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# Perspectives

by

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*The intellect of the wise man is always with divinity.*

Sextus the Pythagorean

It all began for my wife and myself in October 1946, in that least likely of settings—the Alexandria port jail. This was just after the War, when Frithjof Schuon had hardly commenced his writing; but thanks largely to the works of René Guénon and Ananda Coomaraswamy, the two of us were already heading East, in a battle-scarred world where boats and visas were almost impossible to come by, in search of spiritual wisdom.

We were preceded to Egypt by an American friend whose youthful enthusiasm had spurred our ambition even while compromising his own. He had obtained passage as seaman on a freighter, and he celebrated his arrival in the world of Islam by jumping ship, throwing his Western clothes into the harbor of Alexandria, donning a *jellaba* and passing the night in the great mosque before proceeding without visa the next day to Cairo, where he ingratiated himself into the Guénon household. It was only some weeks later when the odd appearance of this black-bearded stranger, in a *gallabiyah* of Guénon's so long it dragged on the pavement, and sporting an Afghan *astrakhan* rare in Cairo, caught the attention of the police and brought this idyll to a close.

We had just left our ship, the former Italian luxury liner “Vulcania”—little more now than a battered transport—and were standing in the midst of the postwar pandemonium of the waterfront waiting for the unloading of the large crate of books that was our sole possession, when an urchin thrust a note into my defensive fist. It was an invitation from our friend to visit him at the lodgings provided him while he awaited deportation. Thus the next morning found the three of us sitting cross-legged on the sun-soaked roof of the jail, with the jailor pouring Turkish coffee, while the “Vulcania” blasted a parting salute of her whistle as she slowly slid from port.

At this very moment our friend produced a photograph of Frithjof Schuon as a young man, seated in Eastern dress before a kilim backdrop. We were thunderstruck. The portrait showed a face archetypally aquiline which represented less a particular person as such than the personification of Wisdom itself. It suggested the Orphic-Hermetic-Platonic current, amalgamated with the spiritual lineage of Abrahamic monotheism.

The quality of the eagle made me think of St. John, the disciple who Jesus intimated would “tarry till I come”; and Schuon—a Teutonic meta-physician like Meister Eckhart—has in fact affirmed in his writings that “Eckhart was a manifestation of St. John.”<sup>1</sup> I once told Schuon that I thought it possible he himself incorporated certain aspects at least of the Johannine function, and he did not deny it.

It must be stressed, however, that Schuon always rejected efforts made to label his intellectual or spiritual role in the world. “I do not know who or what I am,” he insisted; “it is Heaven that knows.” The closest he came to definitions was to say that he represented the compendium or “seal” of wisdom for our moment in the cosmic cycle. And yet if someone claimed for him a wisdom greater than what a Shankara or a Plato possessed, his rejoinder was that he benefited from a hindsight available at this point in history which those coming earlier did not have at their disposal.

Given the human dimensions expressed in that photograph, it might be supposed we would be booking passage on the next boat for Europe. But life is not that simple. In my somewhat casual earlier youth I had already made cursory contacts with Hinduism in both India and Bali; and while these were on a more cultural than spiritual plane, seeds of something deeper were nevertheless planted in my soul, that would have later repercussions.

The year before our departure we had already tasted an elixir of Hinduism in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna as conveyed through Swami Nikhilananda’s Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center in New York City; and soon after this we were to meet Ananda Coomaraswamy, who opened to us the truly *jñanic* dimension of this religion, at the same time encouraging us, with a perfect disregard for the inconveniences to a Westerner attempting to breach the closed system that is the Hindu world, to establish our intellectual and spiritual home there.

If Schuon’s features conveyed for us the type of sage whom we were seeking, we imagined in our naivete that more of the same must surely exist in that East eulogized by Guénon in his early works. We could not know that Guénon and Coomaraswamy in their exposition of the Advaita Vedanta were tapping the intellectual heart of Hinduism, for which representatives at this level on the Indian subcontinent would be almost rarer to come by than the phoenix.

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<sup>1</sup> « Considérations générales sur les fonctions spirituelles », *Études Traditionnelles*, Paris, Novembre-December 1939.

Whatever the case, we pictured Schuon as hermetically sealed off somewhere in the Swiss Alps, and with a message destined for but a very few qualified followers. Having voyaged this far, moreover, we were not of a mind to settle for Europe, nor even the Near East, when the whole Orient still beckoned before us!

Now while Heaven is generous and merciful, it never bestows its favors superfluously; and we were to experience a rude shock when we were first brought about a month later into Guénon's presence. Confronted with this remote and unseizable figure, of a benevolence half-veiled in the "sackcloth" of an outer anonymity, we had the initial impression of Coomaraswamy's person playing in these features—an impression that gradually receded as Guénon's character took on its own contours.<sup>2</sup> But if we had the momentary reassurance of being still within Coomaraswamy's orbit, we would soon find to our dismay that the two sages differed in their practical advice to us.

Whereas the Doctor had openly encouraged us to go to India, even generously intervening in the matter of visas— which supposedly would be reaching Cairo any day now from New Delhi— the French metaphysician by contrast made it clear through subtle innuendo that Hinduism was off bounds. Yet all he said was: (1) that things had greatly degenerated in India in recent years, and particularly since the War; (2) that Hinduism is a vastly complex structure with numerous pitfalls for the unwary, among which were false gurus; and (3) that it would be nearly impossible for a Westerner to have the discernment and criteria necessary for distinguishing the wheat from the chaff in an East that often operates by standards other than those to which an Occidental is accustomed.

I lamely brought up Buddhism in Nepal or Tibet as an alternative, having been much impressed by Marco Pallis' *Peaks and Lamas*, and by the biography of Milarepa, but Guénon's only reaction was to mutter some-thing about the inhospitality of the climate in those regions. The intermediary who had arranged this meeting then volunteered that the problems under discussion did not prevail in the world of Islamic esoterism, and Guénon's concurrence on this point seemed to me almost designedly affirmative.

Coomaraswamy had assured us in Boston that he and Guénon were in essential agreement on all fundamentals, any divergences between them being simply a question of stress on

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<sup>2</sup> Further details on the personal and intellectual qualities of these two figures can be found in my 'The Man and the Witness', published in S. Durai Raja Singam's commemorative volume, *Ananda Coomaraswamy: Remembering and Remembering: Again and Again*, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, 1974; and in my tribute, 'Coomaraswamy— The Man, Myth, and History', *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Summer, 1977.

There is also Ranjit Fernando's collection, *The Unanimous Tradition*, published by the Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies, Colombo, 1991, where I have contributed a chapter, 'The Revival of Interest in Tradition', that contains matter pertinent to the triad of metaphysicians under discussion in this paper.

subordinate points, such as the importance given to initiation in the spiritual life. Yet seated before me was a venerable sage dressed in a *gallabiyah* and known to the very few in Cairo who enjoyed his acquaintance as Sheikh Abdel Wahed Yahya, married to the daughter of an Egyptian *faqir*, a man who nourished the hope of one day making the pilgrimage to Mecca—just as Coomaraswamy in his turn dreamt of eventual retirement to India in accordance with the third *ashrama* of life. I categorically dismissed the repugnant idea that there could be so much as a trace of subjectivity in his attitudes: his intelligence would not permit this; and was he not after all wearing a gold ring in-scribed in Sanskrit lettering with the sacred monogrammatic syllable AUM?<sup>3</sup> The essential burden of his doctrinal message had already been written, moreover, when he was living in Paris and married to a French Catholic.

We were also soon to discover that Guénon, who was little communicative about anything else, always brightened with interest at the mention of Coomaraswamy or Schuon. In fact, amidst his voluminous reader correspondence, the mail he most eagerly awaited was that from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and that from Switzerland. We could not escape the presentiment that to distance ourselves from this sphere of influence would be tantamount to rejecting the center in favor of the periphery—India or not.

**T**hus, in the two months that ensued while the visas were delayed by a technical snag in New Delhi, our inner orientation became transformed to the point that the final arrival of the documents proved a matter of irrelevance, practically speaking, although from the viewpoint of destiny we considered their retardation as having providentially thwarted a wrong move.

A letter came from Guénon, dated February 9, 1947:

We were very happy to learn of the decision that you have taken... I think the course you have chosen was certainly the best, but naturally I would not have wanted to influence you in this respect as long as you had not yet decided on your own. In this connection, I should say that what I wrote in *East and West* was really of a rather “theoretical” character, and at that time it could not be otherwise, for it was hardly possible then to foresee the actual possibilities which would open up afterwards. In the same way, when I envisaged certain possibilities within Catholicism, I did this above all in order not neglect or reject anything *a priori*, but without much hope of seeing them materialize, and now this is certainly more than ever the case.

In writing to Dona Luisa Coomaraswamy on the occasion of her husband’s death in September 1947, I asked if they had received an earlier letter announcing our decision, and in her

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<sup>3</sup> I am told that the spiritual quality inherent in this ring once proved efficacious to Guénon in fending off an attack of magic emanating from one or another of the occult societies in France from which he had long since dissociated himself.

reply she said: “We received your letter and were pleased for you. I thought the Doctor answered you, perhaps he thought I had.”

It is worth pausing a moment on what Guénon said about *East and West* in the letter just cited. This book was written over twenty years before we met Guénon, namely, at a time when intellectual aristocracies, however much hidden, still reigned in spiritual circles. Yet even while he spoke to us about how badly things had fallen off in the East since his early writings, there were notwithstanding saintly figures flourishing in India—people like Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Swamigal, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Ma Ananda Moyi, Swami Ramdas, or Swami Sivananda. And in the West for that matter were men of eminent spirituality, such as Pope Pius XII, or among the American Indians, holy medicine men like Black Elk and Little Warrior of the Sioux.

And what has happened since? All of these personages, along with other of their illustrious contemporaries, Padre Pio for example, have departed this life leaving no truly qualified successors. In other words, the wellsprings of spirituality throughout the world have progressively ceased to flow. And such is the present state of affairs, which no wishful thinking can change.

Now if one asks what temporal condition it was these people shared in common, the answer is: they were all born before the present century. These were men of another age. There is a cyclical gap here which separates the giants from the pygmies. What distinguishes us men of this century is that we are born with a dimension lacking: the generality of us are fragmented human beings, relativized, bending with this and stretching with that, having no center, no fixity, no greatness. And it is not necessary to look to the spiritual life for evidence of this: it abounds in all spheres, in government, the military, the academic, the arts and sciences. The last “greats” to leave anything memorable in this world are virtually without exception nineteenth century men, even when the climax of their careers has fallen athwart our century.<sup>4</sup>

The foregoing remarks, however, are not intended to mean that we of the twentieth century are perforce spiritual nullities, even if we are headed in that direction, for man cannot become a complete nullity without the world ceasing to exist. And they are certainly not intended to imply that nineteenth century man as such had anything particularly transcendent in his constitution; after all, it is Ralph Waldo Emerson of that century who declared: “Man is a god in ruins.” On the contrary, we are in no little part the product of the previous century’s errors. I am only speaking about a certain human fullness or completeness which is hardly come by any more. And through our own progressive rejection of past values, the as-yet-to-arrive twenty-first century man promises well to emerge on the scene a dehumanized horror—if indeed the Powers that rule the Cosmos allow him to become anything at all. As Schuon tirelessly points out, the

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<sup>4</sup> One has to remember that only in the wake of the First World War did the twentieth century take on its distinctive characteristics.

human state by the centrality of its nature carries the obligation to transcend that portion which is purely horizontal; and what defines twentieth century man is precisely the reduction of his vision to a “one-world syndrome”—even though this is now more and more being ruptured from below.

I can already hear some readers protesting that Schuon was born in our century. And this is just what I am getting at. For he was not so much “born” as “thrust” into our age as a counterweight to its disequilibriums. But to fulfill such a role requires a dimension of another order than what a nineteenth century birthright alone could provide: it requires being invested with a plentitude which in one degree or another escapes the limits of any particular temporal condition itself. To these considerations let it only be added that no gift of a cosmic order is ever of a purely personal or private nature, and there are those who are destined by contact to assimilate and convey in their turn and according to their capacities elements of this perennial potentiality not bound by time or space.

**A** Cairo banker with a country home used by him uniquely for week-end riding offered to rent us the upper floor; and since our ties with the United States were pretty well severed, and since we were already in an Oriental country with the necessary papers, we decided to embrace the traditional culture at hand and purge away some of the rougher edges of our American profanity before venturing on to Switzerland.

Thus we took up residence in the little “oasis” of Nazlet es-Samman at the foot of the Great Pyramid. Apart from the immediate beauty of this garden-desert setting, there was the eternal presence of the Pyramids in the majesty of their geometrical purity lending a certain aura of primordiality to the region. And it seemed appropriate to be living in a location considered by Guénon in his article, ‘The Tomb of Hermes’,<sup>5</sup> to be the ancient—even antediluvian—center of Hermetical wisdom and initiation.

It was a year later, in the spring of 1948, that we made our first visit to Lausanne; for it was there—and not somewhere hidden in the Alps, as we had naively supposed—that Frithjof Schuon lived. His dwelling was in the attractive little residential street of Chemin de Lucinge, a few blocks southeast of the center. He had just one room, opening onto a balcony full of geraniums, and a kitchen where he had his worktable. Fine Afghan rugs of sober beauty lined the floor, while on the walls were Sumatran hangings and various Oriental inscriptions. The decor included Arabic and Tibetan artifacts and standing on a medieval chest, a Romanesque statuette of the Virgin and Child.

I was presented to Schuon, who was seated on a low divan and wearing a simple robe with—if I remember correctly—a blue Tibetan cape over his shoulders, the gift of Marco Pallis. The impression I retain was of an enormous presence. He asked in a rather dry voice how long

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<sup>5</sup> See the Guénon collection: *Formes traditionnelles et cycles cosmiques*, Paris, 1970.

we would be staying in Lausanne, if we liked living in Egypt—which in itself he found perfectly acceptable—and whether we had word from Guénon. There was little else said, except that in closing he recommended we read *The Way of a Pilgrim*,<sup>6</sup> a book that was just becoming known; any questions of ours should be referred to others in his entourage.

On subsequent visits we were invited to suppers of soup, bread, and cheese, prepared by one or another of the few people gathered there, and eaten seated on the floor, Oriental style. Conversation was restricted, except when the host asked a question, which was best answered in one or two sentences, or when he expounded on a topic—whether intellectual or practical—currently engaging his attention. After the meal the visitors remained together while Schuon retired to his worktable, occasionally summoning someone to discuss a matter that needed expediting.

Besides metaphysical truths, we heard much more than we had bargained on about human virtues and failings, about right comportment and attitudes regarding people and furnishings and dress and colors and sundry other seemingly secondary matters. He appeared quasi oblivious to anything suggestive of personal merit, whereas faults by contrast rarely escaped his keen regard, criticisms which were usually communicated later to the offender by a third party, and most often relating to errors that had escaped one's awareness, or which had not seemed all that important. We had much to learn!

Even Guénon and Coomaraswamy did not enjoy complete immunity here, which could be initially puzzling to the ears of uncritical votaries. The French metaphysician was charged with a too unilateral, schematic, and rigid presentation of spiritual verities which failed to include sufficiently the human element, along with the imponderables and enormous complexity of the human soul. The Doctor for his part was criticized for an exposition that appeared to deny the potential immortality of any created being, on the grounds that the Self or Atma alone being the One, the Real, all else must consequently be illusory and ultimately impermanent. Coomaraswamy also stressed the primacy of myth over history, of symbol over fact, so that the metaphysical necessity of the Logos doctrine, for example, has precedence over the “adduced” historicity of the Christ or the Buddha.

The paradox here is that these two purveyors of traditional doctrines had to give witness to truths of a transcendent and universal order in an individualistic and relativistic civilization where everything—religion included—has been secularized, humanized, and desacralized. It was essential for them to put the stress in the opposite direction and to accentuate supraformal realities and first principles. But those coming to Schuon were doing so precisely because they had gotten the message, and it was his job to put their heads back on again, so to say, and prevent them from becoming “monsters” of metaphysical abstraction and eventual pride. The fact is, no

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<sup>6</sup> Anonymous, Translated from the Russian by R.M. French, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 1941.

one person can do it all: the job of chopping off heads does not require the same tools or finesse as does the art of restoring them.

Since we have seen how Coomaraswamy and Guénon diverged on the matter of what India could offer a Western aspirant, it is of interest to know Schuon's own views here. He himself was on a trip to India with two Englishmen and had just arrived in Bombay when the War broke out, obliging him to return shortly to Europe. But the others remained and eventually attached themselves to a guru named Krishna Menon. We were in Lausanne when letters, at once euphoric and insulting, arrived from these men, indicating that something in their inner development had gone drastically askew in the way of self-delusion.

Now Schuon had good evidence that this guru was in reality a false master possessing dangerous psychic powers. He nevertheless in a long letter addressed to Krishna Menon gave the man the benefit of the doubt, writing that he was quite ready to believe his venerable addressee understood the structure and needs of the Hindu mind and soul; what he very much doubted, however, was if Krishna Menon or any other Hindu master as such was or ever could be adequately informed of and sufficiently prepared for the individualistic and cerebral complications that the typical Westerner bears in his heritage.

Needless to say there was no reply, but the material in this letter has been expanded into the magnificent chapter in *Language of the Self* entitled 'Self-Knowledge and the Western Seeker.' This episode illustrates how Schuon was frequently motivated to write: a vast amount of what came from his pen was provoked by an error crying for rectification or a truth needing clarification, where no one else had appeared on the scene to do the job.

Getting back to India, Schuon says in *Language of the Self*, "The Hindus are the most contemplative people in the world; and for thousands of years it has been their habit to consider in themselves what is divine. They say 'I am *Âtma*,' 'I am Brahman,' just as their ancestors have done for thousands of years. Pure contemplation has forged the Hindu soul."

Europeans by contrast "are often afflicted with a hidden individualism which it is difficult for a Hindu to imagine; European civilization has been oriented for centuries towards the exaltation of man, of the individual....That is why in the West it is necessary before everything else to clear the ground; to speak publicly of the 'Self' in such surroundings, is to lose one's time or, what is worse, to sow seeds of poison."

A pious Westerner has no problem situating the Gospel statement about "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," and that "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." This is exactly the sense of "I am *Âtma*." But when the same Westerner hears the Hindu formulation of this truth, a strange alchemy starts to simmer in his soul that risks overwhelming his critical faculties.

We had a problem in Lausanne with our lodgings. Virtually all the hotels in town—apart from the luxury palaces and the inverse—charged full board with room, the one exception being the stately Hotel Alexandra which was ready to compromise for half pension; since, however, the garden of this Victorian mansion was adjacent to Schuon's home, we feared the indiscretion of pointedly taking quarters so close. But word came that this was a matter of no importance, and thus ended the problem, which proved instead to be really the beginning of an emerging pattern our lives would take. In the following years we visited Lausanne each summer.

Guénon died early in 1951, and the political situation in Egypt was fast deteriorating. Meanwhile, by the spring of 1952, with our family expanding, we saw we would need more room, and I asked our landlord if he might consider renting us the ground floor of his house, since it was in the main unoccupied. "La!" ("No!") he barked, raising a forefinger in a gesture of finality. Doors seemed to be closing on us. Then just a few weeks later, upon arriving in Lausanne for our annual visit, we heard from Madame Schuon that the two-room apartment next to theirs had that very morning been put on the market for subletting. Schuon since his marriage in 1949 had moved to more spacious lodgings in Chemin de Monribeau, close to the beautiful Parc de Mon Repos, and his wife suggested that we take the adjoining vacated apartment during our visit, perhaps as a way of protecting them from having potentially undesirable neighbors move in. We had no furniture, but friends were helpful, and we had already learned from our days in Egypt how to start with little more than a suitcase and a mattress on the floor.

Sensing the opportuneness of the moment to review our situation in Egypt, we put the matter to Schuon, who replied that while the decision lay entirely with us, he for his part saw no inconvenience if we wished to remain in Switzerland—itself a country probably as beautiful as any in the world. That August as a result found me closing our home at the Pyramids, just as the revolution broke out which deposed King Farouk and put Colonel Nguib in power.

Our inner life during those past years had been somewhat ambiguous, for while we were acquiring elements of the Oriental ambience in our psychic structure, we were at the same time forcibly stifling legitimate elements of our Western heritage and above all our universal outlook, due to the lack of certain local conditions requisite for this development. In a word, there was no accessible intellectual aristocracy or spiritual elite in Egypt, and the inhabitants in the goodness of their hearts could no more understand our true position in their country than we ourselves could explain it to them. Guénon was gone, and we had no real center there.

The outlook in Schuon's proximity by contrast was one of limitlessness, since there was essentially no positive human dimension that lay beyond his grasp to situate and, where called for, integrate. His discernment, starting on the intellectual plane, carried down to the most concrete coordinates on the material level.

The impression a visitor retained from the milieu of this Teutonic sage was one of transparent objectivity—material, global, cosmic, and spiritual objectivity, seeing the nature of

things in themselves for what they are, irrespective of the plane on which they are situated. Schuon said in fact that his role was to bring back the concept of the Absolute in a world become relativized. Parallel with his vision of things went a deep, abiding sense of the sacred, manifested outwardly by his serious mien and highly dignified manner.

On a chill, dark afternoon in mid-November in 1952, I was seated in the park called Promenade Mercier, gazing across the lifeless lake to where the mountains beyond were veiled in fog. The recent transition in my life had sparked a quickening awareness of the essential Unity underlying the diversity of forms, such as I felt called for a comprehensive witness along lines already proposed by Coomaraswamy. And thus was born the idea for *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*, which I wished to pattern on formulations that were being taught by Schuon, those to be published later in his *Stations of Wisdom*.

That following year the Schuons acquired as a gift a plot of land composed of orchard and vineyard, in the suburb of Pully just east of Lausanne. They were likewise given the means to build a small villa on this property. As the construction neared completion it was suggested that we take over their apartment, which would afford us with our two children more living space. Then one afternoon Madame Schuon rang our doorbell and explained that the vineyard represented more land than they needed or wanted to cultivate, but that they did not wish to sell it to the outside world. Would we be willing to build there if it was offered to us?

At the time we lacked the funds necessary for this, but Heaven proved to be gracious. It was a transition in our lives that would soon present, moreover, an important opening for serviceability. We had purchased a car for getting children to school, and other errands, and the Schuons for their part discovered that having access to an automobile would facilitate their frequent travels, undertaken to visit museums, sanctuaries, eminent authorities from various religious spheres, and in general people sharing the same ideas and interests. As no one else in Schuon's entourage at that period had both a car and the time available for its use, it became our privilege, myself doing the driving, to accompany them on nearly all of their journeys.

Thus, for the next quarter of a century, we attended them on trips that took us to France, Germany, Belgium, Holland, England, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and Morocco, including excursions and stays in the Alps. We also drove through much of the American West with them in a visit to the Plains Indians in the summer of 1963.

Schuon taught that travel in someone spirituality inclined, when done for legitimate purposes, can sharpen the faculties of the soul through the contact one has with unfamiliar scenes and the challenges of situations not met with at home. He himself on these occasions was always alert, punctual, disciplined, and keenly observant. He had ever present a small notebook for recording ideas or sketching faces of marked interest, or for composing diagrams delineating metaphysical and cosmological conceptions. And yet he seemed habitually abstracted from the accidental immediacy of the environment—indrawn, distant, and somehow remote from it all.

The quality emanating from him was that of Rumi's "dead man walking." But for him it was the ambient world that was dead. He often remarked in amazement at the insouciance of people forever chattering a plethora of banalities as though totally blind to the cosmic immensity ready to engulf them.

One afternoon we were driving out of London on our way back to Dover to cross the Channel for home: Kingsway, Aldwych, Waterloo, Elephant and Castle, Southwark, Bermondsey, Eltham, Sidup, Bexley—the pressing metropolis and interminable drone of tight-wedged traffic would never end. And then suddenly we hit the greenbelt and freedom; it was as though the city had never been. "That is how the modern civilization will end," said Schuon, "something seemingly lasting forever, and all at once it is no more!"

This brings to mind in a deeper order of ideas an observation made during a conversation with Titus Burckhardt, when Schuon asked for a pencil and paper. He drew a line across the middle, and then turning to Burckhardt said: "It's as simple as that. Everything below this line represents the world of becoming and change, of flux and agitation and suffering. It is in its nature to be that way, and nothing can make it otherwise. Above the line is the supraformal realm of eternal beatitude and peace, which is always the same without change. Our sole task is to transfer the center of our being from the space below to the one above!"

I once asked my wife if she could think of a precise term that would best express the essence of Schuon's intellectual vision. "Objectivity," she replied, "seeing the nature of things for what it is." Later that morning I put the same question to Madame Schuon, and she gave the same answer, all of which anticipated my own thoughts on the subject.

In *Logic and Transcendence*, Schuon writes: "History and experience teach us that there is one thing human nature finds particularly difficult, and that is to be just; to be perfectly objective is, in a way, to die." His extraordinary logical faculties were the sine qua non for the message he had to offer, while at the same time proving to be a trial for him as regards the ambient world, which by its nature was all too frequently eminently irrational, if not downright absurd. "Seeing things for what they are" means being consequential; it means having an inward and outward sense of forms and proportions, having a discernment that is qualitative and rational. He has said that an art form by the fact alone of being traditional in origin is no guarantee against relative error. An icon of the Virgin, for example, may well be executed by a pious monk with prayer and fasting, the correct preparation of pigments following time-honored procedures, and yet with all this be an inferior representation of the subject through the artist's inability to convey a hand or a facial expression correctly; whereas in secular art a contemporary painter may with ordinary oils produce a Virgin and Child which "accidentally" through a felicitous intuition or inspiration will come closer in aesthetic essence to the reality of the subject than the ritual icon just mentioned.

On a more profound level, this way of viewing things means the spiritual art of regarding phenomena with a theophanic vision that pierces through the object to a higher, archetypal

reality of which the outward form is the reflected projection. It implies an integrating, unifying perception which discerns the essential and accordingly eschews entanglement in the accidental.

There was to be found yet another dimension in Schuon's constitution, namely, a great latitude for humor, which was carefully meted out to the appropriate situations, and characterized by a playful wit devoid of any malice. It in turn was counterbalanced by a severity in his nature befitting someone of his stature, and who for the rest bore the name Frithjof, meaning Disturber of the Peace. When we were visiting at the home of the Thomas Yellowtails in Wyola, Montana, Susie Yellowtail directed her gaze to Schuon and said: "You know, you have that same severe expression that the old-time chiefs used to have!"

Characteristically, children manifested a complete spontaneity and naturalness in his presence: on occasion they came to him with their ball or balloon inviting him to share in their game and he graciously accepted. And this highlights yet another aspect of his nature, which was that along-side the metaphysician there existed the child, with a readiness for the innocent and naive. I am reminded here of a story in the *Collations* of Cassianus Eremita about St. John the Evangelist, who was chided by a hunter who came upon him gently stroking a partridge, imagining that with a man of such holiness and fame a loftier manner of passing the time would be more in character. St. John then asked the hunter why he did not keep his bow taut. To the answer that it would in the long run weaken the capacity of the wood to project the arrows with the force necessary, the Evangelist replied that he too needed repose in order that his intellectual faculties be at the proper intensity when needed.

A king has his court and a bishop his diocese, and the hardest thing for Schuon, who had the amplitude of twenty men, was the lack of an outward plane of resonance adequate to his capacities. Guénon expresses the problem succinctly in the lecture he gave at the Sorbonne in 1925, called '*La métaphysique orientale.*' He demonstrates that a truly traditional civilization puts everything essential at the disposal of those qualified, to realize the flowering of their highest faculties. Our present civilization does exactly the opposite, soliciting all that is basest and most material in man, while imposing well-nigh insuperable obstacles to those who wish to transcend their lower selves.

Not so many years ago, a Moroccan holy man told us that "from now until the end of time, all the doors are wide open— the gates to Heaven and the gates to Hell." If these words are to be believed, they imply both exceptional challenge and exceptional risk. Schuon expressed the same idea in a different manner. To the complaint of a highly placed magistrate in an Oriental country, that the work of Satan is rife in the world today, he replied: "Yes. But do not forget that now is also the time of the Divine Mercy."

He could well declare in the words of Louis XIV "*Après moi le déluge*" ("After me the Flood"). The secret of the Hour is with Heaven. But already this much can be said: to the extent

that there is to be any revival at all of the traditional spirit, the work of Schuon will spearhead this restoration. And even now without reference to tomorrow, his work stands like an ark to which all those can repair who feel the call to Truth, and to liberation from the lower waters that constitute the prison of this world.