

Schuon Lectures 2026 – Day 4

“Make Your Choice”

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Nota bene: This lecture is the third of four lectures in a series entitled: “Schuon’s Path of Truth & Beauty: The Perennial Philosophy in the Modern Era.”

The original lecture was presented with PowerPoint and contained many illustrations and four film clips. This transcription of the audio portion of the lecture cannot convey all of the information on the slides and film clips. Interested readers should view the entire film recording of the entire lecture. This transcription has been edited to provide context for viewers who have not seen the film of the lecture.

Today, Mr. Schuon answers profound philosophical questions surrounding existence and Reality in order that each viewer may have a broader perspective from which to make life's most important choices.

So, where are we? We have an overview of a variety of things. I will not repeat them. And, we understand the importance of developing and maintaining a “sense of the sacred” in our daily lives. It is time to consider: are we in a similar circumstance to 19th Century Plains Indians?

Let us recall the wisdom from Ohiyesa, an American Indian paragon:

It is my personal belief, after 35 years’ experience of it, that there is no such thing as a Christian civilization. I believe that Christianity and modern civilization are opposed and irreconcilable and that the spirit of Christianity and of our ancient religion is essentially the same.

So, how are we similar to 19th Century Plains Indians? Modernity violently crushed virtually all that was sacred in the Plains Indian world. In our case, modernity has gradually removed virtually all that is sacred in our culture over the past 500 years. Some similarities are that the dominant society has lost its “sense of the Transcendent;” dominant society is largely bereft of morals; environmental desecration is rampant; sacred beauty is virtually banished from our daily lives; there are few outward supports for a life of prayer, and religion is no longer a cultural glue and guiding light. And, there is no return for society.

How do you respond? We are going to leave that question with everyone at the end of the day. Schuon's recommendation: “you must focus on what is essential” and “you must discover the values in religion.” A newspaper reporter queried Schuon: “Let me ask you, if you could just comment on the state of religion in the world today, and after a lifetime

spent studying religion, where is humankind going?” “Oh, doubt of course. But there are always the same values in religions. We just must discover these values. The religions are good. All right. People are bad.” I was sitting next to Mr. Schuon, just to his right, when that question was asked, when Mr. Schuon made the sweeping downward motion, it almost threw me off my chair.

Let us recall what is essential for traditional Plains Indians. Belief in a Great Spirit Who is both above and beyond the physical world while simultaneously being within every aspect of creation. They possess sacred rites and a moral code that are spiritually transformative and produce saints and sages. They recognize that the Great Spirit revealed multiple valid religions that express the same Truth. It is bad medicine to mix the practice of one religion into the rites of another. They reject the modern materialist secular world view. These principles also form the heart of the Perennial Philosophy.

Plains Indian beliefs bring to mind Schuon's celebrated expression, “the Transcendent Unity of religions.” His book of that title was first published in 1948. This metaphysical thesis holds that there exists a single unity underlying the diverse religions. Schuon explains:

If the expression transcendent unity is used, it means that the unity of the religious forms must be realized in a purely inward and spiritual way and without prejudice to any particular form. The antagonisms between these forms no more affect the one universal truth than the antagonisms between opposing colors affect the transmission of uncolored light. He also uses the term “the inner unity or the inner oneness of religions.

These ideas are integral to his metaphysical explanations of the nature of God, the nature of the human state, and the contradictions of the outward forms of the diverse religions. Can Schuon’s ideas help us resist modernism?

Schuon's notion of “esoteric ecumenism,” which he coined in 1981, helps people from the different religions stand should-to-shoulder, so to say, to resist modernism. He believed that esoteric ecumenism was the key to interreligious relationships. The terms “esoteric” and “ecumenism” are rarely used together. “Esoteric” means the inner metaphysical dimension of religion which is accessible to those who have a vocation for it. Whereas “ecumenism” typically involves large group exchanges aimed at promoting unity and improving relationships among the world's religions.

What are the dangers of typical ecumenism? They include relativism and heterodoxy. Schuon was against different faiths worshiping together. He insisted on keeping the integrity of each traditional form. In a letter he said, “I am against the construction of an

abode for the faithful of all religions because this amounts to improvisation and dilettantism.”

So, what is esoteric ecumenism? It implies transcending the formal theological differences among the religions to focus on the common metaphysical core within every intrinsically orthodox religion, while maintaining the integrity of the rites of each religion. Schuon’s published writings unveil this multi-layered thesis in detail for those who understand metaphysics. Excerpts from his letters provide a synthetic overview. Always, when we simplify Schuon, it is at the risk of not hearing some of his precisions, but it is necessary in a short lecture. Schuon:

If all men were metaphysicians and contemplatives, 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 revelations are derived—according to different logical needs and different spiritual temperaments—cannot but contradict one another on the plane of forms.

Schuon, in a different letter:

God could not wish for all men to understand the Unity within the diverse religions since this understanding is contrary to the nature of man in the “dark age.” This is why I am against ecumenism as it is practiced today. The great evil is not that men of different religions do not understand one another, but that too many men are no longer believers. It is therefore urgent that:

1. men return to faith, whatever their religion be, on condition that it is intrinsically orthodox and in spite of dogmatic ostracisms.
2. that those who are capable of understanding pure metaphysics, esoterism, and the inner unity of religions discover these truths and draw the necessary inward and outward conclusions. And this is why I write books.

To a different reader.

I am completely against ecumenism as it is in visage today with its inoperative dialogues and gratuitous and sentimental gestures that amount to nothing. Certainly, an understanding between religions is possible and even necessary, though not on the dogmatic plane, but solely on the basis of common ideas and common interests. The common ideas are a transcendent, perfect, all powerful, merciful, Absolute, then a hereafter that is either good or bad, depending on our merits or demerits. The common interests are a defense against materialism, atheism, perversion, subversion, and modernism in all its guises.

I believe Pope Pius 12th once said that the wars between Christians and Muslims are but domestic quarrels compared to the present opposition between the world of the religions and that of militant materialism atheism; he also said that it was a consolation to know that there are millions of men who prostrate themselves five times a day before God.

These comments were made by Pope Pius 12th to Titus Burckhardt on the occasion when Titus Burckhardt presented him with the illustrated book, *Sienna, City of the Virgin*.

Is it possible to overcome intense ethnic and religious hatred? Schuon's esoteric ecumenism provides the framework to forge strong bonds between orthodox religions while explaining and maintaining the integrity of their providential differences. Esoteric ecumenism recognizes that modernism is the real common enemy of all religions. The fact that many traditional Plains Indians can embrace Christianity as part of their spiritual beliefs proves it is possible to look past ethnic hatreds to see the inner Unity of the religions. These concepts and living proofs should not be ignored. But what else must each of us do to resist modernism?

Where are we? We are considering how to respond to modernism. Next, Schuon answers two fundamental questions. What is the human state? What happens when I die? Then we hear Schuon respond to questions about how to live up to the responsibility of the human state.

First, we ask, what is the human state? This is a bit of a review, but I think it is appropriate.

The human state is a central state and consequently man's intelligence, his will and his soul have a central character. In other words, a character of totality, hence of objectivity. Human intelligence is total for it can conceive the Transcendent, the Absolute. Human will is total for it can choose the Absolute. The will is made for total Good. The human soul is total for it can love the Absolute and the Infinite. The soul is made for total Happiness, heavenly beatitude and earthly harmony.

Schuon again on the human state:

Instead of having his gaze always fixed on the imperfections of the world and the vicissitudes of life, man should never lose sight of the good fortune of being born in a human state. It is a road leading to heaven. One praises God not only because he is the Sovereign Good, but also because he has given us birth at the gate of Paradise. This means that man is made for all that leads there: for the Truth, for the Path, and for Virtue.

What happens when I die? This is one of my favorite quotations:

The experience of death is someone like that of a man who has lived all his life in a dark room and suddenly finds himself transported to a mountaintop where his gaze would embrace all the wide landscape. The works of men would seem insignificant to him. It is thus that the soul torn from the earth and from the body perceives the inexhaustible diversity of things and the incommensurable abyss of the world's containment. For the first time, it sees itself in its universal context in an inexorable interlocking of parts and a network of multitudinous and unsuspected relationships and realizes that life has been but an instant but a play.

And then, in the footnote, Schuon adds:

At death all assurance and all cleverness fall away like a garment and the being who remains is impotent and like a lost child. Nothing is left but a substance we have ourselves woven which may either fall heavily or in the contrary let itself be drawn up by heaven like a rising star. Red Indians put moccasins with embroidered souls on the feet of their dead. And this is eloquently symbolic.

What is the full gravity of the human condition? To an admirer, Schuon writes:

Your difficulties stem from the fact that you are not aware of the full gravity of the human condition and you are not alone in being so. Most people believe that a person goes to paradise because he follows the rites of a religion and has neither killed nor stolen, so on and so forth; but in fact only the saints and sages go straight to paradise because the Divine Mercy dissolves their imperfections, not because they are perfect. When you are walking along the street you believe that “I”—Mrs. H.—“am here”, “on this street”, “now”; you do not see, I assume, the metaphysical and eschatological abysses surrounding you.

In the Middle Ages, the whole civilization was structured in such a way as to give a person at least some sense of his cosmic situation. Today, we live in a kind of misleading ‘extraterritoriality’ and opaque back rooms that hide Reality.

Nevertheless, God touches us everywhere for there is no empty space and no rest. He is the first, the last, the outward, inward. Man is like the point of intersections of the divine dimension.

Where are we? Well, we know a little bit about the human state and the gravity of the human condition. Now we hear a summary of the “four essential elements” of Schuon’s philosophy. A newspaper writer asked Schuon: “If you had to boil your philosophy down to a few elements, and if you wanted to recommend to people ways of following that philosophy, what would you say?” Schuon:

There is first discernment between the Absolute and the relative, *Ātmā* and *Māyā*, Reality and illusion.

Then prayer, because if one understands what is essential and what is Absolute, one wants to assimilate it; otherwise, one is a hypocrite. In order to assimilate the truth of the Absolute one must pray. Now there are three types of prayer: first canonical prayer—in Christianity it is the Lord’s Prayer. Then free, personal prayer, like the Psalms in the Bible—the Psalms are David’s personal prayer with God. The third type of prayer is prayer of the heart—essential prayer, which is an act of contemplation in the innermost self. This is esoterism and I am interested in this. I say to people you must pray, always pray. You must have at least one canonical prayer every day and then you must talk to God; but you must always pray like St. Paul said in an epistle, “pray without ceasing”—this is “prayer of the heart”. The Eastern Church knows this practice very well—the Jesus Prayer—*japa-yoga* in Hinduism. This is the second thing.

The third thing is intrinsic morality: beauty of the soul; nobility; humility, which means objectivity toward oneself; charity, which is objectivity towards the neighbor; domination of oneself; generosity—this is beauty of the soul, this is intrinsic morality.

The fourth dimension is beauty: beauty of forms, of surroundings, of dress, of comportment. That is all.

I draw your attention to points three and four, both involving beauty. Point three, “intrinsic morality” or “beauty of the soul.” He uses the terms twice, synonymously, in what he said. And then point four, “beauty of forms” of the physical world. Each has their own importance. The “beauty of the soul” and “moral conformity” coming before “beauty of forms.”

What are the different types of prayer? Schuon on canonical prayer. “As canonical prayer stems from a Revelation, it is not only a human discourse; it is also divine, which means that besides its literal value it has a sacramental import. It is on our level, yet at the same time beyond us.”

On personal prayer:

Personal prayer loosens psychic knots... dissolves subconscious coagulations and drains away many secret poisons; it sets forth before God the difficulties, failures, and tensions of the soul, which presupposes that the soul be humble and truthful, and this disclosure, carried out in the face of the Absolute, has the virtue of re-establishing equilibrium and restoring peace—in a word, of opening us to grace.

What is prayer of the heart?

The “remembrance of God” which constitutes prayer in its deepest sense, is already a death and a meeting with God and it places us already in Eternity; it is already something of Paradise and even, in its mysterious and ‘uncreated’ quintessence, something of God. Quintessential prayer brings about an escape from the world and from life, and thereby confers a new and Divine sap upon the veil of appearances and the current of forms. The Divine Name is thus a manifestation of the Supreme Principle, or to speak still more plainly, it is the Supreme Principle manifesting Itself.

The cover to the book you see here, *Pray Without Ceasing*, is the way of invocation in the world's religions from scores of secondary speakers, from many different traditions, many Perennialists.

Why are virtues important?

One must realize the virtues for their own sake and not in order to make them “mine.” One may be sad because one displeases God, but not because one is not holy, while others are. To understand a virtue is to know how to realize it. To understand a fault is to know how to overcome it. To be sad because one does not know how to overcome a fault shows that one has not understood the nature of the corresponding virtue. . . .

To have a virtue is above all to be without the fault that is contrary to it, for God created us virtuous. He created us in his image. Faults are superimposed. Moreover, it is not we who possess virtue. It is virtue which possesses us. . . . Virtue for its part is a message from Being; it is like a reverberation of the Sovereign Good in which we participate through our nature and through our will, easily or with difficulty, but always by the Grace of He who is.

What are the essential virtues? Schuon:

Virtue consists essentially in humility and charity. These are the fundamental qualities from which all others derive, to which they all relate and without which no sanctity is possible. Humility presents itself under two aspects: awareness of one's metaphysical nothingness in the face of the Absolute and awareness of one's personal imperfection; this second humility implies not only a relentless instinct for detecting one's own limitations and weaknesses, but also a simultaneous capacity to discern the positive qualities in one's neighbor, for a virtue that is blind to virtues in others destroys itself thereby. Consciousness of one's individual insufficiency springs from the necessarily fragmentary character of the ego; in other words, to say “ego” is to say partial imperfection in regard to other individuals.

As for charity, it consists in abolishing the egocentric distinction between “me” and the “other”: it is seeing the “I” in the “other” and the “other” in the “I.” Humility and charity are the two dimensions of self-effacement: they are, to use a Christian symbolism, like the vertical and horizontal branches of the Cross. The one can always be reduced to the other: humility is always to be found in charity, and conversely.

To these two virtues must be added the virtue of veracity: it is love of truth, objectivity, impartiality; it is a virtue that situates intelligence in the framework of the will—to the extent that the nature of things allows of this or demands it—and its function consists in keeping away every passional element from the intelligence.

Schuon on vices.

The root of all vices lies pride; Virtue is essentially consciousness of the nature of things, which situates the ego in its proper place. . . .

Virtue is less the effort of acquiring qualities than the absence of faults; for, when evil is dissolved from within and fought from without, virtue shines forth; from the beginning it has slept within man, given that it stems from his deiformity.

He also wrote:

A humble person is ready to accept even a partially unjust criticism if it comprises a grain of truth and if it comes from a person who is, if not perfect, at least worthy of respect; a humble person is not interested in having his virtue recognized; he is interested in surpassing himself, hence in pleasing God more than men.

Let us not forget the importance of one’s ambience. To repeat what Schuon said before, “In the modern world, an individual must keep an eye on the formal integrity of his ambience.”

Yesterday, there was a question asked about Schuon's own residence, and someone quoted from a poem. I will re-read that poem. “When I decorate a house or an apartment, / I keep in mind three artistic summits: / The Maghrib, Japan, and the South Seas. Simple and beautiful, / These are three formal languages, and three spiritual worlds.” This photograph is the entryway to Schuon's house. I took these photographs in 2002. You can see the Feathered Sun skin and the Cheyenne pipe bag on the left, together with the Japanese shoji screens. This next photograph is his kitchen table, where he ate all his meals. Again, American Indian artifacts, all handmade crafts.

In this photograph of his living room, you only see one chair. This is Mrs. Schuon's desk, not his. This is a photograph of Schuon's desk. You see the Balinese-Sumatran sarong and

various calligraphy. There are no chairs; he wrote on a stool. These photographs of his home bring to life something that we read yesterday from Schuon:

A generalized habit of displaying too many images and of putting them everywhere could be harmful and a priori would be contrary to our perspective. We must be very careful to realize around ourselves and in our souls a sound equilibrium between holy symbols and an emptiness open to God.

Why is an intrinsically orthodox religion important?

The criterion of an authentic spirituality is, not only the consciousness of the primacy of “*Ātmā*” and the relativity of “*Māyā*,” and then the practice of a method of realization and union combined with the sincere practice of the virtues, but also, as a formal condition, a regular attachment to an intrinsically orthodox religion. It is only thus that man presents himself as a “valid interlocutor” on the spiritual plane: first in relation to God and then in relation to his fellow men.

What constitutes an intrinsically orthodox religion? Schuon:

Three things: Divine origin, adequate doctrine, effective spiritual method. For a religion to be considered intrinsically orthodox, it must be founded on a doctrine of the Absolute which, taken as a whole is adequate. This religion must then advocate and achieve a spirituality that is proportioned to its doctrine, which is to say it must comprise sanctity both in notion and in fact. Therefore, religion must be of divine and not philosophical origin. and consequently it must be the vessel for a sacramental or theurgic presence.

On “new religions:”

It is essential to grasp that after a certain cyclic period and the hardening of the terrestrial ambience which it comprises, God no longer speaks, at least not as a revealer. In other words, after a certain period, what is put forward as a new religion is inevitably false; the Middle Ages mark “*grosso modo*,” the final limit.

Where are we? We have covered a lot of ground. We now hear Schuon's advice in response to life's most important questions from spiritual seekers of all religions.

How can I recognize false masters? This is an important question because a so-called spiritual revolution of new spiritual and religious movements proliferated during the 20th century in the West. Visionaries promised “spiritual experiences” and, in one case, “to transform everything modern man has thought about God and the human possibility.” This week's presentations provided a few touchstones. I am going to recommend that people read Harry Oldmeadow's book , *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy*, and the

chapter, “Counterfeits of the Wisdom of the Ages.” I am not suggesting that Harry is more insightful than Schuon, but Harry summarizes Schuon's thought, and his citations and footnotes are really a guide to further study. It is hard to read Schuon sometimes because, in effect, all of his work is one and there is no introduction for “Schuon 101.” When you start to read Schuon, you need to understand the vocabulary—the sacred vocabulary of five or six religions—and general metaphysics. It is difficult. Harry Oldmeadow's book is one that I often recommend.

Is metaphysical knowledge enough to be saved? Schuon:

A man may possess metaphysical certainty without possessing faith. But if metaphysical certainty suffices on the doctrinal ground, it is far from being sufficient on the spiritual level where it must be completed and enlivened by faith. Faith is nothing other than our whole being clinging to the Truth. Whether we have a direct intuition or an indirect idea of truth. It is an abuse of language to reduce “faith” to the level of “belief.” One can spend a whole lifetime speculating on the supra-sensorial and the transcendent, but all that matters is “the leap into the void,” which is the fixation of spirit and soul in an unthinkable dimension of the Real. This “leap into the void” we can refer to as “faith.”

Why does Schuon say metaphysics should be balanced with childlikeness? Schuon:

Childlikeness: To retain alongside metaphysical science, a childlike faith. Not to be exclusively adult. to retain a childlike heart capable of delighting in little things. Childlikeness is precisely that the soul is still fresh and unspent. There is gratitude for the humblest gift of the world and of life. What is more, there is an unconscious and yet wholly will trust in God. The aging man tends to see everything in connection with the whole universe. The child, on the other hand, when he takes joy over a flower the flower is the only thing. Both kinds of experiences—for each has its justification—are united in the spiritual man's sense in the sacred for the celestially Divine Archetypes.

We heard yesterday that, “Ramakrishna, when he saw a flight of cranes, a lion, a dancing girl, used to fall into ecstasy. This is what is called ‘seeing God everywhere’; not by deciphering the symbolisms, of course, but by perceiving the essences.” Schuon's poem helps us understand what he means by “seeing God everywhere” and “childlikeness.”

I know not who discovered the soap bubble —
Neither Copernicus nor Paracelsus,
Nor a philosopher brimful of ideas —
It must come from the fairy-tale land of children

And yet it is full of wisdom. For it shows
How a host of souls ascends to heaven,
Or how graces descend upon us,
Vivifying the earthly world with heavenly light;
And also how the soul, resplendent in its colors —
Each one unto itself — goes its own way.

What is the most important quality for a spiritual person? This was in a general audience. He immediately said,

Self-discipline, of course. When one understands what is discipline, one loves discipline. For discipline is a kind of beauty. It is not only a thing one imposes on oneself; it is a thing one must love because it is spiritual. Discipline is beautiful like a sunrise, or like an Indian on horseback is beautiful. As for myself, I hate lack of discipline, for it is weakness; it is cowardice; it is ugly—it is vulgar not to be disciplined. And only a disciplined person can be happy. A person without discipline is never happy.”

A short time later, he was asked, "How can I avoid sloth?" Schuon: “Self-discipline is the first condition of confidence in God’s mercy. Discipline is knowledge of ourselves—objective knowledge of ourselves. That is discipline.”

How can I recognize an authentic spiritual experience? “The terms ‘mystical’ and ‘mysticism,’” Schuon explains, “lend themselves readily to misuse by being applied to everything inward or intuitive at whatever level.” He once told me, for example, that vivid dreams may be the result of angelic, diabolic, or positive or negative psychic influences, or simply indigestion. Schuon elaborates:

When a spiritual experience is authentic and profound, it leaves a trace in us; now one must be faithful to this trace. He who has benefited from such a grace knows exactly what he must and must not do; he can no longer be exactly the same man as before. He must not seek to do extraordinary things; from the point of view of the spiritual method and social comportment, nothing changes. . . . What Heaven wants of us is our soul; it invites us therefore to inwardness. “The kingdom of God is within you.” A major spiritual event, comprising a kind of vision, cuts us off in a certain way from the world; it is as if we were living henceforth in a kind of invisible sanctuary belonging already to the hereafter; or as if we were in a small garden that is already celestial, and the happiness of which is no longer terrestrial.

How important are spiritual experiences?

A spiritual life should not depend on any sensible grace. We should not be overly interested in whether our states of soul are agreeable or not; we can certainly accept sensible graces with respect and gratitude. But what matters in the eyes of God is what we do and not what we experience.

In a letter:

When a man experiences a spiritual state or grace or if he has a vision or an audition, he must never desire that it be produced again. And above all, he must not base his spiritual life upon such a phenomenon or imagine that it conferred any eminence whatsoever upon him. The only thing that counts is to practice what brings us closer to God while observing the conditions that this practice requires.

Why is there evil in the world? To a reader, he writes:

You ask me, in substance, why is there evil in the world. Here is the reason: God, being Infinite, created the world, that is to say, the creation of the world is a necessary manifestation of His infinitude and absoluteness. Now the world is not God; not being God, it cannot be perfect; were it perfect, it would be God Himself. And the world unfolds in duration; towards the end, imperfection predominates, whereas at the beginning of humanity, it is perfection that prevails. I have spoken of this in my books, and better than I can do here in a few words.”

How do I respond to evil? Schuon:

When we encounter evil—and we owe it to God and ourselves to maintain ourselves in Peace—we may utilize the following arguments.

First, no evil can affect the Sovereign Good, nor should it trouble our relationship with God; upon contact with the absurd, we should never lose sight of absolute values.

Two, we must be aware of the metaphysical necessity of ego evil; “It must needs be that offenses come.”

Three, let us not lose sight of the limits and the relativity of evil; for “*vincit omnia veritas*.”

Four, one must obviously resign oneself to the will of God. That is to our destiny.

Destiny, by definition, is what we cannot escape.

Five, and this follows from the preceding argument — God wishes to try our faith, hence also our sincerity, our trust, and our patience; and that is why one speaks of the “trials of life.”

Six, God will not ask us to account for what others do, nor for what happens to us when we are not responsible for it. He asks us to account for what we ourselves have done.

Seven, and finally, happiness is not for this life, but for the next; perfection is not of this world, and the last word belongs to Beatitude.

How can I earn my salvation?

Being saved and bringing others to be saved. There lies our whole vocation. It has been likewise said that the good tends by its nature to communicate itself. For salvation, two things are needed before all else: Truth and Faith. Knowing something, and believing something; that is to say, knowledge of the Truth and union with the Truth.

And so also for Faith, two things are meaningful, and they concern our will; namely, an activity and an abstention. Doing what is in conformity with Truth and what gives life and depth to Faith while abstaining from what is contrary to Truth and from what is harmful to Faith. To be able to realize this throughout the whole of life, the soul has need of two virtues: Patience and Trust. Enduring for God, rejoicing in God.

Everything is there. We cannot do anything better ourselves, for ourselves, or for our fellow men. We would almost like to say, he who does not wish to be saved for his own sake, let him at least seek salvation for the love of others. For the good has liberating radiance whether we know it or not and whether we have an outward vocation or not; not everyone has to teach but everyone must be holy. In any case, the obtaining of salvation is accompanied by the consciousness that it benefits others also.

The symbolism of the lamp teaches us the relationship between Truth and Faith: the light is Truth, and the oil is Faith. Oil already somehow possesses luminosity in its own substance; this is inward Truth, inborn in us and inherent in our deepest nature. Or again: water is Truth, and wine is Faith.

Why am I so preoccupied with the world? Schuon:

There is an outer man and an inner man. The first lives in the world and undergoes its influence. Whereas the second looks toward God and lives in prayer. Now it is necessary that the outer man not affirm himself to the detriment of the inner man; it is the inverse which must take place. Instead of inflating the outer man and allowing the inner man to die, it is necessary to allow the inner man to expand and to entrust the cares of the outer to God. Prayer is there in order to reestablish equilibrium.

Who says outer man says preoccupations of the world or even world; in effect, there is in every man a tendency to attach himself too much to this or that element of

passing life or to worry about it too much and the adversary takes advantage of this in order to cause troubles for us.

There is also the desire to be happier than one is, or the desire not to suffer any injustices, even small ones, and harmless ones, or the desire always to understand everything, or the desire never to be disappointed. All of this is in the domain of subtle worlds which must be countered by serene detachment, by the principial and initial certainty of that which alone matters and by patience and confidence.

When no help comes from heaven, this is because it is a question of a difficulty which we can and must resolve with the means which heaven has placed at our disposal. In an absolute way, it is necessary to find our happiness in prayer; that is to say, that it is necessary to find therein sufficient happiness so as not to allow ourselves to be excessively troubled by things of the world, seeing that dissonances cannot but exist, the world being what it is.

There is the desire not to suffer any injustices or simply not to be placed at a disadvantage. Now, one of two things: either the injustices are the result of our past faults and in this case our trials exhaust the causal mass; or the injustices result from our character and in this case our trials bear witness to it.

In both cases, we must thank God and pray to him with all the more fervor without preoccupying ourselves with worldly chaff. One must also say to oneself, that the grace of the remembrance of God compensates infinitely for every dissonance from which we can suffer, and that in relation to this grace, the inequality of terrestrial favors is a pure nothingness. Let us never forget that an infinite grace compels us to an infinite gratitude and that the first stage of gratitude is a sense of proportion.”

Why is there damnation? Schuon:

God has opened a door in the middle of creation, and this open door of the world towards God is man; this opening is God’s invitation to look towards Him, to tend towards Him, to persevere with regard to Him and to return to Him. And this enables us to understand why the door closes at death when it has been scorned during life; for to be man means nothing other than to look beyond and to pass through the door. Unbelief and paganism are whatever turns its back on the door; on its threshold light and darkness separate.

The notion of Hell becomes perfectly clear when we think how senseless it is — and what a waste and a suicide — to slip through the human state without being truly man, that is, to pass God by, and thus to pass our own souls by, as if we had any right to human faculties apart from the return to God, and as if there were any point

in the miracle of the human state apart from the end which is prefigured in man himself; or again: as if God had had no motive in giving us an intelligence which discerns and a will which chooses.

Given that this door is a center — and it must be one since it leads to God — it corresponds to a rare and precious possibility, and one that is unique for its surroundings. And this explains why there is a damnation; for he who has refused to pass through the door will never afterwards be able to cross its threshold. Hence the representation of the afterlife as an implacable alternative: seen from the door — that is, from the human state — there is no choice other than between the inside and the outside.

What means everything for man is that the intelligence should become in fact, what it is in principle, and likewise, that the will should become really free thanks to the object which corresponds to it. In other terms: the intelligence is not truly intelligence except insofar as it discerns between the Real and the illusory, and the will is not truly free except insofar as it strives towards the Real.

What if I have trouble praying? Schuon:

What you should do above all is to practice free prayer in which you must tell God as you will a person all of your troubles. Someone once said to me, “But I cannot pray.” And I answered, “Then say to God, ‘I cannot pray.’ But express it, then the spell will be broken.”

How important are my friendships? Schuon cited a quote attributed to Molière on the importance of choosing one's friends. “Tell me who you frequent, and I will tell you who you are.”

How can I resolve a problem? Schuon:

First means: **Reflection**. In order to resolve a problem of the soul or of the world which surrounds us, we must first have recourse to our intelligence, which permits us either to discover the causes of an ill, or to understand its nature if it is a fault, or again to evaluate the data of an outward difficulty. The consciousness of an infirmity of soul contains the remedy. . . .

Second means: **Consultation**. That which our personal intelligence does not permit us to resolve can possibly be resolved by the intelligence of someone else, inasmuch as a person who is a stranger to a problem often envisages it with more objectivity than the person involved. For this reason, Consultation is the logical prolongation of Reflection; it is moreover a proof of humility and wisdom to appeal

to the insights of another, just as conversely it is a proof of pride and stupidity to intentionally deprive oneself thereof.

It would also be a sign of pride not to confide in a person because one underestimates him or because one overestimates oneself. . . In certain cases, Consultation is an imperative duty, for it is a grave offense to keep false certitudes in one's heart; unresolved misunderstandings can ruin a spiritual life.

Third means: **Prayer**. It is possible that neither Reflection nor Consultation suffices in order to solve a problem; in this case one must take recourse in Prayer; one must expose before God all the objective and subjective data of the difficulty. We must submit in advance to the Will of Heaven; but we must pray boldly. . . . One must, in praying, express gratitude as well as trust.

How important is the advice of learned elders? We will not discuss it now, but it is something we all need to reflect upon. And, do you need to actively search for their advice?

Someone in the audience yesterday asked me to summarize the message of the Sun Dance Chief and the Metaphysician; so, I am going to answer in their own words. We will first hear two excerpts from, "Make Your Choice," the final chapter of Yellowtail's autobiography. Then, Schuon's wife of almost 50 years answers the question, "What was Schuon's function in the world?" And we close with the letter Schuon wrote to his older brother shortly before his brother's death.

In this film clip, Yellowtail is explaining his essential message, including the view of the relationship of diverse religion:

Yellowtail's message has two essential parts: first, he wanted every person, regardless of race, to choose a religion and pray, while still respecting people who follow other religions. Yellowtail studied each of the great world religions. He believed that if people knew more about different religions, it would deepen their love of God in their own chosen form of prayer. [Yellowtail's prayer] "You have given different ways to different people. As we know, this earth is round like a wagon wheel. In a wagon wheel, all the spokes are set into the center. The circle of the wheel is round and all spokes come from the center and the center is You, 'the Maker of All Things Above.' Each spoke can be considered as a different religion of the world which has been given by You to different people and different races. All of the people of the world are on the rim of the wheel, and they must follow one of the spokes to the center. We all pray to the same God, to You. Help us to see this wisdom. Aho, Aho."

Of equal importance, he wanted every American Indian to learn about the spiritual traditions of their ancestors. While many of those traditions have been lost, Yellowtail believed that what remains is sufficient to constitute a valid spiritual path, what he called the Sun Dance Religion.

[Yellowtail] "It is important for the young people to understand and follow their traditional religion. Each man will pass from this earth in his own time. But I know that we will have to make a choice. Each one of us must choose at this present moment which path to follow. So many young people wonder, do I have an opportunity to lead a life in accordance with the traditional spiritual ways? Each person's prayers can help everyone. A person who prays and remembers God will receive the greatest benefit for himself and for others."

So, a little bit more advice from Mr. Yellowtail:

I tell this to young people. You must choose a religion. But before you enter one, you should know which one is best for you. Take the time. Find out all you can about the method of prayer and about what that religion tells you about the maker of all things above. You should understand the rules and know what is expected. Find a path that provides you with the way you need to live a good life every day.

Madame Schuon speaks about her husband's function in the world:

Well, his function in the world is really to bring people back to practice their religion, which is so important, and to bring them back to a path that leads to God; and he has done it. I mean in his books he has encouraged them to do that, and I know that many, many people have gone back and practice their religion very seriously because this is he wants; he wants to help people to go back to where we belong.

Schuon's letter to his older brother shortly before brother's death.

When all is said and done, life is simple. One stands before God from birth to death; the important thing is to be aware of this and to draw the consequences from it. Consciousness of the Sovereign Good is the greatest of consolations. It should keep us in equilibrium always. What results from this consciousness is first of all the quality of resignation, the constant acceptance of God's Will; this virtue is difficult to the extent that we wish to force the world to be other than it is, to be logical for example.

The complement of resignation is trust; God is good and everything is in His Hands. There is also gratitude, for every man has reasons to be thankful; one must remember frequently the good things we enjoy and not forget them because we lack

something else. Finally, one must do something in life, for man is an active being and the best of acts is the one which has God as its object, and this is prayer.

Schuon writes about different paths, spiritual paths, including those that emphasize knowledge, those that emphasize devotion and faith, and those that emphasize action, whether good works or penance. Schuon's way, I believe, is a path of truth and beauty. Now, make your choice.

Mitákuye oyás'ín. “All things are related” and “we are all relatives.”

It is time now for the questions and answers and we want to thank everyone for the questions that they sent in.

Q: The first question: “We have religious pluralism in America, many religions, many ideologies, many perspectives. A benefit or an inhibitor in coming to terms with the consequences of relativism?”

A: Let us start back farther. As you all know, each of the great religions had its own geographical area and there was very little communication between the religions prior to the 20th century. In the 20th century, communication between the religions happens more, and more, and more. And one of the consequences is that the outer forms of the religions conflict, so the conflicts create confusion in the eyes of believers. They question the validity of religion, as such. There really are only three ways to view religion: either there is no religion, or there is one valid religion, or there are multiple valid religions; but, if the latter, how do you explain the outer differences? This is an important question.

There is only one way it can be explained: through the idea of the “Transcendent Unity of religions” and through the Perennialist point of view; this includes the idea of the “inner Oneness within the religions,” and that each sector of mankind, over millennia and around the world, was given its own providential Revelation from God. There are obviously going to be differences that take into account the various tendencies and characteristics for each of these collectivities because God has many faces, many facets, many Archetypes. It is only logical that different Archetypes will manifest as different Revelations. When that happens, this Archetype is different than that one, so there are inevitable conflicting differences in the forms of the religions.

For example, we spoke yesterday about the conflicts arising because of the ambiguity of beauty; you have some religions that proscribe all human images, whether in painting or in sculpture—take Islam for example, at least in principle; then you have other religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, many of the Far Eastern religions, that see the essence within the

symbol—they see through the symbol to the Archetype. We spoke about how Semitic peoples often look at a statue or a painting and tend to idolize the statue or the painting, instead of seeing through to the Essences; we call this the “metaphysical transparency of phenomena.”

Such conflicts create confusion and relativism is the beneficiary. We started seeing relativism in the Middle Ages; at first it progressed slowly, but the pace of relativism accelerated dramatically in the 20th century because, in part, the relativists can point to the apparent conflicts between the religions and say, “there is no religion.”

On Day Two we saw statistics about the accelerating loss of faith. That is, in my opinion, a direct result of scientism, but also of relativism; these are two of the “guises of modernism,” to use Schuon's phrase. We only had time to study a few of the many guises of modernism; but, all of these facets of modernism encourage relativism. Again, one of the solutions, I would say the only solution, is for believers to understand that the common enemy of every religion is modernism. Whether you agree with different religion or not, you need to stand shoulder-to-shoulder to resist modernism, in all of its guises. I think that is the solution. And the esoteric ecumenism that we heard Schuon outline is really the right forum to do that.

Q: “Following on from what you are saying now, as we approach the end of the *kali-yuga*, do you expect an esoteric alliance centered on the Transcendent Unity of religions?”

A: Well, I hope for one. And in fact, I do think that there is already an esoteric alliance of sorts based on the Transcendent Unity of religion that is taking place slowly. I don't know how far it will go, God only knows that; but I think that it will spread—that Truth will spread; it cannot help but spread. It will be, in effect, a counter to the forces of relativism and scientism. As more, and more people reject modernism, what are their alternatives? Well, they are going to have to go to this question of “esoteric ecumenism” and understanding the Transcendent Unity of religion. So, I believe it will happen; I don't know exactly to what extent it will take place. As Schuon said, and we quoted it, “in our epoch, you can only save individuals; you can no longer save collectivities.” So, I think that the work and the conversations that take place will be largely between small groups and individuals, but everything is in God's hands.

I had the great fortune to travel for three and a half weeks in the West with Titus Burckhardt, one of Mr. Schuon's closest friends. In fact, Schuon wrote a poem; in the first verse, he talks about God occasionally gives people a brother soul to embellish the path; and in the second verse, he says “Titus Burckhardt was such for me, a friend from earliest time;” so, a great Perennialist. We were talking about the future, end of days, various things. He said

that it is useless to try to interpret any prophecies or make estimates as to what is going to happen, or when, or how this or that is going to happen. He said that the great battle between good and evil is really taking place above our physical world—at the subtle realms and in the angelic realms. He added that prophecies are polyvalent—there are multiple levels at which they can be understood; we may or may not see various prophecies unfold; it is impossible to know. The point of this story is that all we can do is pray and focus on the virtues: prayer, virtue, interiorizing ambience, with the metaphysical certitude.

Many of the people here, most of the people here, have the vocation to understand metaphysics. One of the questions that came up earlier was , “is there an obligation to speak out for someone who teaches?” And my answer, somewhat humorous, but true, was “it depends on if you have tenure.” But the reality is that if you are in a position to do so, I think it is incumbent on everyone to speak out and speak the truth. As Schuon said in one of the quotations I just read, “it is man's vocation to save oneself and one's neighbor;” the way to do that is to manifest oneself properly in all ways, follow all of his various recommendations, and then speak the truth to the neighbor.

Q: “Could you explain the difference between eclecticism, acceptable syncretism and heterodox syncretism and also the difference between ‘intrinsically orthodox religion’ and ‘new age religion’?”

A: Let us start with “eclecticism.” Eclecticism combines diverse ideas from multiple sources into a single paradigm. Schuon:

Eclecticism is natural wherever different doctrines exist side by side, as is proved by the integration of Platonism or Aristotelianism with Christianity. The important thing in any case of the kind is that the original perspective should remain faithful to itself and should only accept alien concepts in so far as they corroborate its faithfulness by helping to illuminate the fundamental intentions of its own perspective.

We have engaged in eclecticism in our discussions of the ways different religions view Absolute Reality, cosmic cycles and modernity. Schuon notes other examples of eclecticism:

The Christians had no reason at all for refusing to be inspired by Greek wisdom since it was at hand, and in the same way the Moslems could not help making use to a certain extent in their mystical doctrine of Neoplatonic concepts as soon as they became aware of them. . .

It is helpful to have an overview of “syncretism.” In the context of religion, syncretism is the blending or merging of distinct elements from different spiritual traditions into a unified system. Schuon provides an overview:

Syncretism is a perspective which mixes different religious elements. This may not be a bad thing, and we have a certain right to do this slightly without disturbing orthodoxy. Some orthodox Sufi orders adopt Negro music and are orthodox none-the-less. If an orthodox Muslim displays the art or crafts of any other traditional culture in his home, he is being syncretic. However, if you mix the doctrine or the rites between religions into one methodical practice – it becomes heretical.

So, we have both “acceptable syncretism” and “heterodox syncretism,” depending on the circumstances. Many of us routinely practice “acceptable syncretism” when we display crafts from different religions in our ambience or listen to world music from different traditions. Schuon identifies the limit to maintain acceptable syncretism, “There have never been borrowings between two living religions of essential elements affecting their fundamental structures.” If that were to occur, the result is heterodoxy.

What is “heterodox syncretism?” Syncretism becomes heterodox when you mix ritual elements or essential doctrines from two spiritual traditions into one methodical practice. Schuon provides context:

It is notorious that heterodoxies always tend to adulterate either the idea of the divine Principle or the manner of our attachment to it; they offer either a worldly, profane or, if you like, “humanist” counterfeit of religion, or else a mysticism with a content of nothing but the ego and its illusions.

What is a “New Age religion?” So-called “New Age religions” are prominent and wide-spread examples of heterodoxy. These “new religions” employ a “pick and choose” approach that reduces religious praxis to a smorgasbord of personal preferences rather than a Divinely integrated doctrine and method. That is completely out!

Schuon points out that the line between acceptable syncretism and heterodoxy can be subtle:

We would like to say a few words concerning the integration of a foreign element into a particular traditional formalism; this problem places us between syncretism, which is intrinsically heterodox, and esoterism, which in certain cases can admit such coincidences. . . . Such exceptions depend upon certain subjective as well as objective conditions; therefore, we must ask not only what has been done, but also by whom and for what reason.

One such exception is the “dual participation” of many American Indians in both their ancestral traditions and Christianity. Dual participation can be acceptable syncretism on two conditions. First, participants do not mix the ritual forms or essential dogma of the two spiritual traditions. Many Plains peoples will fervently take part in their ancestral rites in a traditional manner, then

later go to Church and pray in a Christian manner. As Trehero (1871 – 1985) noted: “It is ‘bad medicine’ to mix a practice from one religion into the rites of another religion.”

Second, dual participation is limited to a shamanistic tradition and a religion. Dual participation is not possible between two “religious formalisms.” Shamanistic traditions are supra-formal, whereas religions are crystallized forms. Shamanisms are also completely inclusive of all other religious traditions, whereas religions are exclusivist, either in principle or in fact. Other notable examples of dual participation with a shamanism and religion include Shinto with Buddhism in Japan, Bon-Po with Buddhism in Tibet, and Confucian and Taoist branches with Buddhism in China.

We are now full circle to Schuon’s recommendation to follow one “intrinsically orthodox religion.” We recall his criteria: “*Divine origin, adequate doctrine, and an effective spiritual method.*”

So, if in your spiritual search you find the ideas from a particular person or group are not consistent with orthodoxy, particularly if they want to blend rites of multiple religions: run! My wife and I, when we were looking for a spiritual path, drove all over the United States looking at different people that we were interested in meeting; and, then luckily my path came to Mr. Yellowtail. But the point is: look at what you are getting involved in; understand it, and make sure that it is not trying to integrate elements from multiple religions. Follow a religion, pick that. That is the uniform advice that you have had here. I think we have covered all the elements of the question.

Q: “How do I know which religion is best for me to practice? And while I determine what religion is best for me to follow, what should I do in the interim?”

A: Good question. Well, certainly studying the different fundamental parts of the religions, different religions, is important because this is where personal affinity can also come in. Schuon wrote, when he was about 88, to a doctoral student who was from Germany who came to interview him. -Schuon was asked about finding his own spiritual path and he wrote basically, and I am paraphrasing loosely, that from his youth he was always very attracted to Hinduism, and this was the primary metaphysic that motivated him; but he could not be a Hindu because you have to be born into a Hindu caste, due to the different laws for each caste. What was primary for Schuon was finding a spiritual master, and he wrote, “the form did not matter to me,” “the form did not matter to me.” Martin Lings, one of his close friends, said later that “Schuon told me that if I did not love a religion, I would study it until I did love it.”

Both Yellowtail and Schuon are not suggesting a particular religion. They are suggesting “a religion”. Pick it; personal affinity comes in; and the relationship you have with whoever you

are going to be close to, because I go back to what we spoke about: “Tell me who you frequent, and I will tell you who you are.” You are going to need the advice of other people; pick your friends and your path carefully. In the interim, I believe Schuon would say, “Talk to God. Tell God your troubles.” Remember: how do you resolve a problem? Well, first with your intelligence, then by asking others, then by prayer. We just heard that. So, these answers are not mysterious, but you have to talk to God. And in the end, it is establishing a comfortable equilibrium between yourself and God.

Q: “‘Black Elk Speaks’ ends with the words, ‘The nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.’ Could you say more about the role of Schuon played in helping to revive the Sun Dance Religion and of his relationship with Black Elk?”

A: My pleasure. First, I am searching for various quotations that I keep on hand that help me to cite Mr. Schuon more. . . . Now, let us start with, “what was Black Elk's vision?” I do not know how many of you have read Black Elk. As we said, there are over a million copies in print—the most famous book about American Indians, and it is an incredible vision that this man had. Different attempts are made to put it in context. This is a letter in 1977 from Mr. Schuon to Joseph Brown; they maintained correspondence; Brown came here several times after Schuon moved, in fact stayed in our home; they kept a close relationship. Schuon, “

How does one explain to an academic that Black Elk, in his subtle form, was reabsorbed into the world of the Archetypes, passing through the subtle state and stopping at the threshold of the Archangelic World; . . . [snip of several principles required to understand Black Elk's vision]; that the goal of spiritual methods is the abolition of the scission between individual consciousness and universal consciousness. How does one explain this to academics? And how can one understand the wisdom of the Indians without knowing all of that?

This puts into context the incredible nature of Black Elk's vision. We spoke the other day about how Brown wrote to Schuon for spiritual advice in 1946; Schuon asked for books on the Indians; Brown sent him, among others, *Black Elk Speaks*; and Schuon said, “I think this man has more to say than he said in *Black Elk Speaks*. Please find him.” And Brown did. The relationship between Black Elk and Schuon became very close. Black Elk took Father Gaul, Erich Schuon, as his son; gave him the name “Lakota Ishnala,” “Lone Lakota.” He was a priest in a Belgium monastery who knew fluent Lakota; he was very close to the Lakota even before this time; this reinforces the point that “love of the Indians was a family tradition” with the Schuons, as we heard the other day. But, the real relationship was with Black Elk and Schuon. This is a quote from Brown's letter to John Murray; I mentioned

Murray earlier; a close friend of Schuon who was also writing to various American Indian elders. Brown:

He, Black Elk, said that he has told as yet no one about the sacred rites of the Lakota but was telling me because he believed it was connected with my being there and with the holy man who had sent me. The letter from the Shaykh has had tremendous impact on him. His son translated the whole letter, he is excellent at this, and you should also know that he has responded extremely well.

Brown in a subsequent letter:

One might mention, and I do not think that I have done so before, that one of the reasons why old Black Elk has been so receptive to us is the fact that some time ago he had a vision in which he saw that holy men, or representatives of them, would come to him and his people from the East and were to help him in his work. A few days ago, he told me that he is very happy, and he should die soon, but he knows that his work shall be continued by the Shaykh and others.

We spoke on Day 1 about the creation of *The Sacred Pipe*, the book, the seven sacred rites, preserving the wisdom, and also the week-long ceremonials that Brown sponsored where all the old men, almost 100, from different reservations came, brought their sacred pipes, apologized to God for having not prayed more often and promised to renew the tradition. I think that all of this is part of what Black Elk was talking about with Schuon continuing his work. As we saw when we brought the history up to date of the Indians, there is a flowering going on. There are multiple Sun Dances going on during the months of July and August on the Lakota reservations. I am delighted with the growth, and the growth with young people, in the Crow and the Shoshone Sun Dances. A sort of required reading for new, young Crow Sun Dancers is to watch the film that we produced, *The Sun Dance Way*. I am very pleased about that, and you heard what James Trosper had to say about the work that I have been blessed with doing. All of these things helped to renew the Sun Dance Way and they are the direct result of Schuon's influence, both from prayer but also actively encouraging support of the American Indians. It is a precious, very precious, thing that happens and it is an incredible miracle that it takes place. I think that Mr. Schuon has had a material influence in the regeneration of that broken sacred tree; and it gave Black Elk a lot of solace.

At the end of Black Elk's life, Schuon knew that he was very ill and had very little time left on this earth. So, the Schuons had the habit every evening of going to a place of solitude and praying on rosaries for Black Elk. At that same time, although in a much different time zone, Black Elk was having visitations from a holy man from Europe. When his daughter, Lucy Looks Twice, came into the room during these visitations, he shooed her out, saying "you

have interrupted the presence of the holy man from the East.” Lucy Looks Twice was scared by this man from the East who was having this mystical connection with her father. She eventually thought that a Moroccan rosary that Schuon gave to Brown, and Brown gave to Black Elk, was the source of this mystical connection that was taking place. She took it away but then later, feeling very guilty, put the rosary in Black Elk’s in his coffin; so Black Elk is buried with a Moroccan rosary that once belonged to Schuon. This is recounted by Brown, but it is also recounted in Michael Steltenkamp’s book on Black Elk’s life—he is a Catholic priest. Was it Schuon? God knows best. But I certainly do not think it is simply a coincidence. There was a strong mystical and metaphysical connection between Black Elk and the Schuon. He gave Mrs. Schuon the name Wambli Oyate Win, “Eagle People Woman,” and said Schuon was the leader of the “eagle people.” So yes, there was a profound connection. I am very happy to report that traditional American Indian spirituality is strong.

Q: “Could you elaborate further on what Schuon calls the “ambiguity of beauty” and, in particular, of sacred nudity?”

A: Certainly. We spoke yesterday about the ambiguity of beauty—you have saints and sages from different religions who have a diametrically opposed point of view on sacred nudity, or any human figure. The conflicts are one of the causes for confusion, both with believers and with non-believers, that results in relativism. On the one hand, the average person, what I will call the exoteric believer, is the focus of most religions. They do not need to understand metaphysics if they pray sincerely and abstain from sin; if so, their faith can save them. This is the important point. On the other hand, there are those who have a vocation for metaphysics; they can understand the esoteric teachings. I summarize that as the “inner Oneness of religions,” or “the Transcendent Unity of religions.” People with that vocation look at various forms of human beauty, physical beauty, and see the Divine Archetype within the object, whether sacred art or the human body. For example, as we heard about Ramakrishna, a beautiful object would put him into a spiritual state, literally. This is what Schuon referred to as the “metaphysical transparency of phenomena” and “seeing God everywhere.”

This ability to see God everywhere is particularly evident in the Far East, as we saw with the many statues with sacred nudity. In fact, there was a time historically when the Brahmin women were prescribed to be bare breasted, so that they could share the *barakah* of their spiritual presence with the community, as a whole. With American Indians, also, some sacred nudity for women was historically the norm. This brings to mind a story.

The Pte San Win, the “White Buffalo Cow Woman,” brought the original Sacred Pipe to the Sioux. There are variations in the origin story, but I will summarize the key points.

Two men were scouting far from the village and saw a beautiful woman walking toward them. One man had impure thoughts about the maiden. The other man realized her sacred nature and warned his companion, but the companion went to her with bad intentions. He was wiped out in a cloud, with snakes coming out of his skull. The celestial maiden said to the survivor, "I am coming with a sacred gift for the people that will change their ways." She later came to the tipi village, presented the Sacred Pipe to the chief and brought their sacred rites. As she left, she rolled on the ground four times. After the fourth time, she emerged as a white buffalo cow. That is the essential origin story.

Prior to 1980, the stories reported by the priests and anthropologists say that the Pte San Win came dressed in white buckskin. But in 1980 a book was published with translations of recordings that were made by the doctor at the Pine Ridge Reservation at the turn of the century—1899 through 1902—with a large number of the spiritual leaders of the Sioux. Those recordings recount that this celestial maiden, the revealer of the sacred rites of the Sioux, came naked. Scholars believe that the Christian missionaries were horrified when they first heard the accounts of the coming of a naked Indian goddess, so the Indians altered the original story to say she was clothed in white buckskin.

Schuon painted the "Pte San Win" naked starting in the 1960s. I was at lunch with Mr. Schuon, and I said "there are new accounts that have just come to light of the coming of the Pte San Win with sacred nudity, but you painted her naked years ago. How did you know?" He looked at me and said, "I just knew." And I said, "Ya, Shaykh, that is just not satisfying. Please, you have to say more." And he said, "The Pte San Win is the goddess of a primordial religion. As such, she had to be naked. It could not be otherwise. It is the same as Avalokiteśvara . . ." Schuon then identified seven or eight names of naked goddesses in Buddhism and Hinduism—on Day 3 we saw statutes of many naked goddesses from the Far East. For the oriental mind, and for the traditional Indian mind, sacred nudity is a way to shower humanity with blessings; for most of the Semitics, it is not; it leads to sin. Once again, you have the ambiguity of beauty, particularly regarding sacred nudity. The best way I can summarize is to say that both possibilities are fine; they are legitimate; no one should try to change the minds of someone if they have a strong belief in either point of view. This again points to the question, "do you have a vocation of metaphysics?" If not, fine; if so, fine.

Q: "Yesterday you reviewed several different types of beauty. Which forms of beauty are the most important as a support for the spiritual life?"

A: We heard Mr. Schuon explain the "four essential elements of his philosophy." This is a very important summary. Number three is, "intrinsic morality," which is "beauty of the soul." They are synonymous, and intrinsic morality is imperative on everyone. I do not know

what Schuon would say, but I believe that intrinsic morality is more important than the beauty surrounding us, of “interiorizing beauty.” The strong emphasis Schuon places on Interiorizing beauty is somewhat unique. This is an excerpt of a letter he wrote to Hans Kúry, his close friend:

I am glad you have found a good new place to live. I have always given a higher significance to living spaces and forms in the broadest sense, than is usually done. The body is the first form, dress the second, living space the third, the house is the fourth, landscape the fifth. Everything has its respective meaning.

I think that is the best I can come up with.

Q: “What is your advice or what do you think Schuon would advise for the younger generation given the state of the world?”

A: Let us start with advice for parents. Based on my experience, I believe that the two areas that are very important to communicate to children are a “sense of the sacred,” in the profound meaning, which includes belief in a God Who is both Transcendent and Immanent; and an understanding of what Schuon would call “the guises of modernism,” that is some sense that the fundamental premises of the modern world are false. And, if you can help a young person understand those two principles, then I think they have the proper foundation to address life’s challenges.

I think Schuon would advise individuals to learn basic information about the different religions and to understand metaphysics, to the extent you have the vocation. There are different degrees of metaphysical understanding—everyone can understand certain things, such as there is a God that is both Transcendent and Immanent. On Day 2, four different religious traditions provided answers to, “what is God?” The first one being Taoism, which says in effect that “God is ineffable and any attempt to define God is not the real God.” Then we have the Vedas, “‘Brahman,’ or God, is Real; the world, or Maya, is unreal; and the individual soul is not other than God.” As Schuon says, “the Upanishads and Shankara’s wisdom is contained there.” Then you have the American Indians’ answer, and we will not go over that one again. Then you have the “Five Divine Presences”—the Sufi point of view. I have a particular fondness for that because I think it helps to understand the concentric circles through which the Divine emanates.

Then look both for a religion and a group of fellow travelers that you are comfortable with, that can help you to stay on a spiritual path and resist the temptations of modernity, because the temptations are manifest. Everyone, including me, is sucked into many of them. How do we resist those? We have heard Schuon’s thinking. Now you must “make your choice;” it comes down to that: “make your choice.” We held up all of the ideas that

characterize modernism; those are absolutely accepted by the predominant society. And then we reviewed the “Perennialist” views that represent the Truth within each intrinsically orthodox religion. I hope you choose that path. Now you must make your choice.

Thank you.