

stability) occupying the center of a circumference that is the terrestrial (human) slice of universal existence.

7. Let us add that this law ought to be regarded normally as an application or a human specification of the cosmic law itself, which links equally all manifestation to Principle, as we have explained elsewhere in reference to the significance of the Laws of Manu in Hindu doctrine.
8. That is, as in the symbol of alpha and omega, the First and the Last.
9. One could also translate this as "the Evident" (in relationship to manifestation) and the Hidden (in Himself), which correspond again to two points of view of the *Shari'ah* (social and religious order) and *Haqiqah* (purely intellectual and metaphysical order), since this latter can be said to be beyond all points of view, as comprising them all synthetically within itself.

## Frithjof Schuon and the Islamic Tradition

by Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Now that Frithjof Schuon has left this earthly plane and it has become public knowledge that his initiatic name was Shaykh 'Îsâ Nûr al-Dîn Ahmad al-Shâdhilî al-'Alawî al-Maryamî, it is important to bring out into the open his relation to the Islamic tradition within which he functioned as the spiritual teacher of a branch of one of the most important orders (*turuq*) into which Sufism crystallized after the early centuries of Islamic history. It is particularly important to deal with this subject because a misunderstanding can be created in the minds of certain people who have read of his constant reference to the *religio perennis* and the primordial tradition and who might therefore be unaware of his essential relation with Islam, a relation about which he did not write publicly. Schuon was of course the great expositor of esoterism and the *sophia perennis* of his day and always spoke publicly in the name of that universal and perennial wisdom which he also called *religio cordis*. If asked what was his religion by an outsider, he would say the perennial religion or the religion of the heart which is in fact the same answer that was given to this question by Ibn 'Arabî and Rûmî as well as many other classical Sufi figures.

Without doubt Schuon was deeply interested in pure esoterism and gnosis whose veritable nature he unveiled in so many of his works. He also spoke of the subtle differences between Islamic esoterism and esoteric Islam

and his greater interest in the first over the second. But he also knew fully well that there was a place where the two met. Moreover, he wrote clearly that whereas esoterism issues from the Truth which is the source of both esoterism and exoterism and not from exoterism, to practice an authentic spiritual path implies the acceptance of the exoteric dimension and its practice which lays the foundation for embarkation upon the esoteric path. In other words, in Islamic terminology both the *Tariqah* or spiritual path and the *Sharî'ah* or Divine Law issue from the *Haqîqah* or Truth which is the source of both and not from each other, but to enter the *Tariqah* one must first accept and practice the *Sharî'ah*. This is exactly what Schuon required of his disciples while like certain Sufis of old, but in a wider context, he spoke of the religion of the heart and pure esoterism. His function to speak of pure esoterism should not, however, detract anyone for one moment from thinking that he was anything other than a Muslim in the deepest sense of the term and that he practiced the tenets of the Islamic tradition on both the levels of the Law and the Way while emphasizing always the inner or esoteric meaning of the exoteric rites and practices again in conformity with classical Sufism especially of figures such as Rûmî.

Besides speaking of the *religio cordis*, Schuon often expressed his attraction to the metaphysical formulations of the school of Shankara and the primordial ambience of the North American Native Traditions. These assertions, added to the misinterpretation by many outsiders as well as some in his entourage concerning his understanding of the significance of the Indian forms which he loved dearly and with which he concerned himself personally, have caused many to doubt the Islamic character of his teachings especially at the end of his life.

Yet he told us often that his love for such matters as Native American culture, art, and religion was a personal inclination having nothing to do with the *tariqah* which he had founded and which was based on pure Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxy. As a matter of fact, to his last days he remained deeply attached to the Islamic tradition, performed the Islamic rites and read the Quran. The invocation of God's Name as revealed in the Quran did not leave his lips until the very moment of death.

Schuon became attracted to Islam after beginning his studies of Arabic which led to his formal entry into the religion in 1932 in Paris where he was working at the time. He recounted the story that one day while pondering what to do, he prayed to God and made the vow that if he were to receive a sign from Heaven on a particular day before noon he would embrace whatever religion that sign indicated. On that day he left his apartment a quarter before twelve and walked toward a main thoroughfare. At five minutes before noon suddenly a whole group of North African soldiers on horseback in complete Islamic dress appeared in the street and marched by. The meaning of this unlikely sign in the middle of Paris was obvious and Schuon decided to fulfill his vow to God, and embraced Islam immediately. Thereafter, he attended the Paris mosque often but he told us that he learned the *Sûrat al-fâtihah* (the opening chapter of the Quran), which is recited during the daily prayers, in Switzerland from the Persian scholar Sayyid Hasan Imâmî, who was later to become the Imam-jum'ah of Tehran. From that period of his life onward, Schuon adopted Islamic dress while at home. He wore that dress especially in its *maghribî* form<sup>1</sup> throughout his life, learned the *maghribî* style of calligraphy which he wrote beautifully, being a gifted artist even at that young age, and spoke

Arabic to those who knew the tongue. His journey to Algeria in 1932 where he spent several months and most important of all where he met Shaykh Ahmad al-'Alawî, who initiated the young Schuon into Sufism, only strengthened his bond to the Islamic tradition in general and the traditional ambience of the Maghrib in particular.<sup>2</sup> He was to journey to Algeria and Morocco again in 1934, and to Egypt in 1938 to meet René Guénon. He was to visit Morocco again several times later in the 1960's while he also journeyed to Turkey twice to visit the House of the Virgin, the Maryamana, in Kuçadasi in the same period. He never made the pilgrimage to Mecca but was always joyous when his disciples made that sacred journey and would sometimes say that he participated in such pilgrimages inwardly. He therefore had also experienced much of the Islamic world, especially the Maghrib, personally and had a first hand knowledge of it.

The private life of Schuon was in fact carried out in an atmosphere which recreated the traditional Islamic ambience in the heart of the West. The interior of his house was like the most beautiful traditional *maghribî* home and in it one hardly felt separated from the traditional atmosphere of the Islamic world. But it was not only his immediate ambience that was filled with objects of Islamic art. His days were punctuated with the daily prayers and when he was younger he fasted not only during Ramadan, but also many other days of the year following the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Almost every day he recited the Quran. We remember when in the 60's he began to travel more extensively, he asked us to send him the thirty parts (*juz'*) of the Quran in separate bindings so that he could take one or two along without having to carry the whole book which in its larger printings is of course heavy. From the time of his conversion to Islam,

he lived as a Muslim although hidden from the public, practicing the tradition from its exoteric to the most esoteric level. As already mentioned, his being the great spokesman for esoterism and universal metaphysics did not affect his being a Muslim on the plane of forms. Although he wrote eloquently of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shamanism and other religions, his name for his followers remained Shaykh 'Īsa Nūr al-Dīn Ahmad and not something else. And when he died he was buried according to Islamic rites carried out strictly on the basis of traditional practices.

Those who were born in the Islamic world and who had had concrete experience of what the Sufis call "Muhammadan grace" or *al-barakat al-muhammadiyah*, spoke unanimously of the fact that when they came to meet Schuon in his house, they immediately felt the presence of that *barakah* and smelled its unmistakable perfume. Such was also our own experience when we first met him in Lausanne after a period of correspondence. Having met many saintly people in Persia including several Sufi masters and having visited many Islamic holy places, we were utterly astounded by the powerful presence of the Muhammadan *barakah* emanating from him when we first met him in his house in a narrow street overlooking Lake Lemán in Pully outside of Lausanne. Clearly, despite his universal function to express the truth at the heart of all religions globally, Schuon himself was rooted in the Islamic tradition and more particularly in the soil of Sufism. Without this root he could have never established a *tarîqah* within which it was possible to practice and to realize the truths about which he wrote so eloquently in his books and articles.

What Schuon loved most in Islam was the assertion of the Doctrine of the Unity of the reality of the Divine

Principle as Absolute, Infinite and Perfection which he equated with the supreme Goodness of Plato. Schuon basked in the shining rays of the *Shahâdah* and considered the first *Shahâdah*, *Lâ ilâha illâ'LLâh*, as the most perfect formulation of integral metaphysics. He in fact composed some of the most profound commentaries ever written upon the two *Shahâdahs* relating the second *Shahâdah*, *Muhammad rasûl Allâh* to the *illâ* of the first *Shahâdah* and showing its deepest meaning as formulation of the truth of the coming forth of all things from the Divine Principle. Schuon's practice of Sufism revolved around the *Shahâdah* and the Supreme Name which absorb and integrate all other Names and litanies into their principle and origin while his theoretical exposition of Sufi metaphysics always came back to the central truth contained in the *Shahâdah*. He also lived and breathed in its truth and the Supreme Name with which it terminates. Nevertheless, Schuon had also journeyed both "existentially" and metaphysically through the world of the Divine Names which play such a major role in the Islamic universe. He wrote of the meaning and power of many of them and also dealt with some of the difficult metaphysical and theological issues which arise from what appears to be the contradictory sense of some of the Divine Names when they are viewed in relation to each other and outwardly. His masterly essay 'Dimensions of the Universe in the Quranic Doctrine of the Divine Names' in which he deals with the deepest meaning of the quaternary of Names *al-Awwal*, the First, *al-Âkhir*, the Last, *al-Zâhir*, the Outward, and *al-Bâtin*, the Inward, bear testimony to the level of knowledge that he possessed of the 'science of Divine Names'.<sup>3</sup>

Schuon knew the Quran well and read it regularly in the original Arabic which he knew and loved. He was

particularly attracted to the last *sûrahs* or chapters as well as the middle ones especially *Sûrat al-wâqî'ah*, the first that he memorized after the *Fâtihah*. In his daily discourse he often used certain well-known Quranic verses and spent much time in the study of the inner meaning of the Sacred Text much of which would come to him through inner intuition rather than the reading of earlier inspired esoteric commentaries which he, however, knew well especially the one attributed to Ibn 'Arabî but actually by 'Abd al-Razzâq al-Kâshânî as well as the commentaries of al-Ghazzâlî not to speak of more general commentaries such as that of al-Baydâwî. Schuon's chapter on the Quran in his *Understanding Islam* is itself a major esoteric commentary on the Sacred Text in the line of the greatest traditional Sufi commentaries.

As for the Prophet of Islam, Schuon knew well the traditional accounts of his life and the descriptions of his character as found in classical sources. But his knowledge of the inner reality of the Prophet was also direct and 'existential' for he had 'encountered' the trans-historical 'Muhammadan Reality' (*al-haqîqat al-muhammadiyah*). He never wrote a book on the Prophet bringing out the esoteric significance of the episodes of his life, but he did write a number of works of the greatest importance on the inner reality of the Prophet and the significance of his virtues. More than anyone else in the West, he explained to a non-Muslim audience what the Prophet means to Muslims and why he is loved so greatly by them. Schuon's several studies of the Prophet culminated in his 'The Mystery of the Prophetic Substance'<sup>4</sup> which reveals a very rare intimacy with *al-haqîqat al-muhammadiyah*. He had read the traditional prayers to receive a vision of the Prophet and his prayers were answered several times. The essay in question is in fact

one of the most important works ever written on the inner reality of the Prophet. Schuon of course also knew well the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, quoting often *hadiths* and writing on the meaning of the *Sunnah* in the life of Islam in general and Sufism in particular.

Furthermore, Schuon was well acquainted with Islam's sacred and religious history. Besides the rightly-guided caliphs, among whom he especially loved 'Alî as had Shaykh al-'Alawî, Schuon also had studied and admired many of the great masters of *tasawwuf* including Junayd, the Arab Sufi poet Niffarî, Shaykh Abu'l-Hasan al-Shâdhilî and many other *maghribî* masters including Ibn Mashîsh, Abû Madyan, Ibn 'Arabî and of course his own spiritual master, Shaykh al-'Alawî, to whom he would refer as a "*surhomme*", and whose works he continued to quote until the end of his own life. Schuon loved Ibn 'Arabî and translated some of his poems into French when he was young but he refused to identify Ibn 'Arabî with the whole of Islamic esoterism and rejected the view of certain French Guénonians who did so. When from the late 50's onward we introduced him to the works of Persian Sufi masters, he became especially attracted to Rûmî, Shabistarî and Jâmî and finally came to consider Rûmî as the most universal saint of Islam.

There are few domains of the Islamic intellectual and spiritual tradition with which Schuon was not familiar. He knew the different formulations of Islamic metaphysics to which he himself made a great contribution.<sup>5</sup> He also wrote of angelology and cosmology in a manner that reveals his intimate knowledge of traditional sources as can be seen in his extensive essay '*An-Nûr*'.<sup>6</sup> He furthermore dealt in many instances with Islamic eschatology often comparing it to eschatological views of other religions while at other times

seeking to clarify some of the more difficult Islamic doctrines concerning the multiplicity of posthumous states.<sup>7</sup>

Schuon was also well aware of the distinctions between Sunnism and Shi'ism within Islam and in contrast to Guénon, who showed no interest in Shi'ism, was attracted to the study of Shi'ism and especially its esoteric doctrines. The personality of 'Alî and Fâtimah were also of great interest to him and he was in fact planning to write a book or long article on them in the 60's and asked us to send him whatever references were available. It was because of the unavailability of easy to use sources that he finally abandoned the idea and settled for writing the very significant and critical essay, 'Seeds of a Divergence',<sup>8</sup> which contains some of the most profound statements on the relationship of Sunnism and Shi'ism, their issuing from two dimensions within the being of the Prophet and their both belonging to Islamic orthodoxy. In our private discussions over the years he would often bring up certain Shi'ite beliefs or practices and discuss their significance with us.

It is remarkable that being the metaphysician and esoterist that he was, Schuon should be so knowledgeable in the problems and discussions of *Kalâm*, usually rendered as Islamic theology. Like many North African Sufi shaykhs, his interest in *Kalâm* was mainly in the Ash'arite school whose 'voluntarism' he discussed often,<sup>9</sup> bringing out both the strengths and weaknesses of the theses of the Ash'arites and their struggles with the Islamic philosophers. He showed that the problems discussed between the two schools such as free will and determinism or 'createdness' or 'eternity' of the world are not soluble on the theological level itself but can only be solved on the level of pure metaphysics. He also knew Islamic

philosophy well and often sided with the philosophers against the Ash'arites saying that ultimately the Islamic philosophers belonged to the same family as the 'urafâ' or gnostics. He certainly was not an anti-philosophical Sufi but on the contrary was in many ways more sympathetic to someone like Suhrawardî than to the 'anti-intellectual' Sufis of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries (A.D.).<sup>10</sup>

Schuon also had the deepest knowledge of Islamic art in its various forms and wrote some of the most perceptive pages on its meaning. He was especially attracted to the art of the Maghrib with its purity reflecting the ethos of the early centuries of Arab society in North Africa. But he also admired greatly Persian art as well as some of the outstanding architectural monuments of Muslim India. He loved both Arabic calligraphy, which as already mentioned he wrote in a beautiful hand, and Arabic poetry. Being a poet in not only his mother tongue, German, but also in English, he furthermore composed Arabic poetry himself dealing always with spiritual themes in the tradition of the Arabic Sufi poetry of old. He also enjoyed music of the Islamic peoples, first and foremost the chanting of the Quran and the *adhân* (which are supreme forms of music although never called 'music' in Arabic) and then classical Arabic, Persian and Turkish music especially what was connected to the Mawlawî tradition.

As already mentioned, Schuon had traveled extensively in the Western lands of Islam and especially the Arab world. Being the extremely perceptible person that he was, he was able to pierce into and gain in-depth knowledge of the structure of Islamic society and the various classes of people who comprised traditional society especially in the Maghrib. He would often tell us that in the Islamic world he liked most of all the Sufis, then the

class of 'ulamâ' and then the pious artisans and merchants in the bazaars. He also had great love for the nomads wherever they might be and appreciated fully their great spiritual significance within Islamic civilization. Altogether there was little within Islam and Islamic civilization that Schuon had not come to know, study and penetrate into its inner meaning. His being, even more than his works, demonstrated his immersion in the universe of the Islamic tradition while his heart dwelt in the Formless and his intellect spoke of the pure metaphysics and esoterism that lie at the heart of sacred revelations and yet transcend all that belongs to the formal plane.

If we consider all of the writings of Schuon, including his published books and articles as well as unpublished texts, we will discover that he wrote more about the Islamic tradition than any other religion although his perspective was always that of universal esoterism and the *sophia perennis*. In fact the body of his writings contain not only an unparalleled exposition of traditional metaphysics and the inner study of religions, but also a peerless account of the various facets and aspects of Islam and its main spiritual and intellectual currents seen from the most profound inward perspective. Already Schuon's first essay published in *Le Voile d'Isis* in 1933 concerned Islam and was entitled, 'L'aspect ternaire de la Tradition monothéiste'. His first short book which appeared two years later in 1935 in Paris was also concerned with Islamic themes and bore the title *De Quelques aspects de l'Islam*. The fourth 'book' of his profound meditations which appeared in German as *Leitgedanken zur Urbesinnung* also in 1935<sup>11</sup> was written in Mostaghanem

and dedicated to Shaykh al-'Alawî while his collection of German poems *Tage und Nachtebuch* contains several poems with Arabic titles and dealing with Sufi themes.

This concern with Islamic themes was to continue in Schuon's major works which began to see the light of day after the Second World War starting with his first major doctrinal book, the *Transcendent Unity of Religions*, in which Islam figures in a central fashion. His two next books *The Eye of the Heart* and *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts* were likewise to deal largely with Islamic themes and in fact sections were devoted specifically to Islam and Sufism. Putting aside works dealing directly with Islam, such was to be the case in nearly all of Schuon's later books such as the work that summarizes his teachings, *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, which ends with a section entitled 'Sufism', and *Approches du phénomène religieux* whose longest section is devoted to Islam.<sup>12</sup>

Turning to works whose very title includes Islam or Sufism, the most noteworthy is *Understanding Islam* which, along with the *Transcendent Unity of Religions*, is the best known work of the author. No book of Schuon has sold as many copies nor become as widely disseminated globally as this remarkable book on Islam. No work in a Western language has done as much as this book to explain Islam to the Western audience and to create a better bridge for an in-depth understanding between Islam and Christianity. Furthermore, the influence of this work in the Islamic world itself from Senegal to Malaysia has been great especially among Western educated Muslims who have come to learn so much about their own religion and have the doubt created in their minds by Western attacks against Islam removed through this work. *Understanding Islam* has been translated into Arabic, Persian, Turkish and some of the

other major Islamic languages,<sup>13</sup> while its French and English versions have also been very widely read in the Islamic world. It is hard to overestimate the spiritual and intellectual impact of this book in bringing about the comprehension of Islam in both East and West, the East including not only the Islamic world itself but also Hindu India, Japan and other Asian countries.

Other works of Schuon with specifically Islamic titles include his *Sufism—Veil and Quintessence*, which discusses the heart of Sufism and its teachings, and *Christianity/Islam: Essays on Esoteric Eumenicism* which is the most masterly treatment of the subject by Schuon, a subject to which Schuon was to return in a schematic fashion in his *Roots of the Human Condition*. There are also two collections of his essays in English dealing with Islam, namely, *Dimensions of Islam* and *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy* which have no French original but which have also been translated in some Islamic languages. When one considers all these works and the numerous passages concerning Islamic themes in other books and essays, one becomes more aware of the enormous amount of writing which Schuon devoted to the subject of Islam while presenting the *sophia perennis* and traditional doctrines in general.

The influence of these works in both the West and the Islamic world is much greater than what a cursory glance would reveal and in fact only in-depth studies can make known the profundity and extent of his influence. Nevertheless, something can be said even now about his influence. If one considers not only Schuon's own writings but also works of such figures as Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, Gai Eaton, Victor Danner, Leo Schaya, Jean-Louis

Michon, Roger Dupaquier, William Chittick, Sachiko Murata, Vincent Cornell, and many others writing in Western languages on Islam, all of whom were deeply influenced by Schuon's works, it becomes clear how extensive the impact of his work has been on various aspects of Islam as studied in Western Languages.<sup>14</sup>

In the Islamic world itself, although Schuon had been more closely associated with North Africa than any other part of the Islamic world, it was in Persia where he first became well known starting in the late 50's and early 60's as a result of translations made by ourselves into Persian of some of his essays as well as extensive discussion of his writings in our own works. Gradually his writings as well as those of Guénon, Burckhardt and Lings began to attract the attention of a number of perspicacious scholars among both Western educated Persians and those trained in traditional *madrassahs*. This trend has continued to this day with the result that his ideas, along with those of the figures already mentioned, are part of the current intellectual discourse in Persia as the present day public discussion in that land of "religious pluralism" reveals so clearly. There is a whole generation of younger Persian scholars who speak of *sunnat*, a word we used some forty years ago as translation for "tradition" as understood by Guénon and Schuon, precisely in the sense of *tradition*, and who consider their perspective as *sunnatî* or traditional whether they are dealing with philosophy, religion, or art. This is due most of all to the impact upon such scholars of the thought of Guénon and Schuon encountered directly or through our writings and those of some of our students and colleagues writing in Persian.<sup>15</sup>

In Turkey likewise Schuon's writings, along with those of authors closely associated with him, began to become

known in the late 70's and by now there is a whole library of traditional works in Turkish including several books by Schuon. Moreover, in Turkey as in Persia the Islamic identity of Schuon was well known even in his lifetime and people often spoke of him as a "gnostic" or *al-'arif bi'llah* who was a disciple of Shaykh al-'Alawî but who lived in the West. An 'intellectual elite' in the Guénonian sense has formed in Turkey as well as Persia, Pakistan, Malaysia, and certain other Islamic countries which is deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition, universalist in perspective and fully aware of the nature of the modern world, an 'elite' whose formation owes a very great deal to the writings of the traditionalist school especially those of Guénon and Schuon.

In Pakistan interest in the writings of Schuon and those closely associated with him began in the early 60's through a number of lectures given and essays published by us in that country. Soon a number of important Pakistani intellectual figures such as the late A.K. Brohi and the late Muhammad Ajmal became followers of the traditional perspective and in Pakistan as in Persia, the traditional perspective began to enter into mainstream intellectual discourse. The publication of many traditionalist works including those of Schuon in local Pakistani editions by the Suheyl Academy played a major role in the spread of the influence of his works and those of his "school". For some time even a traditionalist journal was published in Urdu in Lahore under the name of *Riwâyat* in which Schuon was openly introduced as Shaykh 'Îsâ Nûr al-Dîn Ahmad, and he is known as such by most well known Pakistani scholars. For a while a traditionalist journal was also published in English in that country under the title *Studies in Tradition* in which his works were published.



A similar situation is to be found in the Malay world although perhaps not with the same degree of amplitude and breadth. A number of scholars in Indonesia and especially Malaysia have been trained in the traditional perspective and this point of view is well known in that part of the world. Moreover, a number of the works of the traditionalist school including those of Schuon have been translated into both Bhasa Malay and Bhasa Indonesian. In the debate between tradition and modernism as well as the dialogue of civilizations going on in those countries today, the voice of Schuon can usually be heard in the background determining often what is being formulated in louder voice.

It is strange that despite the centrality of the Arab world to the Islamic world and the fact that Schuon was more acquainted with that part of the Islamic world than any other, his influence is less perceptible in Arab countries than in the other parts of *Dâr al-Islam* already cited. Although, as already mentioned, the Arabic translation of *Understanding Islam* was well received in the Arab world, Schuon has not found until now a group of competent translators who could render his works successfully into Arabic, both in the sense of translating those works and in writing in Arabic about the ideas and doctrines expounded by him. In a country like Egypt, which is the intellectual center of the Arab world, this lacuna is quite evident. As for North Africa, it is mostly through Schuon's French works that a number among the younger generation have come under the sway of his teachings. Meanwhile, in Morocco and Algeria and also Syria he continues to be remembered among older members of the Sufi orders as the Sidi 'Îsâ who became the disciple of Shaykh al-'Alawî and later a shaykh of the Shâdhiliyyah 'Alawiyyah Order.

Altogether the influence of the works of Schuon and his followers in the Islamic world is more in the realm of presence than external action. The doctrines and expositions in question are like a light which illuminates by its presence without being the direct source of action. One should not in fact be fooled into belittling his universal influence by relying on the study of external actions and reactions, which can be studied from the outside in a cursory fashion. The influence in question is there to be sure, powerful and immutable yet transforming in ways which touch the deeper layers of the intellectual and spiritual life of many who themselves have great qualitative impact upon society.

Schuon's message has of course had an impact upon a number of Christians and Jews, Buddhists and Hindus and even those without a definite spiritual orientation but who are in quest of the truth. But it would not be an exaggeration to state that although he lived in the West and wrote in European languages, his greatest influence was in the Islamic world as a comparison of intellectual concern for his ideas in America and Britain on the one hand and Turkey and Persia on the other reveals. The reason for this phenomenon is to be sought in the inner reality of the man himself and the fact that he was nurtured by the Muhammadan *barakah* which emanated from his being as it does from his writings.

Without doubt Frithjof Schuon was an exceptional person from his childhood and had already had profound metaphysical intuitions even in the age of adolescence before embracing Islam. God had given him a pneumatic nature and an intellect which could perceive metaphysical truths from an early age. But as he himself wrote in reference to German Romanticism, a correct intellectual intuition remains inoperative unless it is nurtured within

the *cadre* of a living tradition. In the case of Schuon, God chose Islam as the tradition in which he and what he received from Heaven were to be nurtured and brought to fruition. It was Islam and the Muhammadan *barakah* that allowed him to become a spiritual teacher and a shaykh of the Shâdhiliyyah Order, to found a *tarîqah*, the Shâdhiliyyah 'Alawiyyah Maryamiyyah, and to reach spiritual states and stations from whose perspective he was to write his remarkable and incomparable works. To be sure he had a function beyond the specifically Islamic universe in revealing the inner truths of other religions and their inner unity which, lest we forget, is a major theme of the Quran itself,<sup>16</sup> in bringing out the true significance of esoterism and the *sophia perennis* in relation not only to theory but also spiritual practice, in speaking with the greatest profundity of the nature of the soul and the elements of an authentic spiritual life, in providing an in-depth criticism of the modern world, in reestablishing the correct mode of serious thinking and intellection, and in accepting non-Muslim disciples.<sup>17</sup> Yet, there is no doubt that he was a Sufi shaykh, with however an exceptional metaphysical vision and breadth of principial knowledge, who was a product of the Islamic esoteric tradition. Even his non-Islamic dimensions can be understood in light of the fact that Sufism is the esoterism of the last major revelation of humanity, and that, like Islam whose function it was to integrate all the revealed truths that came before it, Sufism contains within itself all the possibilities of esoterism.

No matter how much some might seek to aggrandize some of the deviant currents and eddys and aberrations that surrounded him in his very old age and try to present him as a figure that had gone 'beyond' the Islamic form, Schuon was and remained rooted in the Islamic tradition

to the moment of his death and knew more than anyone else that one cannot live beyond the world of forms or the level of forms while living in the world of forms, and that even the 'beyond' is determined by the tradition within which one has lived in this world. Only the Ultimate Beyond, beyond the beyond, is above all forms in the Supreme Unity which lies beyond all distinctions. Schuon was the great expositor of the doctrine of Unity and a spiritual teacher who led those qualified to reach that Unity, which manifests itself in all authentic religions. In his case The One (*al-Ahad*), who manifested himself in His fullness in Islam with its emphasis upon Unity (*al-tawhîd*), chose him as the vehicle for the expression of the truth which leads to The One, nurtured him to become a spiritual master, familiarized him with the 'breath of intimacy', revealed to him the spiritual reality of the Prophet and made the Muhammadan *barakah* to flow through his being. That is why those who knew Schuon well as Shaykh 'Isa Nûr al-Dîn Ahmad repeat for him now that he has died the Arabic prayer that is recited only after the death of the friends of God, namely "May God be pleased with him and through him with us". *Radî Allâh 'anhu wa 'annâ bihi*.

## Notes

1. In 1957 when we first met Schuon in his house near Lausanne, he was as usual completely traditional *maghribî* dress. He told us that many wonder why we insist in wearing traditional Islamic dress here in the middle of Europe. He added that it was because the *barakah* of the Prophet of Islam flows through such a dress and can be experienced concretely in it. It therefore brings this *barakah* to one's being and facilitates prayers and invocation while helping greatly in the creation of a traditional Islamic ambience in which Schuon lived and which he insisted

to his disciples to create to the extent possible in the intimate spaces of their lives and of course most of all in their homes and particularly prayer rooms.

2. Schuon later recounted how he thirsted to find a spiritual master and how he had decided that if he were not to find such a person, he would retire into the desert to pass the rest of his life in solitude and seclusion. But the hands of destiny led him to the great Algerian Sufi master, Shaykh al-'Alawî. In recent years certain detractors have sought to cast doubt upon Schuon's attachment to the Shâdhiliyyah-'Alawiyyah Order and the possibility of Schuon possessing a regular initiatic chain (*silsilah*) which alone guarantees traditional continuity in Sufism. Let it be said first of all that there is no proof whatsoever that Schuon was not initiated into Sufism by Shaykh al-'Alawî. On the contrary, over the years numerous Algerian and Moroccan *fuqarâ'* have attested to his having received the initiation in the hands of the great Algerian shaykh. In the 1960's we met a number of members of the Syrian branch of the 'Alawiyyah Order who asked us about how Shaykh 'Îsâ was faring and told us stories heard by older *fuqarâ'* about his coming to Mostaghanem in 1932 and having been received into the *tarîqah* by Shaykh al-'Alawî who put him in his first *khalwah*, or spiritual retreat. Only three years ago in Morocco we again heard similar stories from older Shâdhilîs who asked about him.

As for his being chosen a *muqaddam*, even if this were to be cast in doubt by his detractors against the facts, this denial would not in itself destroy initiatic continuity. Many *faqîrs* in various Sufi orders who were not designated as *muqaddams* or *khalifahs* later became shaykhs through the Will of Heaven. The history of classical Sufism is replete with such cases, especially in the earlier centuries when various functions prevalent in later Sufism did not as yet exist. In any case the veritable nature of any *shaykh* or *murshid* can only be gauged by the quality of his disciples. A tree is judged by its fruits.

In this context it might also be added here that in 1938 when he was in Cairo, Schuon was also initiated into the Qâdiriyyah Order and like certain other Sufi masters, of whom Ibn 'Arabi is a well known example, possessed more than one initiation. Schuon had also told us that early in his life after entering the 'Alawiyyah Order he had had an encounter with Khadir, the "Green Prophet", who corresponds to Elias and who represents an ever-living initiatic function in the Islamic universe. This

- encounter could not have had nothing to do with the 'Eliatic function' of Schuon himself. See Leo Schaya, 'La mission d'Elie', *Sophia Perennis*, Vol. 3, no. 1, Spring 1977, pp. 16-28; also as 'The Mission of Elias', *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Summer-Autumn 1980, pp. 159-167.
3. See F. Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam*, trans. P. Townsend, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970, chp.2, pp. 30-45.
  4. See Schuon, *In the Face of the Absolute*, Bloomington (Ind.): World Wisdom Books, 1989, pp. 209-234. This work was originally written upon our request for and published in *Islamic Spirituality—Foundations* (ed. S.H. Nasr), New York: Crossroads, 1989, chp. 4, pp. 48-63, under the title 'The Spiritual Significance of the Substance of the Prophet'.
  5. A case in point is his essay 'The Five Divine Presences', in *Dimensions of Islam*, chp. 11, pp. 142-158, which is a most profound discussion of the doctrine of *al-hadarât al-ilâhiyyah al-khams*, a doctrine which has been discussed over the past seven centuries by many eminent metaphysicians going back to Ibn 'Arabi and Sadr al-Dîn al-Qûnawî.
  6. See his *L'Oeil du coeur*, Paris: L'age d'Homme, 1995. The essay 'An-Nûr' was also published in English in *Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 102-120.
  7. See for example his 'Some Observations on a Problem of the Afterlife', in *Dimensions of Islam*, chapter 10, pp. 136-141, 'The Two Paradises', in *In the Face of the Absolute*, pp. 235-249 which also contains references to classical Quranic commentaries; and 'The Sufi Paradise', in *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, trans. J. Peter Hobson, London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976, chp. 10, pp. 181-187.
  8. Printed in Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, chp. 5, pp. 91-110.
  9. A good example is 'Dilemmas within Ash'arite Theology', in *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, chp. 7, pp. 118-151.
  10. A seminal essay dealing with this subject is his 'Tracing the Notion of Philosophy', in *Sufism—Veil and Quintessence*, trans. W. Stoddart, Bloomington (Ind.): World Wisdom Books, 1981, chap. 5, pp. 115-128.
  11. This work was reprinted later as *Urbesinnung—Das Denken des Eigentlichen*, Freiburg im Breisgau: Auum Verlag, 1989.

12. This work to which a number of other sections were added appeared in English as *In the Face of the Absolute*. The English work therefore contains *Approaches...* but is not simply its translation.
13. Nothing is more difficult than translating the sentences of Schuon into a Semitic language such as Arabic. It is a more daunting task than rendering them into Persian into which we have translated a number of essays of Schuon, not that the translation of his works into Persian is any sense easy. As for Arabic, we spent three years with a leading Egyptian scholar, the late Salâh al-Sâwî, to translate *Understanding Islam*, into an Arabic which would be classical and at the same time contemporary. The translation under the title *Hatta nafham al-Islam* was published by Dar al-mutahhidah li'l-Nashr in Beirut in 1980, and is known in the Arab world by scholars of the field as are the Turkish and Persian translation of this seminal work.
14. One would also need to add to this list the works of Michel Valsân, who was Shaykh 'Isâ's *muqaddam* in Paris, and indirectly his disciples some of whom like Michel Chodkiewicz are outstanding scholars of Sufism.
15. It is also important to mention the journal of Iranian Academy of Philosophy *Sophia Perennis* in which several of Schuon's articles were published.
16. The Quran presents a universalist doctrine of religion and revelation which was not developed fully in Islamic history except in a few cases such as those of Ibn 'Arabî and Rûmî. It was providential that this dimension of the Quranic revelation should receive its full elaboration in our times in the hands of the traditionalist writers, foremost among them Schuon.
17. It should not be forgotten that certain classical Sufi masters such as Rûmî had Christian and Jewish disciples and that in India many Sufis accepted Hindu disciples.

## Celestial Corporeality

by Wolfgang Smith

*Leiblichkeit ist das Ende der Werke Gottes.*

Friedrich Christoph Oetinger

As is well known, Christianity believes not only in the immortality of the human soul, but also in what it terms the resurrection of the body. Somehow the bodies of the deceased will be "raised," and in the process, transformed and glorified. "Behold," St. Paul declares, "I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." (I Cor. 15:51-53)

Whatever may be the outlook of other religions on this question, the Christian does not seek a discarnate posthumous state. "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." (II Cor. 5:4)

This miracle—this unthinkable prodigy—the Christian maintains, has already taken place: it has occurred in the resurrection of Christ, "the first-born from the dead." (Col. 1:18). The dogma of bodily resurrection, thus, is clearly central to Christianity: "If there is no resurrection of the dead," St. Paul affirms, "then Christ