

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.