mystic is all at sea, and engaged in a speculative and possibly self-deceiving exercise, and, moreover, this highlights that whilst there is a transcendental esoteric unity, the exoteric plays an essential guiding role in the form of scripture.

5. 3.3 Christ as the Central Figure and the Paradoxical Nature of Scripture

Having trifled with a few morsels of Eastern scripture so as to lend credence to the argument of the perennial nature of scripture in the pursuit of mysticism, the Researcher now wishes to return to the Christian scripture and mysticism. In the opening part of this chapter, it was stated that Christ is the ultimate Christian mystic and, moreover, that all Christian mysticism stems from him. Egan, in his excellent book on Christian mysticism, argues that Christ is the sacrament of what mysticism is all about. "Total union and oneness with the God of love." It must be emphasised, however, that the union and oneness proclaimed by Jesus are not fusion with or dissolution into God, but indwelling in Him, this is the mystery of mystical love.' (Egan, p. 22) This point is illustrated in scripture: to see Christ is to see the Father (Jn 14:19). To hear him is to hear the Father (Lk 10:16). To know Christ is to know the Father, and this mystical knowledge of the Father and the Son is eternal life itself (Jn 17:3). To love Christ is to be loved by the Father, a God revealed by Jesus who is Love itself (Jn 14:21; 1 Jn 4:8). Jesus promised that those who believed would become one with Him and the Father, experience the divine Love that existed between Him and the Father, 'that they may all be one,' just as he and the Father were one (Jn 17:20). And finally on this point of Christ being the gateway to mysticism in Christianity, the following passage elucidates the matter with equal weight of the above:

"There is no other path but through the burning love of the Crucified, a love which so transformed Paul into Christ when 'he was carried up to the third heaven' (2 Cor. 12.2) that he could say: 'With Christ I am nailed to the cross. I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me' (Gal. 2:20). This love also so absorbed the soul of Francis⁴⁹ that his spirit shone through his flesh when for two years before his death he carried in his body the sacred stigmata of the Passion. The six wings of the Seraph, therefore, symbolise the six steps of illumination that begin from creatures and lead up to God, whom no one rightly enters except through the Crucified. For 'he who enters not through the door, but climbs up another way is a thief and a robber.' But 'if anyone enters' through this door, 'he will go in and out and will find pastures' (John 10:1, 9). Therefore, John says in the Apocalypse: 'Blessed are they who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb that they may have a right to the tree of life and may enter the city through the gates; (Apoc. 22:14). It is as if John were saying that no one can enter the heavenly Jerusalem by contemplation unless he enters through the blood of the Lamb as through a door.'" (Suso, 1330)

Thus Christ is the central figure in all Christian mysticism, and he cannot be denied by any Christian mystic, for to do so would be like indulging in a task of self-delusion; not dissimilar to that of Virochana, from the passage in the *Chandogya Upanishad*. In her guide to mystical union with God, the great Catholic mystic, St. Teresa of Ávila, in *The Interior Castle*--the principal source of mature Teresian thought on the spiritual life--says that without Christ the mystic is lost. The following passage from Egan's *Christian Mysticism* highlights the point:

"Teresa grasped implicitly that all graces, especially contemplative ones, are the grace of Jesus Christ. She taught explicitly, moreover, that neglecting his sacred humanity was the principal reason why so many failed to get beyond the prayer of union. No matter how advanced a person considers himself to be, for Teresa, meditation on Christ's humility will never hurt him. In fact, without Jesus as his 'Guide,' he will never enter the last two mansions. Concerning the alleged evidence from John 16:7 (it is to your advantage that I go away)" (Egan, 2002, p. 141).

What is being argued here by Teresa is that only the angels are permanently enkindled in love but for human beings it is impossible to love only, therefore the mystic must constantly think about Christ's Passion. Finally on this point, another great Catholic mystic, St. John of the Cross, argues that Christ is the way to perfect union with God. For he says that like Christ the contemplative must be stripped both inwardly and outwardly of all things in order to die in self-imitation of Christ's self-sacrificing death (Egan, 2002, p. 180).

⁴⁹ St. Francis of Assisi, 1181-1226

A slight counter argument against the above is that scripture is paradoxical and symbolic, and is not necessarily a literal guide to mysticism, but yet without it, mysticism could not really be placed in the religious pantheon. Moreover this paradoxical nature of scripture with its use of symbolism lends further credence to the ineffable nature of God/Absolute. Again this is not limited to Christianity but is perennial in nature. In the following section of the chapter I shall try to expand on these points.

For the purposes of my study here, I will define paradox as that which are two contradictions that result in two true propositions that do not agree; and that the disagreement between them cannot be resolved in any rational manner. If one takes Meister Eckhart's view on the Bible, he regards it as a book that both reveals and hides at the same time, as Katz puts it, "The Bible is a book of secrets, and the key to understanding it is an awareness that it reveals ultimate truths while concealing them and conceals them while revealing them" (Katz, 2000, p. 44). A perennial-like theme that runs through the sacred scriptures of all the great religions. Katz continues along the same theme thus; "By speaking of X and then denying X, leaving some grace of the meaning of X while not describing X. Through simultaneously affirming X and denying X, paradoxical language in his (Eckhart) understanding of it paradoxically gives some direction toward which to look for X but does not picture X or literally attribute qualities or characteristics of X, though paradoxically the indescribability of the Absolute becomes in an inverted way a description" (Katz, 2000, p.44).

As stated above, Paradoxes are found in the scriptures of every Religion, take for example, Islam and Sufism. Janayd in trying to develop his theory of the pre-existence of the soul and the final goal of mystic ascent, is full of paradox. He says that the Soul is "As was when was before was" (Kader, 1962). This paradoxical theme is continued with Ibn Arabi's commentary on some specific verses and *suras*, compiled and published by Mahmud Ghurab:

"He pushes those who deserve that toward which they are being pushed by means of the wind from the west, with which he makes them die unto themselves. He seizes them by their forelocks and the wind- which is only their passion- pushes them toward Gehenna, toward the separation that they imagined. But when he has thus pushed them toward this place, they in fact arrive at proximity. The (illusionary) distance ceases, as does, for them that

which is called 'Gehenna' by this name, namely, an abyss, as place of exile, has changed its nature." (Chodkiewicz, 1993, p. 43)

The significance of this is that Allah's love transforms all relations with mankind according to a rule of Divine mercy, which means that everything is turned on its head here and is not what it seems and thus we have a kind of alternative Reality. Men who through sin were thought to have been distant from Allah, are now brought back to their Creator, thus one could argue that distance now becomes closeness, judgement becomes compassion, Divine causation now equals human sin, death equals eternal life, separation equals proximity and Gehenna now equals Heaven. As Katz puts it, "Things are not what they appear to be" (Katz, 2000, p. 47). Paradoxes in Sufism are used to help point us to truth and to help turn us away from the superficial and the mundane, from the limited to the unlimited *al haqq*.

It can be argued that this paradoxical theme that seems to run through scripture is not dissimilar to that of the conundrum-like nature of mysticism and language itself as examined in the previous chapter. In the canonical literature of the of Hindu tradition of the Upanishads, vast commentaries are laced with paradoxes, take, for example, the following passage from the *Isa Upanishad* : "The One, the Self, though never stirring, is swifter than thought;... though standing still, it overtakes those who are running...It stirs and it does not stir, it is far and likewise near. It is inside all this and it is outside all this." The *Chandogya Upanishad* insists that Brahman "moves, it moves not, it is far and near, it is in, it is out." The *Kena Upanishad* says when talking about Brahman, "He who knows not, knows; he who knows, knows not" (Kena Upanishad, 1, 2, 3).

The point here is that scripture is logically indeterminate when employed in relation to the Absolute. Scripture obviously can be interpreted in many ways and the knowledge in scripture is not meant for all, take, for example, the following from the *Celestial Harmony*, where Pseudo-Dionysius had told his readers: "It is most fitting to the mysterious passages of scripture that the sacred and hidden truth about celestial intelligences be concealed through the inexpressible and the sacred and be inaccessible to the *hoi polloi*. Not everyone is sacred, and, as scripture says, knowledge is not for everyone" (Dionysius, 1987, p.149).

Thus paradoxes are useful means to both reveal and conceal in the literature of mysticism. Touching on the point on the *Hoi Polloi* as mentioned above, it could be argued that whilst the

mystic is initially guided by scripture, he reaches a point where scripture is only symbolic in that it is now rendered as a guide for the uninitiated. The following passage from Huxley's, *The Perennial Philosophy*, in which he quotes Wu Ch'êng-ên's comments about Monkey, helps to highlight the point:

"Listen to this!" shouted Monkey. 'After all the trouble we had getting here from China, and after you specially ordered that we were to be given the scriptures, Ananda and Kasyapa made a fraudulent delivery of goods. They gave us blank copies to take away; I ask you, what is the good of that to us?'

'You needn't shout,' said the Buddha, smiling. '... As a matter of fact, it is such blank scrolls as these that are the true scriptures. But I quite see that the people of China are too foolish and ignorant to believe this, so there is nothing for it but to give them copies with some writing on'" (Huxley, 1946, p.147).

The above is useful as it shows that mystics are able to worship God without symbolism and through an inner knowing of God, even though they could not have begun to do so without the symbolism that Religion offers. If we were all to approach God in that way, it might have been impossible for Religion to have any ground or hold, when we have a God that is of such an un-symbolic nature.

In this chapter we have seen that scripture is a guide to the mystic, and what pitfalls he or she should avoid. But it is not absolute due to its paradoxical nature, which merely highlights the ineffability of God/Absolute. As for the Christian mystic, Christ is essential to his or her mysticism, and without acknowledging Him (Christ), this is tantamount to doing away with the cornerstone of Christian mysticism.

5. 4 The Common Pathways to Mysticism/Mystical Union

"I am neither Christian nor Jew nor Parsi nor Moslem. I am neither of the East nor of the West, neither of the land nor of the sea...I have put aside duality and have seen that the two worlds are one. I seek the One, I know the One, I see

the One, I invoke the One. He is the First, He is the Last, He is the Outward, He is the Inward" (Rumi/Lings/Minnaar 2007, p. 242).

Mysticism is not without a pathway and within that pathway there is to be found a perennial guide that leads to transcendent unity for those called to this inward esoterism. This ground is not so much the exoteric rites of a particular Religion as they tend to be for the exoteric majority, but by focusing on those who have undergone mystical Union with the Absolute and trying to argue for the common ground upon which this path is proceeded upon. The Researcher does not wish to use the word doctrine even though the latter may be defined as knowledge imparted by teaching. It has overtones of exoteric formality and therefore may be somewhat off putting. In this chapter I will argue for five grounds of commonality: submitting to the will of God/Absolute; putting aside the ego; disdain for worldly pleasures; longing love for God and finally prayer. This is not to suggest that these are the only common grounds of mystical union with God/Absolute, but they are the ones that the Researcher will argue for as they seem to be the most obvious starting points.

In this study I can do no better than to refer to one of the great Doctors⁵⁰ of the Catholic Church, St. Teresa of Ávila and her *Interior Castle*, and the teachings/sayings of the great Indian saint Sri Ramakrishna from Mahendra Nath Gupta's diaries which were published in five parts from 1902 to 1932 and are known as the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in English and as *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in the original Bengali version.

Before going further, it might not be inappropriate just to give some background details of both saints in the main body of this work, as they are both central to its theme and play a leading role in the arguments put forward in this chapter as well as its main focus. I wish to start with Sri Ramakrishna (1836-86) who is perhaps less well-known to the general public than St. Teresa. Sri Ramakrishna was a Hindu/Bengali sage who was born in 1836 to a high-caste family, nonetheless the family was poor and it is said that he received little, if any, formal education. He is particularly famous for his advocating, let every one perform with faith and devotion of their creeds: "Faith is the only clue to get to God," he was known to worship with Christians and Muslims. He was of the view that all Religions lead to the same God (Smart, 1998 p.409). Sri Ramakrishna was said to have experienced his first spiritual ecstasy when he was six whilst

⁵⁰ (*Latin Doctores Ecclesiae*) -- Certain ecclesiastical writers have received this title on account of the great advantage the whole Church has derived from their doctrine. www.newadvent.org Catholic encyclopaedia.

observing a flock of white cranes flying against the background of a black thundering sky. He began to assist in priestly work in 1852 and became a priest in 1855 (Heehs, 2002, p. 430).

Saint Teresa of Ávila, also called Saint Teresa of Jesus, baptised as Teresa Sanchez de Cepeda y Ahumada, was a prominent Spanish mystic, Carmelite nun, and writer of the Counter Reformation. In 1970 she was named a Doctor of the Church, (Catholic Encyclopedia). St. Teresa entered a nunnery at the age of 21 having originally run away from home to do so, and eventually managed to get her father's consent to take the habit. St. Teresa founded the convent of Discalced Carmelite Nuns of the Primitive Rule of St. Joseph at Ávila and is famous for her teachings on Christian spirituality and mysticism with her *Interior Castle*, treatise on the Union with God/Absolute.

Now as I ponder on St. Teresa of Ávila's teachings on mystical union and those of Sri Ramakrishna, I do not want to get into a debate about Christian vs Hindu doctrines as that is not the purpose of the study. My main goals are to find common doctrinal ground concerning mystical union between the two saints, doctrinal ground coming from the writings or sayings of the two saints, rather than from the formal institutions of their respective Religions.

It may well be argued that St. Teresa and Sri Ramakrishna have a great deal of common ground upon which their mysticism is based. Firstly, it is a love mysticism that involved the submission of the individual to the will of God/Absolute; it speaks about the incomprehensibility of union with God and the submitting to God's will as being paramount to the setting aside of the ego, the dying to self and the disdain for worldly pleasures once the bliss of the Absolute has been tasted and that there must be a longing for God just as one longs for a lover. Above all is the importance played in all of this through prayer, for without prayer there can be no access to God/Absolute.

Again the Researcher would like to reiterate the importance of the five pillars of the Perennial Philosophy as laid out above by Schuon, namely Prayer, Truth, Way, Beauty and Religion. In looking at St. Teresa and Sri Ramakrishna, he will be arguing for the importance of prayer, as well as arguing for a common path (way) to mystical union.

5.4.1 Submitting to the Will of God/Absolute

All is Your will, O Mother Tara! You have Your own way in doing everything!

You do Your works, O Mother! People, however, say that they do it.

You bind the elephant in the mud, and You make the lame cross the hills.

To some You grant the seat of Brahman, and others You take down,

I am the instrument, You are the operator; I am the dwelling, You are the dweller within.

I am the chariot, You are the Charioteer; I move as You make me move.

I speak as You make me speak. (Sri Ramakrishna sings, Chapter XVIII Section II)

One of St Teresa's greatest stresses in her *Interior Castle* is the need for the mystic to submit to the will of God in the belief that in doing so it is for the greater good of the individual, and failure to do so could lead to the individual offending God. Submitting oneself to God's will is seen as almost giving the devotee a stoic outlook on life though on a much greater scale than the conventional use of the term. For St. Teresa advises that nothing in earthly sphere of events afflicts one, neither sickness, nor poverty nor death, unless it be the death of someone who "Will be missed by God's Church" for she argues that God knows better what He is about than the soul does of what it is desiring (Ávila, 1979, p. 98). In fact St. Teresa is quite insistent that union with God can only come about through submission to His will. For whilst one might enter the religious life and be relatively virtuous and free from sin, there are, she warns, hidden worms that eat away at the ivy of virtue which will impede our union with God:

"...Whoever guards himself against offending the Lord and has entered religious life thinks that he has done everything! Oh, but there remain some worms, unrecognised until, like those in the story of Jonah that gnawed away the ivy, they have gnawed away the virtues. This happens through self-love, self-esteem, judging one's neighbours, even though in little things, a lack of charity for them, and not loving them as ourselves. Even though, while crawling along, we fulfil our obligation and no sin is committed, we don't advance very far in what is required for complete union with the will of God" (Ávila, 1979, p. 99)

Moreover, submitting to God's will is of paramount importance in saving even those who are in communion with God from falling from His grace. St. Teresa warns us of those who are close

to God and almost in communion with the Angels, but yet not totally submitting themselves to His will still manage to fall. One example is Judas who was in communion with Christ and the other Apostles but not submitting to the will of God. Such words of caution are tempered with her belief that the devil tempts the soul that does not submit completely to God's will and lures them to self-love and away from the will of God.

When speaking of the will of God, Sri Ramakrishna speaks of two kinds of devotees, one being like a baby monkey, and the other like a kitten; the monkey using its own strength to cling to its mother and the kitten allowing its mother to carry it from place to place. The devotee who relies on the will of God runs no risk of falling into the clutches of evil or falling from Grace.

"The young of a monkey clasps and clings to its mother. The young kitten cannot clasp its mother, but mews piteously whenever it is near her. If the young monkey lets go its hold on its mother, it falls down and gets hurt. This is because it depends upon its own strength; but the kitten runs no such risk, as the mother herself carries it about from place to place. Such is the difference between self-reliance and entire resignation to the will of God" (Müller, 1898, *Ramakrishna His Life and Sayings*, p. 118 no.93).

This theme of the will of God is given even further strength when Ramakrishna likens the one who follows God's will as being totally dedicated to his work and is like a mother with a new born child, who had previously been absorbed in household chores, but now that the baby has arrived she is totally dedicated to him:

"So long as no child is born to her, the newly-married girl remains deeply absorbed in her domestic duties. But no sooner is a son born, than she leaves off all her house-hold concerns, and no longer finds any pleasure in them. On the contrary, she fondles the newborn baby the livelong day, and kisses it with intense joy. Thus man, in his state of ignorance, performs all sorts of worldly works, but no sooner does he see the Almighty, than he finds no longer any relish in them. On the contrary, his happiness now consists only in serving the Deity and doing His works alone" (Müller, 1898, p.115 no. 77).

The devotee submitting him/herself to the will of God is like moving away the clouds of the ego which obscure the rays of the sun, for the sun is always there, but when obscured it cannot shine:

"The sun can give heat and light to the whole world, but it can do nothing when the clouds are in the sky and shut out its rays, similarly, so long as egoism is in the soul, God cannot shine upon the heart" (Müller, 1898, p. 135 no 64).

I have therefore argued that the setting aside of the will of the individual is paramount in union with the Absolute/God and not only in the guides laid out by the two saints but in Sufism too. We are told about Bayazid Shibli and other mystic saints being in an almost continual state of rapture and that God had taken great care to preserve them from disobedience to His commands (Nicholson, 1989, p. 62). The submitting to the will of God is paramount if the mystic is not to go astray, and this is firmly argued by St. Teresa, especially when she emphasises that one needs to keep guard against the devil, and so does Sri Ramakrishna when he lays emphasis on not getting hurt by falling away from God in his analogy of the monkey and the cat. Therefore it would be difficult to deny the importance of submitting the will of the individual to that of the Absolute/God, and we have seen in three major mystical doctrines its importance as common ground upon which genuine union with the Absolute/God is based.

5.4.2 Ego and Disdain for the World

Let us now turn to the importance of setting aside the Ego which is not wholly unrelated to the will but the Latin definition of the word ego is "I" and the Greek *Eγώ* also meaning "I". "If you wish to know God in a divine way, your knowledge has to become pure ignorance and forgetfulness of yourself and all creatures" (Eckhart, 1980, p. 239, Sermon XVII). It can be argued that the setting aside of the Ego, the "I", the humility that this entails is one of the common themes of all mysticism. Let us now look at how the two saints comment on the matter. Sri Ramakrishna argues that it is only through performing charitable works that the self can be set aside and by expecting no reward we can come to know God through love, and that it is not man who does good to the world but God who works with selfless desire:

"Performing work without any expectation of reward purifies the mind and increases your love for God. It is only by loving Him that you can realise Him. It is not man who does good to the world, it is God Himself who does it. He has created the sun and the moon; He has given affection to the hearts of parents; He has given compassion to the great; He has given devotion to *sadhus* and devotees. He who works without any selfish desire does good to himself" (Sri Ramakrishna, 1902, (Diaries) Chapter I part V).

In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, he likens the "I" of the ego to a salt doll that needs to be dissolved in the ocean of the Absolute so that all distinction between it and the Absolute are lost until there is not the slightest trace of distinction; lasting union cannot be achieved as long as the ego is still clung to (Sri Ramakrishna, 1980, p. 209). For Sri Ramakrishna, the ego is the unreal that stops one from joining with the Real; it is likened to a stick that lays across the Ocean of *Satchidananda*, and that when the ego is removed there is only an undivided Ocean of *Satchidananda*. If our ego remains we have an appearance of two; though this is not the case when we attain the Knowledge of Brahman, for then the Ego is removed and the devotee is established in Samadhi (Ramakrishna, 1980, p. 297).

The Spanish saint and her views on the matter of setting aside of the ego and worldliness are in her book *The Interior Castle*. We are told by St. Teresa that the soul that sets aside self will enjoy the true favours of God and that in its humility it will reject earthly things except those that are in the service of God (Ávila, 1979, p. 26). It is argued further that in humility and the putting aside of self, the individual is able to see his or her own filth when pondering the humility of God. This, for St. Teresa, means we are acquiring knowledge of our own "lowliness" when entering the first room of the Interior Castle. (Ávila, 1979, p. 43) All of this helps us see how far we are from being humble; we are further told to view ourselves as being silk worms that build a cocoon in which it spins for itself and in which we are to die in order to be transformed. Moreover we are exhorted to weave the cocoon by taking away our self-will, self-love and attachment to earthly things, Teresa says that the cocoon is Christ:

"Therefore, courage, my daughters! Let's be quick to do this work and weave this little cocoon by taking away our self love self-will, our attachment to any earthly thing, and by performing deeds of penance, prayer, mortification, obedience, and of all the other things you know. Would to heaven that we would do what we know we must; and we are instructed about what we must do. Let it die' let this silkworm die, as it does in completing what it was created to do! And you will see how we see God, as well as ourselves placed inside His grandeur, as is this little silkworm within its cocoon. Keep in mind that I say "See God," in the sense of what I mentioned concerning that which is felt in this kind of union" (Ávila, 1979, p. 93).

This theme of putting aside the world and the ego and worldliness in general again shows the common ground of different religious traditions and helps reinforce the argument of unity of a kind in the core practices of the mystics. In Islam and its Sufism there is a Purgative Way, for it is said that one who does not follow this path of purgation and attempts to follow the Sufic path

is guided by the devil, and it is likened to the tree that the gardener does not attend to yet still it bears fruit which brings forth "None or bitter fruit" (Nicholson, 1989, p. 32). Thus when the Sufi Sheiks are exhorted to purge themselves before they even begin their novitiate in earnest and they can serve the people only when they place themselves as servants of the people, and that all others must rank as masters; the Sufi must serve all others equally. Only by putting aside selfish interests can he serve God (Nicholson, 1989, p. 33).

The story continues with a would-be Sufi spending about seven years in tasks related to self-effacement primarily begging before he can be accepted as a novice under a master and wear the dervish coat.

I have therefore argued that putting aside worldliness and the ego is of paramount importance and without it any pursuit of mystical union is an illusory exercise; for the individual needs to be totally absorbed in the Absolute, and, as such, this can be done only when the stain of ego is removed.

5.4.3 Mystical Love and Prayer

In the previous section I sought to show the common ground of setting aside of self or ego and worldliness, now I wish to turn to the importance of the common ground of love (spousal) and prayer and the importance that love plays in mystical union with the Absolute/God. Again I will begin with the thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna before turning to those of the St. Teresa.

In the Hindu system of which Sri Ramakrishna was principally an adherent except when he practised Christianity and Islam, the *Bhakti* is the intense love of God, an attachment to Him alone. This is found in the disciplines of the *Vaishnavas*. According to Vaishnavism, God cannot be realised except through logic or reason, and that without love all the penances, austerities etc are futile. (Ramakrishna, p.36) Though the Researcher has stated that it is not the wish of this dissertation to compare doctrines in the strict exoteric sense, he feels that a brief

background on the importance of love in the *Vaishnava* system would help to understand Sri Ramakrishna's position on the overwhelming importance of love in attaining union with God/Absolute. He wishes to continue with a few more comments on the system before looking at what Sri Ramakrishna has to say on the matter of love.

In order to develop the devotee's love for God in the *Vaishnava* system, the devotee has to go through a series of realisations of God, from being a master, friend, child or sweetheart or even a husband, each subsequent relationship leading to an intensification of the love that the devotee feels towards God. These various stages or attitudes are called, *dasya*, *sakhya*, *vatslya* and *madhur* as one passes through the various stages one gains a greater intimacy with God and eventually union with the Godhead (Sri Ramakrishna, 1980, p.38).

Sri Ramakrishna tells us that love of God is the only way to enter the *inner sanctum* (harem):

“The Knowledge of God may be likened to a man, while the Love of God is like a woman. Knowledge has entry only up to the outer rooms of God, but no one can enter into the inner mysteries of God save a lover, for a woman has access even into the harem of the Almighty” (Müller, 1898, p. 138 no172).

Sri Ramakrishna warns us that we must love God with our whole being and desire him as we would desire air; it is only through this yearning that we are able to see God. He relates the tale of a disciple asking his guru how he might come to see God and what kind of longing would facilitate this. The guru takes the devotee to a pond and holds his head underwater and likens the gasping for breath as the type of yearning that one must have for God:

“Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish) — One attains God when one has developed intense dispassion. One's heart and soul must yearn for Him. A disciple asked his guru how he could attain God. The guru told him to come with him. He took him to a pond and held him under water. After awhile he released him and asked, ‘How did you feel under water?’ The disciple answered, ‘I was panting for breath – as though I were going to die!’ The guru said, ‘Now listen, you will attain God when your heart and soul are just as restless for Him.’”

“So I say that God can be attained when one combines the force of these three attractions: the worldly man's attraction for his possessions, the chaste wife's attraction for her husband, and the attraction of a mother for her child. One immediately attains the vision of God when one loves Him with the combined force of these three attractions” (Sri Ramakrishna Chapter XI section III).

Ramakrishna continues with his theme of yearning when he tells his disciples that the devotee must be like a child yearning for its mother when it calls out to God that it must not be prepared to settle for anything other than God. The child yearning for its mother will not settle for sweetmeats or any form of wordly substitute and it will cry until it is once again united with its mother:

“The child sees nothing but confusion when his mother is away. You may try to cajole him by putting a sweetmeat in his hand; but he will not be fooled. He only says, ‘No, I want to go to my mother.’ One must feel such yearning for God. Ah, what yearning! How restless a child feels for his mother! Nothing can make him forget his mother. He to whom the enjoyment of worldly happiness appears tasteless, he who takes no delight in anything of the world- money, name, creature comforts, sense pleasure- becomes sincerely, grief-stricken for the vision of the Mother and to him alone the Mother comes running leaving all her other duties” (Sri Ramakrishna, 1980, p. 367).

This love yearning and praying for God is a theme that is strongly taken up by St. Teresa in the love mysticism as she advocates in her *Interior Castle*; how far does it have common ground with what is advocated by Sri Ramakrishna? It should also be noted that both St. Teresa and Sri Ramakrishna speak of stages by which mystical union is achieved and that only through love can the inner rooms of the sanctum be accessed, knowledge alone will not suffice.

St. Teresa too advocates a union of love, a spiritual union in which she likens the devotee to a bride of Christ/God, referred to as the betrothed, a union like two flames of a candle or like a drop of rain falling into the ocean, not too dissimilar to the Salt Doll theme expressed by Sri Ramakrishna earlier. St. Teresa defines loves as being not taking delight in God, but in having a strong desire to serve and to please, and not to offend Him (Ávila, 1979, p. 70). The devotee in Teresian spirituality is likened to a bride who enjoys favours of love with her spouse, except that it is purely spiritual, and almost infinitely superior are the joys that the Lord bestows on the bride in this union of love:

“This spiritual espousal is different in kind from marriage, for in these matters we are dealing with there is never anything that is not spiritual. Corporal things are far distant from them, and the spiritual joys the Lord gives when compared to the delights married people must experience are a thousand leagues distant. For it is all a matter of love united with love, and the actions of love are

most pure and so extremely delicate and gentle that there is no way of explaining them, but the Lord knows how to make them clearly felt" (Ávila, 1979, p. 103).

Unlike Sri Ramakrishna, Teresa warns us that even when we ascend to such heights we are to guard against the devil and his attempts to bring us down. "I tell you daughters, that I have known persons who had ascended high and had reached this union, who were turned back and won over by the devil with his deep cunning and deceit" (Ávila, 1979, p. 104). Though like her Indian counterpart, she does say that once this love union is truly joined the soul must forget earthly joys and turn its eyes solely to God. St. Teresa likens this love union to rapture that draws the soul out of its senses and that the accompanying visions are beyond the ability of the intellect to speak of (Ávila, 1979, p. 127-128).

Like all lovers the pain of separation is almost unbearable and so, too, we are told by St. Teresa that separation from God leads to a strange solitude for which there can be no earthly support and that the soul has a thirst that it does not wish to have taken away (Ávila, 1979, p. 168). Sri Ramakrishna too talks of the separation that one feels when away from the mystical union with God:

"Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — The joy that one feels after that experience equals the pain of separation before it. Mahabhava – that is, divine ecstasy – disturbs the body and the mind violently. It is like a big elephant pushing its way into a straw cottage. The whole house is shaken. It may even fall to pieces.

The burning fire that one feels when one is separated from God is not ordinary." (Sri Ramakrishna Chapter XIV Section II)

Again I will argue that this theme of love in mysticism is a common ground upon which nearly all true mystics must tread. In Islam's Sufi doctrine, there are two kinds of contemplation, one brought about by faith and the other by rapturous love, where God is regarded as the Beloved and a man attains a degree of rapture that his whole thought is engaged and absorbed into the Godhead. The Persian treatise on Sufism, the *Kashf Mahjub of Hujwiri* says that there is no greater suffering than to be veiled from God. Moreover that the Sufi must close his eye and turn towards God alone and away from earthly and material things, "For to regard other than God is to be handed over to other than God" (Nicholson, 1989, p. 56).

“...For in the rapture of a man attains to such a degree that his whole being is absorbed in the thought of his Beloved and he sees nothing else. Muhammad ibn Wasi said ‘I never saw anything without seeing God therein,’ i.e. through perfect faith. Shibli said ‘I never saw anything except God in the rapture of love and the fervour of contemplation’ (Nicholson, 1989, p. 55).

Thus the theme of God as the beloved spouse from whom the lover cannot bear to be separated is a theme with common ground in the mysticism of Islam, Hindu and Christianity. Not to say that there are no other variations of mysticism, but there can be very few without love as a central foundation point that would be worthy of the name in the context of union with God/Absolute.

I have so far sought both to show and to argue for some common ground in the practice of mystical union, by looking at a great Christian mystic and a great Hindu, and wherever possible, Sufism is included in order to lend more weight to my argument. As the ineffability of what is experienced in such unions gives further weight to my arguments concerning the formless Real and a hidden transcendent ground from which all Orthodox Religions spring, I have shown and argued that virtue, prayer, charity and the effacement of self are paramount. These in themselves will not strike the readers as surprising since most have an idea of what they are. But the fact that across the ages one has found the same commonality in the practices that are required to bring about union with God/Absolute. This in itself is strong grounds for an argument for mystical unity of a kind. On the subject of prayer, I have not mentioned any specific exoteric prayer, as all union begins through supplication to God's will or through a yearning for God, and such a yearning is a prayer in itself. As there is not any specific exoteric prayer that once said will bring about such union, so meditation on the name of God is strongly advocated as a part of any contemplative exercise.

It may well be observed that St. Teresa is more direct in pointing out an adversary in preventing the continuation of mystical union than is Sri Ramakrishna, since she often talks of the devil and those who are granted favours having to guard against the wiles of the evil one. With Sri Ramakrishna, there is no such talk of a particular embodiment of evil to pull one down from union other than *Maya* and, in particular, “Gold and Women,” which are mentioned numerous times throughout his Gospel as preventing one from seeing God.

The above argument is in conformity with Schuon's argument that unless the soul conforms to the Real, through Truth, Prayer (or the Way) and Virtue, then the spiritual life risks becoming a mental play, an argument that was alluded to above when it was stated that the issue would be looked into in the chapter on mysticism. In the context of the decline of the Sacred and the rationalisation of form, I would argue that prayer is necessary as it brings us closer to God/Absolute, and therefore, Saint Teresa and Sri Ramakrishna have willed that (prayer) which will bring them closer to God/Absolute. Moreover, as Schuon would say, "Man must love in God that which testifies to the divine Beauty and more generally all that is conformed to the Nature of God' he must love the Good" (Schuon, 1986, p. 7, *Survey of Metaphysics And Esoterism*).

5.5 Schuon's Arguments on Prayer, Virtue and Charity

As the whole of this study comes under the theme of Perennial Philosophy, the Researcher will take a final conclusive view of the above (chapter V) by looking at how far Frithjof Schuon's arguments on Truth, Way (or Prayer) and Virtue are encompassed in what has already been discussed. Schuon's basic argument is that virtue has three characteristics: humility, charity and truthfulness (Schuon, 1981, pp.101-115). It could be argued that virtue covers truth, way and prayer, at least in Schuon's definition of it. I shall be adhering to this definition only, for attempting to define the word virtue with its many connotations would be like trying to define the many different types of plants and animals that one could find in the Amazon Rain Forest. I start with humility, Schuon tells us that it is us being aware of our nothingness before God, a theme that is echoed by St. Teresa and Sri Ramakrishna time and time again--the Spanish saint likening the devotee to be nothing more than a worm before God and the Indian saint telling us that we need to dissolve ourselves in an ocean like a salt doll. Moreover, that such humility is to remove the "I" from the equation and to put others first. The trampling and effacement of ego is another theme that is constantly emphasised by our mystics above. In Sufism we have the story of a devotee who had to perform seven years of self-effacement before he was even allowed to

wear the dervish coat. Charity, for Schuon, is linked to humility and vice versa those possessed of humility will put others first, and putting others first leads to charity. On the matter of Truthfulness, this is defined as being in love with truth which, of course, all those seeking union with the Absolute must be, if they are to succeed, for the love of truth is the realisation of the illusory nature of the world and the desire for the soul to return to Truth (Schuon, 1981, pp. 101-115). One is constantly reminded by Sri Ramakrishna of Maya and overcoming it especially in the form of "Women and Gold" (Lust and Greed) (Sri Ramakrishna, 1980, p.128). In his Gospel, Sri Ramakrishna told us of the story of a would-be devotee who was afraid to leave his family and was eventually shown that here one could not hold on to anything and call it one's own except the truth of God (Sri Ramakrishna, 1980 p. 341).

There are deeper implications on Schuon's views of truth, humility and the like in terms of the decline in the Sacred: humility being cut off from virtue, subordination of morality to virtue in order to prevent it from becoming just a set of rules. These thoughts, however, can be saved for future study as it would stray too far out from the current study which is grounded in the commonality of virtues necessary for mystical union.

5.6 Transcendent Unity Argument Undermined through Misunderstanding of Mysticism

It is very important when speaking of a transcendent unity of Religions through a mystical perspective in order to make sure that there is clear definition of what mysticism is, and to avoid debasing it with other watered down forms of mysticism that do not involve union with God or the Absolute. The Researcher, for the purposes of a dialectical balance, will look at some of the arguments of Richard Zaehner, in which the latter argues against the transcendent unity through mysticism. It will not be possible to examine every facet of his arguments in a limited work such as this one, but the Researcher shall attempt to deal with those areas which he feels are of the greatest importance. For example, when Zaehner speaks of Nature Mysticism, it will then be the Researcher's purpose to look at some of the eschatological problems that Zaehner highlights concerning the Ultimate Reality.

It has to be accepted at some point by those who share similar views with Zaehner that an over-examination of mystical experiences from a systematic rational point of view is bound to result in an unsolvable conundrum. For rationality has its limits and Religion by its very nature is irrational; Religion tries to guide us from the unreal to the Real, therefore to examine every mystical experiences from the point of view of various religious doctrines is to lose oneself in the exoteric. To do so would be to ignore the esoteric nature of Religion which is its very core. The esoteric experiences of the various mystics throughout the ages, claiming unity with God/Absolute are not pointing to a single unity. This is even harder to accept on the part of most rationalists, especially those of their number who would dismiss Religion all together as being beyond their ability to rationalise. In this section, the Researcher will look at some of the ways that Zaehner argues against the transcendent unity of Religions through mystical experience, in particular, with regards to Monism and Śāṅkara's notion of the Self and how this has, to some extent, been misunderstood or misrepresented by Zaehner, as well as Zaehner's arguments for nature mysticism. The Researcher will only mention briefly Zaehner's observations on "mystical" experiences induced by drugs, as he himself dismisses these experiences as having no place in the scheme of things in his argument. The Researcher quite concurs with him on this point.

Zaehner quotes Sri Ramakrishna and says that all Religions are essentially the same (Zaehner, 1970, p.7), this is not quite what was said by the Indian saint. What Sri Ramakrishna emphasised were different paths that led to God and likened them to a flowing river from which different peoples took some water, "A lake has several *ghats*. At one *ghat* the Hindus take water in pitchers and call it '*jal*'; at another the Mussalmans [Muslims] take water in leather bags and call it '*pani*.' Or 'water.' Can we imagine that it is not '*jal*' but only '*pani*' or 'water'? The substance is one under different names" (Sri Ramakrishna, 1980, p. 61). Therefore he is not saying that all Religions are the same but that they represent the same unceasing flow of divinity that has forever been in existence with different manifestations to different peoples. The refutation of this idea, no matter how subtle and no matter how dialectical, is the main tenet of Zaehner's arguments in his *Concordant Discord* and *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*. Though his main point of attack on the matter of Perennial Philosophy is through the mystical argument, it is the refutation of that argument as put forward by Zaehner that the Researcher will seek to examine and refute; though as stated earlier, it is not within the scope of this dissertation to examine every facet of it, save those that rear themselves most vehemently against the Perennial Philosophy.

Zaehner makes his rationalist credentials quite obvious when he says that there is no agreement as to what Religions are supposed to release man from, and that this rational approach is given more common ground in the form of science. For Zaehner tells us that this is the ground upon which we all have some form of commonality and that it is not possible to define Religion in strictly scientific terms. Sacred text is subject to interpretation and to one's personal theological bias. Of course, the Researcher would find it hard to deny that from a strictly exoteric point of view, but it is not the exoteric upon which the Transcendent Unity of Religions is based, though this is the main principle upon which Zaehner refutes the mystical argument for such unity. Zaehner begins by looking at the efforts of Huxley and his attempts to achieve the Buddhist concept of Enlightenment through the use of meditation and mescaline, he then goes on to talk of a kind of age of Aquarius *à la* 1960's (the book was written in 1970) in which the ineffable can be experienced through the use of LSD. This is in itself a debasement of the mystical argument and its importance, even though later Zaehner repudiated the experiences of those who have taken this path.

The major misgivings of Zaehner's argument is that it is based on the doctrinal exoteric and in so doing seeks to show the irreconcilability among those doctrines. This would be an admirable approach in many other fields of religious study, but not in one where there is a clear distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric; and it being the exoteric that it is agreed upon has the discord and the latter the accord due to its opaqueness and somewhat indefinable nature. "...Being 'oned' with God, does it mean the same as the Vedantin assertion that the individual soul is Brahman or as Hallaj's ecstatic pronouncement *Ana L-Haqq*, 'I am the Truth' or as Huxley's experience of being a Not-self in the Not-self of a chair?" (Zaehner, 1978, p. 30). Whether they are the same or not will most certainly not be decided by any religious doctrine, as by nature doctrines are not the same. I have established this already, in my discussion of the exoteric. The Researcher would like to remind readers of Schuon's comments that one of the pillars of the Perennial Philosophy is an Orthodox Religion, thus Huxley endeavours do not fit into that category.

It would seem that, to some extent, Zaehner has misinterpreted Schuon, and as such, criticised him with a degree of vitriol which is unbecoming of so learned and distinguished a scholar. Zaehner argues that Schuon has said that Christianity would be false in Saudi Arabia and Islam false in Italy (Zaehner, 1978, p.30-31) and that "One is also true, but only relatively so and in its proper time and place." This is a gross misunderstanding of the argument that Schuon

advances, for Schuon says that each Religion is the true Religion in and of itself; he does not confine this to any particular geographical position. Each Religion is true in so far as it is Orthodox (see earlier definition above) and therefore a manifestation of the Divine. This does not have to be limited geographically, though historically Religions tend to dominate a geographical region. The matter is better put in the following quote from the perennial master.

“Every exoteric perspective claims, by definition, to be the only true and legitimate one. This is because the exoteric point of view, being concerned only with an individual interest, namely salvation, has no advantage to gain from knowledge or the truth of other religions; or rather it denies this truth, since the ideas of plurality of religious forms might be prejudicial to the exclusive pursuit of individual salvation” (Schuon, 2005a, p. 15). Therefore it is only the limitation of the exoteric forms to their own peculiar individuality that is implied and not to their manifestation in any one geographical location.

Zaehner would not be entirely without validation in regard to the saying that no one is a “Super Pope” and therefore is not the prime or sole arbitrator of the exoteric and the esoteric in a given Religion. To label Schuon as such merely to repudiate the notion of transcendent unity through the higher forms of mysticism is perhaps an over determination of concept. One is led to wonder if Zaehner had read the several dozen books written by Schuon on such matters over nearly a 70-year period. What really needs be borne in mind is that Schuon is neither the inventor of the Perennial Philosophy nor that of the transcendent unity of Religions. Perennial Philosophy is a theory that has been advanced throughout the ages by certain enlightened scholars. For example, Simone Weil, the French intellectual born at the beginning of the last century, was of the belief that the great Religions were a manifestation of transcendent divinity. For the sake of intellectual gymnastics, sparing or whatever reason, criticism and refutation have their place, but the history of the matter must be laid out as honestly and as clearly as possible and with as little prejudice as is humanly possible. Schuon can be credited amongst other things with bringing this nearly neglected theory to the attention of the Western public at large in the 20th century.

5.7 Nature Mysticism

In his refutation of the mystical theory of transcendent unity, Zaehner looks at nature mysticism and its validity in the process, or should one say as a type of mysticism that does not foster the process. The Researcher will take this opportunity to point out that the mysticism which this dissertation deals with in terms of union, is that of the highest level known to scholars and, as laid down by Evelyn Underhill, union with the Absolute/God. Nature mysticism does not fall into this category even though it may reveal what is hidden in one regard or another; it is not union in that highest sense. Nonetheless the Researcher will look at Zaehner's argument for it and how it detracts from the transcendental argument and is incongruous in that context.

Zaehner begins his notion of nature mysticism by talking about the Cosmic Consciousness⁵¹ as espoused by the British born Canadian Bucke (he moved from England to Canada at the age of 1). Richard M. Bucke makes a list of 13 paragons of cosmic consciousness of which Zaehner looks at three of them--Buddha, Balzac and Walt Whitman. Space does not allow the Researcher to deal with Balzac. Buddha is already so universally well-known and his context within the framework of this study duly allotted. Whitman however is the example taken by Zaehner to advance his argument for nature mysticism, so the Researcher will deal with this argument. We are told by Zaehner that Whitman makes no distinction between the body, soul or spirit and matter, whereupon this is followed by some expostulations in the credentials of Whitman's pantheistic-like poetry and his lack of sexual repression, along with Bucke that the late 19th century would have subjected them to. This is then followed by some further praise of the body, with the conclusion by Zaehner that the body and soul are equal, this is then followed by some

⁵¹ **Cosmic consciousness** is the concept that the universe is a living superorganism with which animals, including humans, interconnect, and form a collective consciousness which spans the cosmos.^[1] The idea bears similarity to Teilhard de Chardin's conception of the noosphere, James Lovelock's Gaia theory, to Hegel's Absolute idealism, and to Satori in Zen.^[2] It is reminiscent of Carl Jung's collective unconscious^[3]. In the 20th century, Canadian born psychologist Nathaniel Branden, originator of Bio-Centric Psychology, stipulated that as life advances from simplicity to complexity, consciousness evolves from the vegetative thru the animal to the natural human condition of self-consciousness.^[4] In the 19th century, English born Canadian psychiatrist Richard M. Bucke had already evolved an evolutionary consciousness theory which claims that Cosmic Consciousness lies in a mystic state above and beyond Self-consciousness, the natural state of man's consciousness, just like animal consciousness lies below.^[5]

1. J. Semple *The Backward-Flowing Method*, p. 14, Life Force Books, 2008
2. Benjamin Walker *Beyond the Body*, pp. 27-8, Routledge, 1974
3. Paul Marshall *Mystical Encounters with the Natural World*, p. 126, Oxford University Press, 2005
4. Nathaniel Branden *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*, pp. 36-7, Nash Publishing Corp., 1969
5. Richard M. Bucke *Cosmic Consciousness*, p. 19, Cosimo Inc., 2007

exerts from the Whitman's *Song of Myself*, which inferred the idea of eroticism. "...And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my bare-strip heart...And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers." Etc. (Zaehner, 1970, p. 53) In fact, the whole of the line as portrayed by Zaehner concerning Whitman is primarily obsessed by sex, "In Whitman's case sex is divine, and by sex he means not the so-called theme of Christian mystic...but physical act in all its squalor" (Zaehner, 1970, p. 54). And then it is added by Zaehner that Whitman eternity is bodily joys and activities transported into a timeless sphere, which he likens to the Muslim ideal of heaven as depicted in the Koran; followed by this quote from the Bhagavad-Gita. "That [kind of] knowledge by which one sees One mode of being, changeless, undivided. In all contingent being, divided [as they are], In Goodness' [knowledge]. Be sure of this" (Zaehner, 1970, p. 54). The Researcher does not deny the multifarious virtues and artistic praise with which Whitman's poetry should be held, yet when he wishes to criticise the Perennial Philosophy and the transcendental nature of the higher forms of mysticism, other thinkers like Whitman are out of place. Nonetheless the Researcher feels obliged to give full justice to Zaehner by looking at the full range of his nature mysticism argument.

One of the fundamental flaws in Zaehner's arguments and why the Researcher has levelled the accusation against his watering down mysticism is because Zaehner has indeed lowered the bar. This in and of itself is no offence against any creed or law, but if one is attempting to argue against a theory of transcendent unity of Religions that is based upon the highest form of mysticism, union with the Absolute/God, then one earns little credit for one's argument.

My rendezvous is appointed it is certain,

The Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect terms,

The great Camerado, the lover true for whom I pine will be there.

"If by mystic we mean one who has tasted an eternal mode of being, then Whitman was certainly a mystic, but he is essentially a mystic of the earth, of Nature and of matter" (Zaehner, 1970, p. 56). The answer to that statement of Zaehner's is an emphatically no! One doesn't! In the context of the Perennial Philosophy; there is no denying the mysteriousness of Whitman's experience, but he is not a mystic in the conventional religious sense. If he were accredited as

being so, then one might argue that a man who sits staring at a Titian or a Holbein and has a cathartic experience in which he says that he saw God, he, too, could also be labelled a mystic, for his experience would most certainly have been mysterious. To proceed along these lines in the context of this argument is to debase it! Any systematic examination of mysticism, in the general sense, has to be inclusive of most of its accepted tenets, and by that virtue it is likely to be far too broad to meet the requirements of the Perennial Philosophy. In his *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*, Zaehner examines the case of the Englishman Richard Jefferies and his *Story of my Heart*. In the latter work Jefferies lays down his thoughts on nature and its mystical effect for him; he argues that nature must be pervaded by a force more subtle than electricity or what the Indians called *prana*, or breath of vital force. Jefferies speaks of a "Higher deity" to which the soul is said to constantly aspire to but is unable to obtain (Zaehner, 1978, pp. 48-49).

The Researcher cannot argue against Jefferies, notions or perceptions even when he advances the view that the body, i.e. man's body, is by nature immortal, those arguments may be valid within the context in which they were formed. Zaehner argues that Jefferies stands closer to orthodox Christian mysticism than do many of the Christian mystics, because of his veneration of the body as opposed to the self-mortification inflicted on the body by the traditional mystics. Here however one sees Zaehner coming up with one of his foremost dislikes, that is the influence of Augustine's Manichaeism which he feels has unduly influenced Christianity. That is a theological argument for those better versed in such matters and is beyond the scope of this dissertation to effectively explore. Yet we are told in all the main mystical traditions of the Orthodox Religions that setting aside of the body is paramount, not just in the sense of carnality but also in denying the body as it is by its very nature ephemeral. Nature mysticism may possess a degree of mystery about it, but it is by the overcoming of nature that we manage to transcend the physical rather than remain attached to it.

Man's body at least in the form it exists now is not immortal by nature or in any other sense. It may well be argued that in mysticism the body is an anchor that prevents us from reaching higher planes. St. Teresa of Ávila warns us that we need to be weary of becoming lost in the temporality of our pleasure and the self-esteem that we receive from them. For in the second dwelling place of the *Interior Castle*, we are distinctly warned: "That the devils represent these snakes [worldly things] and the temporal pleasures of the present as though almost eternal. They bring to mind the esteem one has in the world, one's friends and relatives, one's health and a thousand other obstacles." In other words we must be weary of earthly pleasures for how illusory

they are, as they must pass away (Ávila, 1979, pp. 49-50). How much more so then of the body, which is praised so highly by Whitman. Let us turn to the thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna on the ephemeral nature of the human body. He tells us that “Women and gold are impermanent”, the term women is used to represent lust. Against his use of the term women when giving his observations on the body, the Researcher would argue that the following descriptions could be applied generally to the body. “The body of the most beautiful woman consists of bones, flesh, fat and other disagreeable things, why should a man give up God and direct his attention to such things?” (Sri Ramakrishna, 1980, p.129). Any form of ‘mysticism’ like the one advocated by Whitman and, to a slightly lesser extent, by Jefferies and portrayed as mysticism by Zaehner that glorifies the body is at variance not only with mysticism as defined by Evelyn Underhill, but also by the very mystics who practised mysticism at the highest level. There is no doubt that nature mysticism has some commendable qualities about it, in terms of appreciating nature and seeking some form of divinity in nature, however that might be defined. It is the not the least of which the Orthodox Religions generally speak of:

“The ego is a moving fabric made of images and tendencies” the tendencies come from our own substance, and the images are furnished by the environment. We put ourselves into things, and we place things in ourselves, whereas our true being is independent of it... We are like foam ceaselessly renewed on the ocean of Existence. But since God has put Himself into this foam, it is destined to become a sea of stars at the time of the final crystallisation of spirit. The tiny system of images must become, when its terrestrial contingency is left behind, a star immortalised in the halo of Divinity. This star can be conceived on various levels” the divine Names are its archetypes; beyond the stars burns the Sun of the Self in its blazing transcendence of infinite peace” (Schuon, 2006a, pp. 94-95).

5.8 Monism vs Theism

In both the *Concordant Discord* and *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*, Zaehner does a pretty thorough examination of various mystical experiences in the major Religions with the view to refuting the notion of a transcendent unity of Religions from a mystical angle. This undertaking is in-depth but primarily done from the exoteric point of view, tending to undermine the esoteric ground of commonality. This section of the dissertation will analyse these arguments in order to

find out how far they are valid in the framework of this study. It will limit itself to the issues raised by Zaehner concerning mysticism and will not seek to stray into various religious doctrines for such an endeavour would lead this dissertation down the path of comparative religion in the broader sense, which the Researcher feels is virtually an inexhaustible topic by its very nature.

It might be well to begin with some definitions laid down by Zaehner. Firstly he tells us that Monism in practice is the isolation of the soul from all that it is other than itself; it is this standing still from God/Absolute as opposed to the merging of the soul with God/Absolute that is the crux of the argument:

“The ascetic should be indifferent to praise, refrain from prayer, public worship, and funeral ceremonies, he should be at home with all that moves and all that does not, and should accept whatever comes to him. Seeing the truth in respect of himself and of the external world, having himself become of the nature of truth, taking his pleasure in it, he will never depart from the truth” (Zaehner, 1978, p. 155).

The whole thing can be rather confusing for Mono means one, and naturally one would have thought that such one means the oneness with God/Absolute. But this chapter is looking at the question of oneness where the soul⁵² stands still in a kind of quietism that undermines the transcendent mystical experience of my argument:

“For it is not impossible that a man should be confronted by a mirror and should look into it and not see the mirror at all, and that he should think that the form he saw in the mirror was the form of the mirror itself and identical with it or that he should see wine in a glass and should think that the wine is just coloured glass. And he gets used to this (way of thinking) and becomes fixed in it, and it overwhelms him...

There is a difference between saying, “the wine *is* the wineglass”, and saying, “it is as if it were the wineglass.” Now when this state prevails, it is called “naughting beyond naughting”, for (the mystic) becomes naughted to himself and naughted to his own naughting; nor is he conscious of himself in this state,

⁵² One has retained the term for want of use of a better one, it best sums up Zaehner's approach. Though we will state here that in the Advaita-Vada tradition on non-dualism the ‘Self is not identified with God (*Ishavara*) the qualified *Brahmā* (*saguna*) producer of beings but rather with *Brahma* unqualified (*nirguna*) and supreme (*Parabrahma*) the Infinite which leaves nothing outside Itself, or rather, which has no within or without.’ Moreover, ‘the Self as such, as *Brahma*, from which It is in no way distinguished, in absolutely unmanifest and unmanifestable. If in a certain sense the living soul (*jivatma*) can be regarded as a manifestation of *Atma*, it is only in the sense that *Atma* is ‘is that which manifest everything, without being Itself manifested by anything whatsoever.’ Neither the higher intellect (*buddhi*), nor the mental (*manas*), nor the sense of self-as Westerner would say the ‘human person’ (*ahankara*, literally ‘that which makes the ‘, aham)- one of these is the Self.’ (A Monk of the West, *Christianity and the Doctrine of Non –Dualism*, p.42, Paris 1982, first English Edition Sophia Perennis, 2004)

nor is he conscious of his own unconsciousness for were he conscious of his own unconsciousness, he would be conscious of himself. This condition is metaphorically called identity with reference to the man who is immersed in it, but the language of truth (it is called) union. Beyond these truths there are further mysteries the penetration of which is not permissible" (Zaehner, 1978, p. 158).

With all the naughtings that have taken place above what then is Zaehner's purpose in including this quote from *Mishkat al -Anwar*. It is a comparative purpose on a doctrinal basis as to what is supposed to occur during a mystical experience of the highest nature. From the Hindu perspective, the Self is Brahman and it is only through self-deception that he (the individual) does not realise this and his true nature. From a Muslim perspective, we are told by Zaehner that God alone is Absolute Being. All of these positions are doctrinal positions, conditioned partly by experience and the religious context in which they took place. If such experiences are to be viewed from a totally rational point of view with regards to a single exoteric objectivity, then there are bound to be conundrums. Metaphysics clouded by dogma, with no real universal position upon which to start, is bound to lead to discord in terms of interpretation. The following snippet from the Monism vs Theism chapter might help to illustrate the point. "The Self is Brahman, that is to say that the individual soul is actually identical with God, whereas the Muslim starts with the dogma that God alone is Absolute Being and that all things perish except His face. For the Muslim, man only exists at all in so far as he is given existence by God; for the Hindu he is God and through God all things eternally...etc" (Zaehner, 1978, p. 158). Zaehner tells us that Ghazali's ontology (in the indented passage above) is inconsistent, for at one point he is taking a monist viewpoint and then when under the influence of *sukr*⁵³ he takes a theist one, thus having argued for the soul being able to stand in isolation, upon undergoing and under the influence of a mystical encounter he is of the opposite view. "On achieving mystical illumination his borrowed existence falls from him, he is annihilated or naughted and God alone remains" (Zaehner, 1978, p. 159). Zaehner refers to this as a denial of one's own existence and as such an absurdity.

The Researcher will not yet offer any advance beyond Zaehner's position, but will seek to put forward succinctly Zaehner's arguments and will seek to highlight where possible, the virtues in his argument from an analytical doctrinal perspective. Yet to what extent is all of this interpretation is but a doctrinal stamp and a reductionist agenda. One is taken into theological

⁵³ ...a sensation that encounters the heart and produces such varied effects as sorrow or joy, fear or love, contentment or restlessness. In the *ḥāl* of *sukr* ("intoxication") the *Ṣūfī*, while not totally unaware of the things that surround him, becomes half-dazed because his association with God. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

mind trip as to what God/Absolute is, the pre-existence of the human soul, the ability or not of God to divide Himself indefinitely. "Thus all religions are forced to admit plurality inherent in the One, for God could neither create nor imagine anything other than Himself had he not the potentiality of plurality in Himself etc." (Zaehner, 1978, p. 167).

Though Zaehner asks the question, "There does ...remain the assertion, so frequently made and so rarely argued that the mystics of all countries and all times see themselves, when in a state of ecstasy, as being identical with the Absolute. How valid is this argument?" (Zaehner, 1978, p. 168). In monism as laid out by Zaehner, it would seem to be a kind of mystical state but as it is a non-theistic one, it is not one that seeks union with God/Absolute, but one where the individual seeks rest in and of himself and where there is a danger of the spiritual pride about which St Teresa warns us in her *Interior Castle*. It is perhaps only a few steps of the long journey but, this journey is never completed because it is in the self that things come to a halt.

Now St. Teresa warns her fellow sisters and us, of a union which is not union, and of a prayer of quiet, all this she says comes about by a lack of love. "...Even though you have devotion and gratifying experiences that make you think you have reached this stage [Union], and you experience some little suspension in the prayer of the quiet (for some it then appears that everything has been accomplished), believe me, you have not reached union" (Ávila, 1979, p. 103). The latter warning comes when one is but in the fifth Dwelling place, let alone the seventh. Thus what is experienced is again a mystical state but not the one that is based on strict definition of Underhill's definition of mysticism. Zaehner examines Śankara (and at least from a doctrinal point of view) who states that he advocated a "Preference for the perfect Yogin's withdrawal from all works." This is part of the view laid out by Śankara that the highest Brahman can only be obtained by *sannyasins*, men who renounce everything. Though not everything in the conventional sense that the Researcher has come to understand the word in mystical terms, but here everything but themselves. "...Refuse to take part in religious ceremonies or to accept the grace of any God, and who abandon all works, whether good or evil..." (Zaehner, 1978, p.170).

From a doctrinal point of view, the matter could be allowed to stand exoterically but when it advocates that the final state is one of standing still, this is a state that has been alluded to by other mystical saints like St. Teresa and Ruysbroeck the mediaeval Dutch mystic, who condemned such states, perhaps the latter having been in one himself as not being true union.

Though he might not have the opportunity of reading the doctrinal texts of the Eastern religions in 14th century Europe; he nonetheless attacked the Beghards,⁵⁴ a Christian sect in the Middle Ages, for false mysticism. Ruysbroeck argues that whenever a man can empty himself and is not distracted by sensuality and images, he can attain a rest by purely natural means and that it is not necessary to have God to obtain this rest. The condemnation of the Vedantin monism, "Oneness without a second" is done primarily because it is seen as a half-way stage and even though sinless as Ruysbroeck tells, it is nonetheless one that glorifies the self:

"Such men are indeed suspended between heaven and earth, isolated from man and Nature because they have severed all attachments, and isolated from God because the oneness of isolation is their end and goal, and because a conviction that they are the Absolute constitutes the toughest possible barrier between them and a possible irruption of grace: they maintain that they cannot advance, for they have achieved a life of unity and emptiness beyond which one cannot advance and in which there no exercise" (Zaehner, 1978, p. 171).

There is still a degree of ambiguity as to whether or not union in the true sense might yet still be achieved even from this state of quietism. One is further informed by the Dutch saint that because there is no sin in such a state, it is a clear room that we offer to God and he may yet enter, however one is warned as is constantly the case with St. Teresa that we may be more likely to be deceived by the evil one, who too may find such a room inviting. "...To rest in this emptiness is dangerous for this is a 'House swept and garnished', and though it is possible that God may enter in if the furniture is fair, it is equally likely that the proverbial seven devils will rush in if either the remaining furniture is foul or if there is no furniture at all; for when men wish to exercise and possess this rest without works of virtue, then they fall into spiritual pride, and into a self-complacency from which they seldom recover" (Zaehner, 1978, p. 173). The following warning from St. Teresa is about the true dangers of spiritual pride and what she terms false virtue, "Great are the wiles of the devil to make us think we have one virtue-when we don't- he would circle hell a thousand times..." and we are warned further that virtues from God are free of pride (Ávila, 1979, p. 101)..

⁵⁴ "Beghards and Beguines are the names applied to certain religious communities which flourished especially in the Middle Ages. The Beguines were women and earlier in origin than the male associations, the Beghards (also called in France *Beguins*). (www.newadvent.org & <http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/encyc/encyc02/html/iv.iv.lxx.htm>)

One of the great dangers associated with the kind of mysticism that seems to be doctrinally advocated by Śāṅkara (according to Zaehner) is that it seems to be advocating an indifference to good and evil, a beyondness that could lead to the neglect of one's fellow man. For true union must overflow into daily life and not one that stands still within itself: St. François de Sales warns us that the raptures of a man who has no ecstasy in his daily life are of a dubious nature and highly dangerous (Zaehner, 1970, p. 211).

5.9 The Argument Against Zaehner's Position

All the above would hold true provided that Śāṅkara's doctrine has been correctly represented by Zaehner. If the self in the arguments is defined as the individual from an egotistical perspective holds true, the danger of spiritual pride would be real and any would-be mystic would be ill advised to ignore the words of the sage masters such as Ávila and Ruysbroeck. The words of the latter two were never written specifically against Śāṅkara's doctrine and to include them is merely to give similitude to a warped position. However Zaehner's representation of Śāṅkara's doctrine might best be termed misleading, for he has identified self as being the individual self, but Śāṅkara tells us that the Absolute Self is not the self that is designated by *Atman* (self). When the word *Atman* is used...to denote the innermost Self (*PratyagAtman*)...its function is to deny that the body or any other empirically knowable factor is the Self and to designate what is left as real, even though it cannot be expressed in words (Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence*, 2006, p. 3). Thus when Zaehner says that to rest in the self or Self makes no difference because there are no capital letters in Sanskrit and that this state no matter how blissful it might be is not union with God (Zaehner, p. 171), he is surely mistaken as Śāṅkara's non-description of the Absolute below is testimony to his awareness that union is not with that which can be defined in any way rather than a blissful standing still state of which he is accused of aspiring to. In the Researcher's opinion Zaehner's understanding smacks of reductionism of the most misleading kind.

Moreover the Researcher will seek to argue here that the Self of which Śāṅkara speaks is far from the egotistical self and that whilst a difference might exist in the exoteric doctrine there is very little in esoteric objectivity. For Śāṅkara, the Absolute is just as inconceivable as it is for other mystics "That from which words fall back," and we are further told that:

“The Absolute is artificially referred to with the help of superimposed name, form and action, and spoken of in exactly the way we refer to objects of proportion...But if the desire is to express the nature of the Absolute, void of all external adjuncts and particularities, then it cannot be described by any positive means whatever. The only possible procedure then is to refer to it through a comprehensive denial of whatever positive characteristics have been attributed to it in previous teachings and say not thus not thus” (Shah-Kazemi, 2006, p.4).

Before moving on to the issue of charity and love and Zaehner's comments thereon, a further explication about the “Self” from Śankara's point of view would be in order. Self is explained as pure Awareness that means without thought or individual identification (ego) of any kind. Thus understanding the Self as pure Awareness brings us also closer to the understanding of self-realisation. If the Self is pure Awareness, then, all we have to do to realise the Self is to quiet our thinking. Where there is no thinking, there is no ego. Where there is no ego, there is the Self. The question could be asked whether we cease to exist when we cease to think (not referring to physical death of course). This condition of being aware of one's Self reveals one's own eternal Being. Since God is pure Awareness and our Self is pure Awareness, the two really compare as a water drop compares to the large body of water. Here, a drop of water has the same qualities as all the water in the ocean. Thus, while it is not correct to say the Self is God, it is correct to say that the Self has the same qualities as God and is in no way different. God and the Self can only be understood as omnipresent Awareness:

“Since the Self is already there at the center of our Being, Self-awareness is actually more correct than self-realisation because realisation implies a first Self that could realise another, second Self. However, there is only one Self and to realise the Self means to BE that Self. Only the ego can speak of realising the Self but only the Self can be the Self. The trick lies in distinguishing the Real (the Self) from the unreal (the ego) and that is accomplished entirely by moving our attention away from the unreal and keep it focused on the Real, the experience of I-AM. Because we all erroneously identify with the ego, or the combination of body and mind, all efforts to realise the Self are falsely classified as an attempt of self-destruction.” (http://www.self-realization.com/articles/self_realization.htm)

Remember that Śankara's notion of the Self is like that of water returning to the ocean; our innermost Self is identical in essence to Brahman, the divine consciousness. A drop of water essentially has the same essence, when we achieve *Moksha* we remerge in this eternal consciousness. The Snake and the rope analogy is just to show the illusory nature of the world, we think that the snake is dangerous and poisonous etc, but then we realise that it is not so and that we have made our own misery etc. There has never been anything but the pure perfect

divinity of Brahman which is illuminated by the meditative light of awareness. Thus Śāṅkara is taking a non-dual approach--*Advaita* means non dual or not two (Johnsen, 2001, p.125 *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Hinduism*). It is quite clear from the above that the Self of which Śāṅkara speaks is not the egotistical self, and that the salvation that he envisages is as transcendent as any mystical ascent, but to take Zaehner's point of view, one would imagine that it was some kind of half-way salvational point; where the egotistical self places itself in a kind of self-perpetuating bliss. In *the Servant and Union*, a chapter from *Logic and Transcendence*, Schuon echoes similar metaphysical arguments to those of Śāṅkara concerning the Self; Schuon argues that there is something in man that is capable of realising through God's grace and surpassing the 'servant-Lord', or subject-object (Schuon, 2009, p181). Moreover that this Self is God in so far as he is "independent of the servant-lord axis." This Self is its own Object and has no opposite, it is pure Subject. "There is something in man that is beyond his individual outwardness", which Schuon argues, is already divine, and this pure Intellect which withdraws from the subject-object axis and resides in what he calls its own transpersonal being; there is a connexion of a mysterious inward nature. "It is by virtue of this connexion we are able to conceive of the Self objectively" (Schuon, 2009, p.182). This Self as stated above is a mystical union but not one of the Creator-creature axis which comes about by grace, whilst that of the Self is one that pre-exists the Creator-creature axis:

"...If we consider the total Universe in connexion with the separativity, according to the axis "Creator-creature", no union is possible, unless it is a union of "grace" that safeguards or maintains the duality; but if we consider the Universe in relation to the Unity of the Essence of Reality-that is, in relation to the homogeneity and indivisibility of the Self-union is possible since it "pre-exists", and separation is only an illusory "fissure". (Schuon, 2009, p.186)

When Zaehner quotes Śāṅkara as saying that the *sannyasins* must be beyond good and evil, (Zaehner, 1978, p. 170) and then follows this up with the various quotes from Ruysbroeck and St. François about charity being essential for the mystic, this is somewhat misleading though we should not forget the contradictory nature of scripture as discussed earlier, for as Shah-Kazemi points out, Śāṅkara is making it abundantly clear that without virtue liberating knowledge cannot be realised. The very first sutra of the *Atma-bodha* makes it clear that a high degree of virtue is the prerequisite even for receiving the doctrine of the Self: 'This *Atmabodha* is being composed for those who, seeking Liberation, have been purified from evil by constant austerities and have breached calm and peacefulness'. Moreover, Shah-Kazemi's quote from the *Upadesa Sahasri*, where again Śāṅkara enjoins that knowledge of Brahman "Should only

be given to him whose mind has been pacified, who has controlled his senses and freed from all defects, who has practised the duties enjoined by the scriptures and is possessed of good qualities, who is always obedient to the teacher and aspires after Liberation and nothing else" (Shah-Kazemi, 2006, pp. 19-20). The Researcher does not feel that it is necessary to refute Zaehner step-by-step or word for word, as it has already been argued succinctly that he has either misunderstood or misrepresented matters concerning the Self and Śāṅkara. Though I shall offer some remarks on the comments that Zaehner made concerning rites and their adherence or no longer needing to adhere to them. These comments in themselves are valid, but when juxtaposed with Islam and Christianity their exoteric nature would suggest that there is something lacking in the monist doctrine. This however is not really the case, for as Shah-Kazemi has pointed out, the path of *sannyasin* is structurally integrated into the framework of the Hindu tradition, whereas for the Christian or Muslim, it is more a deviation from it. The term Hindu does not denote one single Religion, neither are rites as central to it as with Christianity and Islam (Shah-Kazemi, 2006, pp. 198-9).

Zaehner is right to examine the monist position and doctrinal view of Śāṅkara, even more so than that of Nature mysticism, but again in his campaign against the transcendent unity he had widened his definition too broadly in order to find ammunition for his argument. There are without doubt differences in doctrines and views amongst the mystics, even degrees of ascendance. Liberation from illusion/maya and the ascent to the Absolute is the common objective and here is where the transcendent unity lies. There is a distinction between the non dualist monist and dualist theist position, but not so much so that the argument for Transcendent Unity is undermined; only rather that such unity should never simply be coated over and accepted without understanding or examination, and by the opposite token, neither should it be coated over and dismissed without careful examination and representation of the doctrines and principles in a non-reductionist manner. It is perhaps difficult for a Christian to look at the word self in any form and not think of the ego, yet we have clearly seen that the self referred to by Śāṅkara is not an egotistical self but just another way of talking about the individual finding the means to gain union with the Absolute. The Upanishads warn their readers against a false and bodily self as we saw from the passage with Indra and the wise sage, where neither the body nor the mind were considered Self and that vanity and ego had to be put aside, as is the case with all genuine mysticism of the highest order. Therefore Zaehner's attempt to debase the mystical union argument needs to be taken with the proverbial pinch of salt.

In some ways Zaehner's approach whilst initially seeking to undermine the mystical argument supports Schuon's notion of the exoteric; because it shows that there can be no common ground through exoteric objectivity, and that each Religion is the Religion. In this chapter on mysticism I have sought to argue that there is a common transcendental ground despite there not being an exoteric one. Whilst this dissertation is not primarily concerned with doctrinal aspects it would be possible to argue for some kind of commonality between Non-Dualism and certain aspects of the Christian doctrine, as the Monk of the West and Sister Sara Grant have sought to do in both their respective works, *Christianity and the Doctrine of Non-Dualism* and *Toward an Alternative Theology, Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian*.

6 Chapter VI Looking at Religion from a Non-Western Conceptualisation: Conclusion

In this chapter I seek to examine whether it is possible to take another view of Religion other than the Western concept of it, and in so doing to further argue that as the core of Religion is faith, it is possible to have faith without religious concepts.

Earlier in this dissertation the Researcher laid out Schuon's definition of an Orthodox Religion and what it should be, as well as its importance as a pillar of the Perennial Philosophy. In this section, the Researcher would like to pose a question whether it is possible to take another view of Religion other than that laid out by Schuon. Also when taking a religion such as Christianity how much more did that term (for want of a better word) refer to faith than systematisation? I will refer to parts of this thesis statement before I ask a question that is somewhat contrary to it. The Exoteric value and form can only be given meaning through the Esoteric and it is the latter which overlaps into each Religion. The Researcher asks the question if one could have milk without a bottle as Thomas Merton put it; is it possible to approach a Transcendent Unity of Religions through faith alone? Would such an approach be valid in our modern world and how far is this valid in terms of the Perennial Philosophy? Or in other words, the formless without the form.

I will begin by looking at an alternative approach to Religion by the English writer Cantwell-Smith, who tried to take a non-conceptualist view of what Westerners have tended to conceptualise.

Not so much another view in the worth of Religion or its value, but what is it? Is it just a system of tradition or is it based on faith alone? The purpose of this is to give another philosophical angle to this work and, as stated earlier, I do not wish to enter into the realms of inter-faith dialogue. I shall look at some of the concepts of what Religion has become as opposed

to what it should or should not be, and ask the question how valid is Schuon's definition of an Orthodox Religion, then let me quote what Schuon's definition was:

"In order to be orthodox a Religion must possess a mythological or doctrinal symbolism establishing the essential distinction in question and it must provide a path that guarantees both the perfection of concentration and its continuity in other words a religion is orthodox if it provides a sufficient, if not always exhaustive, idea of the Absolute and the relative, and thus of their reciprocal relationships and a spiritual activity that is contemplative in its nature and effectual with regard to our ultimate destiny" (Schuon 2006a, p.121).

If we take the view that the exoteric is a manifestation of something that is transcendent, would we be right in asking just how exactly have we managed to come about with concepts of Christianity, Buddhism and so on? Are they merely references for scholars or do they exist in some form of concrete entity that we can actually point to this and say that it is Christianity? I do not refer here to church architecture or scripture, and even if we did, these would only be separate things that we would associate with Christianity. But what exactly is the Religion if you take away these things? In order to help us answer some of these questions, I shall turn briefly to some of the thoughts of Cantwell-Smith⁵⁵ who argues that there is no such thing as Religion or a Religion, when it is divided into two parts; an overt and tangible condition on the one hand, and a vital personal faith on the other. For Smith, neither of the resulting parts is definite, stable, static complete, definable (Smith, 1991, p. 189).

If we take the view that faith is the fundamental part of any given Religion and is the aspect that transcends its outwardness and in knowledge of this to ask ourselves how did we come to have terms like Christianity and Buddhism etc? Is it possible to question what these terms mean? Faith includes religious experience, the sense of the numinous, religious emotions of love and awe, hope and fear, the disposition to worship (Smith, 1991, p. x). "Faith is concerned with something, behind or beyond Christianity, or Buddhism" (Smith, 1991, p. 13). Might we not venture to suggest or to argue that Faith is a manifestation of that perennial reality behind the outward exoterism of Religion and, perhaps we could also say that faith is an almost perpetual perception in our understanding, as being trust, steadfastness etc. But what of the various religious terms that we speak of they themselves have not been so perpetual. If I take for example Christianity, we often hear the term the Christian religion, which would suggest that

⁵⁵ For the purposes of expediency we shall refer to Cantwell-Smith as Smith.

'the' has always been so. Yet it has not always been so. Some early Christian writers like Augustine never referred to it as the Religion. In fact in Roman times, Cicero likened *Religio* to something that was interior to persons, but with the advent of the followers of Christ (Christians) the accepted meaning of the word began to change with the advent of systematisation in their practices (Smith, 1991, p. 25). What we could really argue here is that the faith aspect of things was far more prominent in these earlier times when talking about Christian practices (not to suggest that it is not today) but in another kind of way with less boundaries.

We can take as an example Augustine's *De Vera Religione* written in 390 which is often translated by modern predispositions as "On the True Religion," as opposed to the original meaning "On True Religion." The Researcher mentions this as it is crucial to show that the exclusivity that we often associate with Christianity was not necessarily always so. Upon examining Smith's thoughts on *De Vera Religione* the argument advanced by Smith is that, translators of St Augustine's books assumed that because he was Christian he was talking about Christianity as being the one true Religion:

"...A closer translation would be 'On True Religion'; the idea is of the order of 'On Proper Piety', or On Genuine Worship. As the author comes close to saying, the book argues at length and in many ways that *vera religio* means the worship of the one true God; it hardly mentions Christianity, and culminates in a warm, reverberating and sustained affirmation of a personal relation to that transcendental God 'from whom, through whom, and in whom are all things....For this writer 'religion' is no system of observances or beliefs, nor an historical tradition, institutionalised or susceptible of outside observation. Rather it is a vivid and personal confrontation with the splendour and love of God" (Smith, 1991, p.29).

In fact Smith's views are somewhat perennial even though he himself does not overtly say as much. When he talks about the final *religio* as the bond that "Unites us to the Creator Himself and nothing coming between our minds by which we know Him as Father, and the Truth, that is the inner light through which we know Him," the perennial non-boundary exclusivity credentials are given further weight. When we hear more of this theme from St. Augustine and the timeless nature "It existed of old and was never absent from the beginning of the human race until Christ came in the flesh, then true Religion which already existed began to be called Christian. He is not asserting 'My religion is the true one' - actually he admits that what he is talking of transcends his own apprehension of it. He is arguing rather that man's true nature is fulfilled in a close personal *engagement* with the divine, and that Christ has made this possible" (Smith, 1991, p. 30). If for a moment we can take Christ out of the equation, we are certainly being told about a

timeless 'religion' just like in the Perennial Philosophy. The Researcher would argue that that timeless religio is faith in a transcendent reality.

The West with its obsession to put everything into one form or another so that it can be better 'understood' is as though this way of measuring is the best way. Yet when we turn to Schuon's definition of an Orthodox Religion as providing an idea of the Absolute and the relative, this surely in no way interferes with the faith aspect of things that we have been talking about. The Researcher would argue that one of the problems with placing so much emphasis on faith being one of the points that Schuon himself raised is that without exoteric dogmatic sign posts there could be a danger of individual religious indifference, which in turn might lead to neglect of the Divine. Yet we should really look at the contexts in which the two arguments are being posited. If we were able to hark back to a time when the awareness of the Divine in the West would have been almost all prevailing and, as such, there would have been hardly anyone who did not believe in some form of sacredness with an after-life (transcendent reality), even if they did not care much for the outward forms that this sacredness had taken on. Therefore the Researcher would argue that the advocacy of faith over an outward distinct systemised Religion would have been a very feasible path to follow.

Yet When Schuon posits his argument about the Perennial Philosophy and the Transcendent Unity of Religions, this is being argued against a background of lamentable spiritual decline in favour of rampant secularism, as we have seen partly above. Therefore an approach to the faith alone without the systematic outwardness that we have been used to in the West would be a dangerous path to follow as it might lead to even greater secularisation with everyone feeling that they could go their own way. Such is the permutation of secularism that there may be some who believe that the only reality is consumerism and this alone they need have faith in.

Yet one of the strengths of Schuon's arguments is that he does not discount the possibility of divine manifestation bypassing doctrine and religious outwardness since he cites the case of St Paul and the Indian Sadhu Sandar Singh, both of whom bypassed dogma by the intervention of Divine Revelation. In some ways, this promotes the "milk without bottle" faith as transcending the conceptualisation and systematic approaches to Religion as Smith does is to make one a perennial philosopher, and an idealistic one too. For when Smith wrote his book *The Meaning and End of Religion* fifty years ago and speculated that in 25 years the terms that referred to or

designated specific Religions would have disappeared from serious writing and careful speech (Smith, 1991, p. 195).

Whereas Schuon's approach is to acknowledge that these divisions, for whatever reasons they have emerged and are there, no amount of idealism is likely to overcome them; therefore let us accept them as vehicles that allow us to access the Divine. The argument of a transcendent faith is a valuable one in that it asks us to question what Religion is or is not, and how much of what we call Religion is merely a Western invention used for containing what is not understood or what one wishes to dismiss. Like Schuon and the other perennial philosophers, we need to see beyond the religious concepts that a lot of us are trapped in. Even though Smith does not overtly advocate a transcendent unity, he may nonetheless be labelled an adherent of the Perennial Philosophy in the loose sense of the word, for he accepts and recognises a truth beyond the concepts of systemised Religion. "Faith is concerned with something, behind or beyond Christianity, or Buddhism" (Smith, 1991, p. 13). Again to the question "milk without bottle", the answer would still have to be no! For in this rampantly secular age, there is far too great a danger of us falling even further away from the Divine. It could further be added that we now live in an age where through centuries of repetition Christians are able to recite prayers and creeds without perhaps being imbued with the same sense of mystery of the early Christians, who would have had to learn everything in secrecy and with great solemnity and perhaps only after a period of spiritual examination would they be fully initiated into the mysteries of their Religion. As St. Ignatius of Antioch says that they might be drawn into the inward life of 'Divinity, having acquired the power to become the sons of God (John1:12),' (Schuon, 2004, p. xviii).

Now in this section the Researcher will ask how valid are Smith's notions of the imposition of Western observations on Religion, the 'isms' and, in particular, with regards to the Hindu tradition before leaving the matter and returning directly to Schuon. Smith argues that there is unanimity amongst mankind in terms of the adjective religious, a pious person, a God-fearing person, a devout person etc. However this unanimity "Vanishes" when we move from considering this a personal quality of life to a systemised one. The example of 'primitive' religions at least so called by scholars, is given by Smith where they don't have any formal name for their traditional pious practices. As Smith puts it, "They perform their rites, relate their myths, uphold their norms, and experience their emotions without analytical reflection or linguistic generalisation. Religion, in any objectified sense, has not been an idea in the minds of these groups." (Smith, 1991, p. 54) This argument is reinforced by Smith when he talks about the

ancient Greeks having no word for religion and likewise the ancient Egyptians and especially for the concept as we understand it. For Smith, this argument is to show that there is not a "Generic religious truth or a religious system that can be formulated or externalised into an observable pattern theoretically abstractible from the persons who live it." And even more profound that to do so is to look for essences and to Platonise one's own faith and to Aristotelianise other peoples'" (Smith, 1991, p. 57). I think this statement is quite sound and I shall follow Smith's argument to show that it is so, and to compare it with Schuon's definition. However, the statement is somewhat self-contradictory; the generic truth of which Smith seems to be implying does not exist. How does this leave faith, to which he has implied from his arguments, which is the common means by which the individual seeks to access the Divine? Surely that is a generically implied practical truth, as it has existed before the systematisations and therefore must transcend them generically.

To back up his argument about conceptualisation, Smith takes the example of Buddhists in their early formation in India and the term *dharma* and how it has been used as an equation of Religion. Smith argues this is a mistake because *dharma* for the early followers of Buddha in India was, "...Transformed into something of much profounder, more cosmic import. This term named for them an ultimate cosmic pattern of behaviour, a transcendental moral law, the supreme 'ought'" (Smith, 1991, p.57). The point is that for Smith to equate *dharma* with religion is to conceptualise Buddhism without the Buddha and any Buddhists (Smith, 1991, p.57). Smith does not deny that a religious tradition often conceptualises its teachings so as to distinguish its own sect from another "In what modernity would call the same religion." This signifies what Smith calls the doctrinal position of a particular sect or community, the point here is that the application of any modern concept to early Buddhism and as to whether or not it was a religion is something that never occurred to those early Buddhists themselves. For Smith, the modern West has proven itself incapable of answering such questions.

On this subject of conceptualisation let us look at 'ism' question, the specific naming of individual 'religions' and what Smith has to say on the matter. His theory is that the 'ism' distinctions are really only needed when the practices have become divorced from the community in which they originally emerged. Thus where the people's religious life remained coterminous and integrated with their social existence, the West has not developed a separate name for those practices (Smith, 1991, p. 61). The religion of the Greeks, the religion of the Incas and so on, though he does make an exception for Islam as that already had a built-in name,

and the term is mentioned in the Quran. Smith traces the history and the first manifestation of these religious terms 'Boudhism' (1801), 'Hindoism' (1829), 'Taouism' (1839), 'Zorasterianism' (1854), 'Confucianism' (1862) etc. What Smith is trying to argue in the case of the Hindu traditions is that there is really no such thing as Hinduism and that the latter is an imposition by outsiders, mainly by those from a more systematised background. He cites the Muslim invasions of India in the 2nd century and the attempt by the indigenous population to use the term Hindu to differentiate themselves and their Hindu ways from the Muslim invaders. And that this covered groups that we would now call Hindu, Buddhist and Jain. Further weight is given to Smith's argument when the British tried to carry out a census in 1921, 31, 41, that they could find the boundaries between Christians and Muslims from Hindus but not one that could discriminate Hindus from animists. The point is that the term Hinduism when used by the West is a catch-all phrase and for Smith it confirms his theory "...that the concept of a religious system, whether ideal or sociological is here alien and invalid. It is a Western (and Muslim) concept, which Westerners (and Muslims) have tried to impose upon their understanding of India; but it does not fit. There are Hindus, but there is no Hinduism" (Smith, 1991, p. 65). It is not that Smith is arguing that there are no Hindu practices, but that they have never sought to be a unified entity, unlike Islam or Christianity, which even though they are diverse it was at some point their desire to be unified. The Hindu traditions have never sought this and are happy to glorify in diversity, they are content as Smith says to affirm that there are "As many aspects of the truth as there are persons to perceive it" (Smith, 1991, p. 66).

Smith continues with a similar theme when he talks about the case of Sikhism and how Guru Nanak the 15th century mystic never intended to start a system but attacked religious formalisation of all kinds, though this did not stop his followers several generations later from formalising and systematising themselves. Thus with time what was once a personal matter of indefinable faith--for the word *Sikhi* means disciple in Punjabi, Smith argues, "There has gradually evolved a name for an abstract rather than transcendental ideal of the group rather than the person, and finally the counterpart of Western (outsiders') concept 'Sikhism' as the total complex of Sikh religious practices and rites, scriptures and doctrines, history and institutions" (Smith, 1991, p. 67). This theme of outsiders (mainly Western) giving names to religions is further emphasised when Smith talks about the term Confucianism being a Western invention, for when some missionaries in 1667 published some Chinese classics in Latin and introduced the term Confucius to Europe, from this later developed the terms Confucian, Confucianist as adjective and noun; yet there are no equivalent terms in Chinese (at least in the late 50's and

should there be now it may well be argued that it has been brought about to accommodate Western concepts). Additionally, he points out there are no words for 'Taoists' or 'Buddhists', because whilst the notions, thoughts and teachings for these three schools have existed in China for centuries, it has not involved a closed community. Such systematisation is distinct from, as Smith puts it, "The life to which either ideally or socially their application gives rise." The whole argument is about tradition over systematisation, that teachings of Lord Buddha have been transmitted to others, and that if one were to carry out a census in China asking how many people were Buddhist, it would be, as Smith puts it, "Like asking how many Westerners are Aristotelian or pragmatist" (Smith, 1991, p. 69). A similar analytical study is also made of the Shinto tradition, asking the question is it a religion, I need not enter into details here, but the answer is no; the 'ism' is an outside imposition and the term Shinto which means way of the gods is not even an original Japanese term, according to Smith, as the modern Japanese equivalent *kami no michi* is a transliteration of a Chinese term (Smith, 1991, p. 70).

From the above we can see the basic theme that Smith is arguing for, that the systematisation and imposition of an 'ism' is an imposition of an outsider on what the Researcher will term a spiritual tradition that is a way of life, and as such, needed no distinguishing of itself within itself. Where does all of this leave us in our journey? It most certainly means that when we hear the distinctive terms given to religious conditions, such terms must not in and of themselves be taken for granted as an established fact. Had this dissertation been talking about the inter-faith dialogue argument, it would have been easy to go down some path of asking various religious leaders to reduce the systematisation that keeps them in their various positions; yet here I cannot do that as my argument is of a different nature. Though might one not argue that the exoteric outwardness which is such an integral aspect of this dissertation and Schuon's theory that such exotericism need not be looked at as being so monolithically concrete, for some of that concrete aspect possesses a similitude that is largely of a Western perception/creation. In terms of interfaith dialogue, it is hoped that there will be some who will read this dissertation and be inspired to turn to the esoteric core of their respective Religions. Should they wish to engage in dialogue, please keep in mind that the exoteric core differences in Orthodox Religions are, to a large extent, due to the divergences between humanity and in keeping with the Divine Will:

"The divergence between religions is not only due to the incomprehension of men; it is also in the Revelations, hence in the divine Will, that is why there is a difference between esoterism and exoterism; the diverse dogmas contradict one another, not only in the minds of theologians, but also-and *a priori*- in the

sacred Scriptures, but in giving these Scriptures, however, God at the same time gives the keys for understanding their underlying unity. If all men were metaphysicians and contemplative, a single Revelation might be enough but since this is not how things are, the Absolute must reveal itself in different ways, and the metaphysical viewpoints from which these Revelation are derived- according to different logical needs and different spiritual temperaments – cannot but contradict one another on the plane of forms, somewhat as geometrical figures contradict each other as long as one has not grasped their spatial and symbolic homogeneity” (Schuon, 2006b, p.133).

It has been my attempt so far to analyse and argue for Frithjof Schuon's argument for the transcendent unity of Religions and its various aspects and to criticise it where it has been deemed necessary to do so. I began my argument by looking at Schuon's definition of the exoteric and the esoteric and their nature, the latter being more exclusive than the former. Here again I wish to affirm my view that the esoteric looks for the Absolute in his or her tradition but is not to be lost in the exoteric of those traditions. In the quote setting out his premise for the *Transcendent Unity of Religions* which can be found in the introduction of that book, Huston Smith, when talking about Schuon's theory, reminds us that such unity must be all encompassing if it is to hold up at all. For the sake of clarity and continuity I feel obliged to quote again the following:

“From his perspective the defect in other version of this distinction is that they claim unity in religions too soon, at levels where being exoteric, true Unity does not pertain and can be posited only on pain of Procrusteanism or vapidty. The Absolute Unity that is God defies visualisation or even consistent description but is nonetheless required for in the symbolism of the spirit the separation on which duality resides tokens ignorance epistemologically and privation affectively. The Unity must however be of an exceptional kind for it must include everything, if anything possessed reality apart from it, this would reintroduce the division that Absolute Unity by definition precludes. Absolute Unity must be All-Possibility; every possibility must be actualised within it- with God in his personal mode all things are possible (Matt. 19:26; Mark 10:27): in his absolute mode all things are actual” Man's mind cannot imagine a Something that excludes nothing save distinctions” (Smith/Schuon, 2005a, p. xiv).

I asked the question how the above is to be known? I then looked at Schuon's argument for the Intellect and the limitation of rationality in this matter and the independence of purely human mode of thought! I then moved on to the limitations of the exoteric and Schuon's notions of the

absorption of dogma into the greater good. I proceeded to criticise Schuon in his failure to distinguish between what I called core exoteric and added exoteric that has been added over a period of time and has been harmful. My primary focus on celibacy in the Catholic Church which I concluded should be a matter for individual spirituality as it may contribute to making the clergy more exclusive.

I then moved on to look at Schuon's esoteric argument and the view that all Orthodox Religions are to each and in themselves *the* Religion and that each is willed by Heaven. Before proceeding further I laid out the premises upon which the Perennial Philosophy is based. I used Huxley's description of it being "The Divine ground of all existence is a spiritual Absolute, ineffable in terms of discursive thought, but (in certain circumstances) susceptible of being directly experienced and realised by the human being..." (Huxley, 1946, p. 29), which led us on to the *religio cordis*--the religion of the heart--which is the underlying Religion of every Religion, but not exclusive to it. This led me to the definition of an Orthodox Religion and its purpose of discerning the Real from the Unreal. Moreover, such an Orthodox Religion need not be one that has been established in antiquity, but one that provides continuity and allows us to realise our ultimate destiny to be re-united with the Absolute.

I then looked at Schuon's argument for the five pillars of the Perennial Philosophy and their importance, Truth, Prayer, Virtue, Religion and Beauty. I began dealing with these by looking at Religion and their importance as a vehicle to the Divine. Moreover in order to bolster my argument and in support of Schuon, I looked at Religion at its pinnacle in mediaeval Europe and argued for the awareness and seriousness with which the Divine was taken; how it permeated almost every aspect of everyday life, where even the greatest were prepared to defer to it as the point of ultimate salvation. I argued for the importance that contemplatives played in such divinely immersed society and how some of them were even prepared to wall themselves up for life such as Julian of Norwich. The diabolical, too, was just as important in making people aware of the ephemeral nature of mortal achievement and that there was a constant war going on between good and bad. All this was in turn juxtaposed against the notion "man is the measure of all things" of the existentialism of Sartre, and his concept "substance before essence" as a reflection on how things are now, to a large extent, and why the Perennial Philosophy has been largely ignored. I concluded that Sartre's arguments were not really new but they had a far greater force in the modern world than they ever could have been in mediaeval times, "God God

God; nothing but God” as Smith puts, in the mediaeval period this could have come from just about anyone, but now one would expect to hear this only from a theologian.

I next sought to look at the importance of beauty and sacred art as it is one of the pillars that Schuon spoke of in regard to the Perennial Philosophy and its importance as a means of access to the Divine. I began on the premise that such sacred works of art are equally important as an exoteric garment to clothe an Orthodox Religion, as say scriptures, and that to distort or dilute them is considered heretical on the part of the perennial philosophers. I began with a definition of beauty by Dionysius, by St. Thomas and Coomaraswamy's notion that the whole is greater than the parts and how this lent weight to the notion of the Perennial Philosophy. This dissertation explored the theory of the projection of individualism in sacred art and contrasted that with the mediaeval period where the artist ought to praise God only. This manifestation of individualism was argued for when I compared some mediaeval depictions of the Madonna with those of the Renaissance and the more human-like projection to be found in the latter. This is part of the lament for what Coomaraswamy called the sentimentalisation of Christian sacred art. This sentimentalisation was tied in with the look at ornamentation and what Schuon called the saccharine-like qualities of some sacred works of art.

I looked at spirituality in the sacred following the arguments of Schuon and Burckhardt. I took up Burckhardt's view that a sacred work of art need not be one of genius but one that had a certain monotony that safeguards against spiritual poverty. I argued that spirituality in sacred art is something that is conducive to religious contemplation. Further I stated that one of the aspects of the spirituality of sacred art is that it should lead us to a truth and perfection that is ever ascending and that, perhaps, it reaches its end if it can help to propel one to salvation as was the case with the Chinese artist who painted the glorious landscape on the palace walls of the emperor and then disappeared inside it.

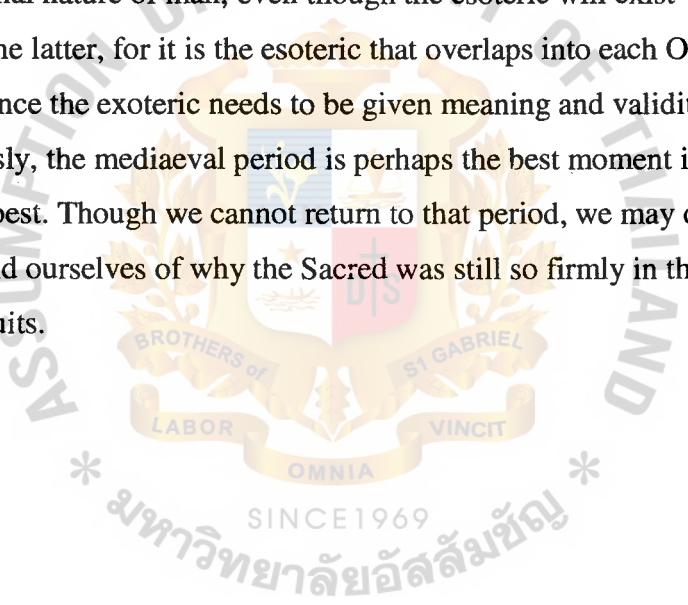
When looking at 20th century art, I sought to examine the notions of what a majority of the 20th century artists considered sacred, I came to the conclusion that there was no universally accepted classification of religious 20th century art, though there were elements of spiritualism which were referred to as being evocative of a religious nature. Moreover, that such spirituality is of an individually designated kind and not the kind that is likely to spur one on to the Divine, even though such works of art such as Kandinsky's *Black Lines* (see above) might induce a

cathartic experience. I concluded that the problem with the 20th century art that purported to be sacred was that its appeal was far too narrow and was not something that could be grasped by the ordinary man in the street. It was also concluded that there was a tendency for those not accepting such art to be dismissed as being of not good parentage in keeping with the story of the court painter in *Til Eulenspiegel*. Finally I looked at Indian sacred art very briefly and the important role that the Divine plays in the lay out of the Hindu temple and the preparations that the artist has to undergo before beginning his work.

Truth, Virtue & Prayer the other three remaining pillars of Schuon's definition of the Perennial Philosophy were viewed through the important role that mysticism plays as a unifying force in the Transcendent Unity of Religions, the cross-cultural mystical experiences, with special focus on Sri Ramakrishna and St. Teresa of Ávila and the five common themes to be found in their respective teachings about what was necessary to achieve union with God/Absolute, as well as a comprehensive definition of mysticism and the part that scripture plays in it and the contradictory nature of the latter! Richard Zaehner's arguments against the Transcendent Unity of Religions through mysticism were examined and criticised especially those concerning Śāṅkara. I concluded the main part of my work by questioning whether an alternative view of Religion might be taken other than that advanced by Schuon and to that end, I focused on some of the thoughts of Wilfred Cantwell Smith concerning how Western thought has created a lot of 'isms' that over-conceptualise our notion of Religion.

In this work I have argued for the notion that the exoteric form can only be given meaning through the esoteric and therefore the Transcendent Unity of Religions along the path advocated by Frithjof Schuon, a path which should have clearly shown that the Absolute/God is clearly greater than can be confined to one particular Religion. It is upon this esoteric platform of greatness and perennial Reality that such unity lies. The dissertation has been undertaken in the hope that those who read it may ask themselves why is there such a decline in the Sacred and what can the knowledge of the Perennial Philosophy do to arrest that decline? Just like the biblical narratives of Hans Frei and Paul Ricoeur, I have sought to write in order to be able to get others to think how can we bring the Sacred back into our lives? Through the Perennial Philosophy, I have attempted to go back to the very core of what Religion is about, to examine its two important aspects--the exoteric and the esoteric--rather than the systematisations that we seem so used to when dealing with Religion. However, the big problem is that the appeal of the

Perennial Philosophy, whilst being timeless just like the sacred art, is of an academic nature that finds it hard to gather support other than through the sources that spawned it. The Perennial Philosophy, too, suffers somewhat from this problem, having a narrow academic appeal that needs to be transcended if it is to play an important role in the revival of the sacred. I have pointed out that one of the constant supports for the Perennial Philosophy and what is also a constant reminder of its timelessness is mysticism which, from time to time, produces such wonderful mystics who remind us of the mystery of our Religions, for example, Padre Pio, Sister Faustina and Sri Ramakrishna, the latter only having died in the last 130 years and the former two within the last 60 years. Thus neither the exoteric nor the esoteric can be given meaning without each other, for to have esotericism without exoterism is to seek the Divine without any reference to man's rational nature, and to have the exoteric without the esoteric is to be lost totally in that rational nature of man; even though the esoteric will exist without the exoteric and gives meaning to the latter, for it is the esoteric that overlaps into each Orthodox Religion. On this plane of existence the exoteric needs to be given meaning and validity through the esoteric. As argued previously, the mediaeval period is perhaps the best moment in time when this balance was at its best. Though we cannot return to that period, we may do well perhaps to examine and remind ourselves of why the Sacred was still so firmly in the minds of man, despite their material pursuits.



Glossary of Terms

Advaita (Sanskrit): “non dualist” interpretation of the *Vedānta*; Hindu doctrine according to which the seeming multiplicity of things is regarded as the product of ignorance, the only true reality being *Brahma*, the One, the Absolute, the Infinite, which is the unchanging ground of appearance.

Ānanda (Sanskrit): “bliss, beatitude, joy”; one of the three essential aspects of *Apara-Brahma*.

Ātma or *Ātman* (Sanskrit): the real or true “Self”, underlying the ego and its manifestations; in the perspective of *Advaita Vedānta*, identical with *Brahma*.

Bhakta (Sanskrit): a follower of the spiritual path of *bhakti*; a person whose relationship with God is based primarily on adoration and love.

Brahma or *Brahman* (Sanskrit): the Supreme Reality, the Absolute.

Brahmā (Sanskrit) God in the aspect of Creator, the first divine “person” of the *Trimūrti*; to be distinguished from *Brahma* the Supreme Reality.

Brahma nirguna (Sanskrit): *Brahma* considered as transcending all “qualities”, attributes, or predicates; God as He is in Himself’ also called *Para-Brahma*.

Brahma saguna (Sanskrit): *Brahma* “qualified” by attributes and predicates’ God insofar as He can be known by man; also called *Apara-Brahma*.

Deva (Sanskrit): literally, “shining one”; in Hinduism, a celestial being’ any of the gods of the *Vedas*, traditionally reckoned as thirty-three.

Dharma (Sanskrit): in Hinduism, the underlying “law” or “order” of the cosmos as expressed in sacred rites and in actions appropriate to various social relationships and human vocations; in Buddhism, the practice and realisation of Truth.

Gnosis (Greek): “knowledge”; spiritual insight, principal comprehension, divine wisdom.

Religio cordis (Latin): “religion of the heart”.

Religio perennis (Latin): “perennial religion”.

Sat (Sanskrit): “being”; one of the three essential aspects of *Apara-Brahman*, together with *Chit*, “consciousness”, and *Ānanda*, “bliss, beatitude, joy”.

Sophia (Greek): “wisdom”; in Jewish and Christian tradition, the Wisdom of God, often conceived as feminine (cf.Prov.8).

Sophia Perennis (Latin): “Perennial Wisdom”; the eternal, non-formal Truth at the heart of all orthodox religious traditions.

Sūtra (Sanskrit): literally, “thread”; a Hindu or Buddhist sacred text; in Hinduism, any short, aphoristic verse or collection of verses, often elliptical in style; in Buddhism, a collection of the discourses of the Buddha.

Tārā (Sanskrit): “star”; in Hinduism, an epithet for many goddesses, notably *Pravati*, consort of Shiva’ in Buddhism, the name given to a diverse group of female *Buddhas* and *Bodhisattvas*.

Upanishad (Sanskrit): literally, “to sit close by”; hence, any esoteric doctrine requiring direct transmission from master to disciple’ in Hinduism, the genre of sacred texts that end or complete the *Vedas*.

Veda (Sanskrit): “knowledge”; in Hinduism, the body of sacred knowledge held to be the basis of orthodoxy and right practice.

Vedānta (Sanskrit): “end or culmination of the Vedas”; one of the major schools of traditional Hindu philosophy, based in part on the Upanishads.

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Autobiography

In keeping with the general arguments of the Perennial Philosophy the author of this work prefers the work to speak for itself, rather than the author speak about himself.



