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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

***Christian Gnosis: From St. Paul to Meister Eckhart* by Wolfgang Smith (Sophia Perennis, 2008). \$19.95, ISBN 978-1-59731-092-5**

Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos

“Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of *gnosis*: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.” – Luke 11:52

A distinctive mark of the contemporary era, it can be said, is the utter absence of doctrinal gnosis, which has its contingent expressions in all of the world’s spiritual traditions, yet is distinctively articulated, in the Christian tradition. This recent publication by Dr. Wolfgang Smith has been hailed as the *magnum opus* of his life’s work—he remains true to the perennial philosophy as he does not seek to create a “new” theory, but adheres rigorously to the traditional authoritative sources on the subject at hand. Former professor of MIT and UCLA, Dr. Smith brings a unique perspective as an accomplished scientist and mathematician as well as a committed Christian.

Christian Gnosis contains seven chapters with compelling themes of uncommon wisdom not readily found in other present-day works: I. Gnosis and Nascent Christianity, II. Cosmology in the Face of Gnosis, III. Transcending the *Creatio Ex Nihilo*: The Kabbalistic Exegesis, IV. The Wisdom of Christian Kabbalah, V. The Gnosis of Jacob Boehme, VI. Meister Eckhart on Creation, VII. Eckhart’s Trinitarian Nondualism, including a Postscript by the author.

This book covers the broad spectrum of doctrinal gnosis pertaining to the Christian tradition—“from Saint Paul to Meister Eckhart”—including its analogous currents found in the Kabbalah exemplifying the esoteric tradition of Judaism. The term gnosis has been abused and deserves caution; especially with New Age proponents taking siege of it in order to substantiate their subjective notions. In return the misuse of the term has caused many to confuse gnosis as a deviation of orthodox religion, not to be confused with fundamentalism, but rather understood as “right thinking”. The author categorically clears the air on the topic when responding to a point made by Clement of Alexandria: “Authentic gnosis, then,

is something divine, something that belongs, not to a man, but to God himself.”

Readers can also note that nondualism is an essential theme presented throughout the entire work and can be found in every authentic sapiential tradition. Although nondualism is often associated with the esoteric or “inner” dimensions of religion, it is correspondingly inseparable from exoterism or its “outer” dimensions: “in fact, the first finds its consummation in the second.” In Dr. Smith’s illustration of the distinct facets of gnosis he does so by allowing each tradition to remain integral and distinctively its own *in divinis* and not a Vedāntic rendition of these traditions. That many seekers in the contemporary era have found their way to the spiritual path *via* the Eastern doctrines is striking, yet how can the West come to recognize the analogous wisdom of its own traditions?

The author points out that Meister Eckhart, who Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1887-1947) key perennialist author regarded as “the greatest European ever born”, is not another great Master among other Masters, but a paragon of the Christian religion, a *jivanmukta*. “One must bear in mind that Eckhart stands at the end of ‘golden age’: on the brink of the very ‘fall’ which gave rise, in rapid succession, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the modern world.” When Eckhart affirms the *negatio negationis*—“a negation of a negation”—paradoxical as it may appear to the discursive mind—it is through the *negatio negationis* that the supreme affirmation of the Divine or Absolute becomes intelligible: “The One is a negation of negation.” The *negatio negationis* is not comparable with the popular notions of “God beyond God” theology nor does this signify that Eckhart was not orthodox in his exposition of the Christian tradition.

This recent publication *Christian Gnosis: From St. Paul to Meister Eckhart* provides a definitive work on the subject of gnosis in the Christian West, adding an implicit dimension to integral interfaith dialogue that is fundamental in a rapid and ever increasing globalizing era. This work will provide for deeper reflection on the Christian tradition and at the same time contextualizes this presentation within what has been termed the “transcendent unity of religions”. Dr. Smith concludes his opus with the following disclosure dedicating its

merits to the much needed restoration of the Christian tradition: “there is need today for teachings of Eckhart, the Master who—better perhaps than any other—can help to restore ‘the key of gnosis’ to its rightful place within the Church.”

***Hinduism and Its Spiritual Masters*, by William Stoddart (Fons Vitae, 2006). 136 pp., \$15.95,**

Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos

Lead me from the unreal to the Real;

Lead me from darkness to Light;

Lead me from death to Immortality.

- Brihadâranyaka Upanishad, I, 3, 27.

It is regrettable that, amidst the mammoth surplus of competing titles, such a vital work as this—a veritable “hidden treasure”—has gone virtually unnoticed. It is a characteristic of the contemporary milieu that it repeatedly favors *quantity* at the expense of *quality*. Yet, this phenomenon becomes graspable when treated and viewed in relationship to a much larger symptom that is interconnected with the systematic obscuration of spirituality or “intellectual regress” of the historical cycle known in the Hindu tradition as the *Kali-Yuga* or “Dark Age”—underscoring the very quintessence of the “signs of the times”.

In terms of etymology, religion is that which binds, specifically, that which binds man to God.... In the first place, religion is a *doctrine* of unity.... In the second place, religion is a *method* of union.... Whatever they may be called, these two components are always present.... Doctrine, or theory, concerns the mind; method, or practice, concerns the will. Religion, to be itself, must always engage both mind and will.

The most important single point about religion is that it is not man-made. Religion is not invented by man, but revealed by God. Divine revelation is a *sine qua non*; without it, there is no religion, only man-made ideology, in which no sacramental or salvational element is present.

This present work by Dr. William Stoddart is imbued by what has become known as his signature method as—“a master of synthesis”—succeeding in illuminating the rudiments of whatever topic he is drawing

upon, always utilizing as few words as possible, to present the essential keys needed to adequately comprehend the subject at hand. This signature method or *modus operandi* is fittingly contextualized alongside the numerous years studying the *philosophia perennis* or the perennial philosophy that illuminates the universal metaphysics at the heart of each revealed and orthodox (doctrinal purity or right understanding) spiritual tradition—“*Sages call the One Reality by many names.*” (Rig Veda, I, 164, 46.) It is thus relevant to illustrate that amid the oldest living esotericism, the Hindu tradition and the youngest living esotericism within Islam known as Sufism there is an identical underlying metaphysic: “The science of Sufism and the science of Vedânta are one.” declared Dârâ Shukûh, the son of the Mughal emperor Shâh Jahân.

It is improbable and perhaps rightfully so that a book cannot *de facto* capture the breadth and depth of an entire tradition, yet even while acknowledging the *apophatic* quality of the ineffable nature of the Absolute, this book regardless, does just that by way of elucidating what is indispensable to the Hindu tradition or *sanâtana dharma*. This book is a new and revised edition of the formerly titled book: *Outline of Hinduism* (Oakton, VA: The Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1993) that has been out of print for sometime. In this work readers will be guided through the multifaceted anthropology of the Hindu *dharma* articulating its mythology, metaphysics, cosmology and spirituality. The author expounds upon matters that will challenge the very edifice of the modern and postmodern mind in order to clarify the lost sense of the transpersonal that was traditionally a norm: The Place of Hinduism Amongst the Religions of the World, Hindu Pantheon, The Incarnations (*Avatâras*) of Vishnu, Masculine (*Purusha*) and Feminine (*Prakriti*) Principles, The Five Levels of Reality, The Four Castes (*varna*), The Three Spiritual Ways (*mârgas*), Yoga and Its Branches, The Hindu Scriptures, The Six Points of View (*darshanas*), The Four Ages (*yugas*), The Four Stages in Life (*âshramas*), Transmigration or Reincarnation, Classical Sages and Saints, Modern Sages and Saints and Holy Cities, Holy Rivers, Pilgrimage Points.

Contrary to the *Zeitgeist* the import of the caste system (*varna dharma*) is not an apparatus to impose a collective tyranny or exploitation for the indulgence of the *brahmins* or elite nor is it an outdated mode of government or temporal power. With this said, it needs to be remembered that traditionally the temporal power was always subject to the spiritual authority.

The Universal Man or *Purusha* embodies the four main castes (*varna*) as articulated in Purusha-Sûkta, Rig-Veda, X, 90.:

The Brahmin was his mouth;
(*Brâhmana*)
From his arms was made the Ruler;
(*Râjanya*)
his thighs were the Industrious;
(*Vaishya*)
from his feet was born the Servant.
(*Shûdra*)

The caste system (*varna dharma*) rather contains the integral principles which provide social harmony *par excellence* not only extrinsic but intrinsic that is inseparable from the spiritual domain itself for it nourishes the tripartite human microcosm of Spirit, soul and body. The impact of colonialism in India cannot be downplayed, especially since at present time there is more “material prosperity” and this is often posed as a justification for the abuses undergone, yet what has been sacrificed at this gain is immeasurable. Likewise colonialism had a devastating effect upon this ancient civilization and the understanding of its sacred traditions:

[R]eligion originates in revelation, is handed down by tradition, and is preserved by orthodoxy. In Hinduism, the principal means whereby the revelation (both in its timeless essence and in its many outward branches) is handed down and preserved is intimately linked with the social institution known as the caste system. It is ironic that it is this, more than almost anything else, that is misunderstood and abhorred in the modern [and postmodern] West; nothing is more vigorously anathematized by sociologists and journalists alike. Yet besides its function of preservation and transmission, the caste system is the very principle of Hindu social harmony. Caste and traditional Hindu society are virtually one and the same thing.

Albeit the previous statements have been put forward in defense of the caste system (*varna dharma*), it would be unrealistic not to underscore the present-day abuses of the caste system (*varna dharma*) that take place within the Indian culture itself that are nonetheless examples of the prevailing ignorance (*avidyâ*) in light of the *sanâtana dharma* (the “Perennial Law” or “Primordial Norm”). Copious cases have made the international

headlines of the mass media stressing the oppressive apparatus of the caste system (*varna dharma*) that has been enmeshed with the role of women in Indian culture which are thought to be inherently discriminated against, treated unfairly or degraded. Hitherto, the different human vocations existed because there are fundamental distinctions among human individuals themselves (i.e. their makeup of the three *gunas* “cosmic tendencies” or “qualities” of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* that determine individual attitude and propensity). These different vocations, for example, pertaining to the role of women or sub-divisions of caste (*jâtis*) are not meant to be interpreted as arbitrary inequity yet they have come to be identified as such due to the militant secularism of the times. There are also allegations that Hindu scriptures (*śâstras*) look down upon women because they cannot perform their spiritual rites or sacrifices without their husbands’ presence. Yet the same is conferred to men, who also cannot perform their spiritual rites without their wives being present. Regarding marriage (*saha-dharma-cârinî-samprayogâ*) in the Hindu tradition, it needs to be remembered that it is perceived as a spiritual union for the practice of *dharma* and all the extravagances that have become a norm in the present era do not hold legitimacy according to the Hindu scriptures (*śâstras*). This is also the case with the physical brutality causing many fatalities regarding the custom of dowry. However this is not permitted by the spiritual authorities that have been custodians of this sacred transmission, tracing its origins to time immemorial, who remind us that these are modern perversions that radically attack and are contrary to this way of life that implicitly honors human diversity, freedom of difference and subjective reality *in divinis*. In order to emphasize the auspicious role of women in the Hindu tradition, consider the following words from the *Mânava-Dharma-Shâstra*, II, 145.: “*One mother is more venerable than a thousand fathers.*” And one cannot fail to notice the integral femininity that is disclosed through the significance of *Mahâshakti* or the Divine Essence and correspondingly *Shakti* who presides over universal manifestation appearing under Her different forms such as Lakshmî, Durgâ, Kali, etc.¹

In contradistinction to the caste system (*varna dharma*) there is a systematic disintegration under the guise of scientism, secularism, democracy, and progress. The perennial wisdom of the ages or *yugas* is contained in the following passage from the *Vishnu Purâna* dating back to the 3rd century A.D. that outlines verbatim

the desacralized epoch of today, with an impressive precision:

Riches and piety will diminish daily, until the world will be completely corrupted. In those days it will be wealth that confers distinction, passion will be the sole reason for union between the sexes, lies will be the only method for success in business, and women will be merely the objects of sensual gratification. The earth will be valued only for its mineral treasures, dishonesty will be the universal means of subsistence, a simple ablution will be regarded as sufficient purification....

The observance of castes, laws, and institutions will no longer be in force in the Dark Age, and the ceremonies prescribed by the Vedas will be neglected. Women will obey only their whims and will be infatuated with pleasure.... Men of all kinds will presumptuously regard themselves as the equals of *brahmins*.... The *vaishyas* will abandon agriculture and commerce and will earn their living by servitude or by the exercise of mechanical professions.... The path of the Vedas having been abandoned, and man having been led astray from orthodoxy, iniquity will prevail and the length of human life will diminish in consequence.... Then men will cease worshipping Vishnu, the Lord of sacrifice, Creator and Lord of all things, and they will say: "Of what authority are the Vedas? Who are the Gods and the *brahmins*? What use is purification with water?" The dominant caste will be that of *shûdras*.... Man, deprived of reason and subject to every infirmity of body and mind, will daily commit sins: everything which is impure, vicious, and calculated to afflict the human race will make its appearance in the Dark Age.

Yet, not all is lost during the epochs of forgetfulness for the mercy and dispensations of the Absolute are never absent; restorers of the Primordial Tradition and the One-and-Only Truth are sent in every age as described in the Bhagavad-Gâtâ, IV, 7-8:

*Whenever the Law is forgotten,
Whenever anarchy prevails,
I incarnate Myself.*

*In every age I come back;
to deliver the righteous,
to destroy the wicked,
to establish the Law.*

Hinduism and Its Spiritual Masters offers readers an invaluable tool in order to wade through the vast and complex dimensions of the Hindu *dharma*. As the doyen authority on the World Religions, Professor Huston Smith, said in his endorsement of this book: "In this book we find an astonishing amount of information compressed into an incredibly small compass. Reading it made me regretful that I retired for a second time—this time from the University of California—at the close of 1992. This volume would have made a nice supplement to the readings I usually assign." We concord completely with the above observations regarding this book which will provide pointers to what is both the transcendent and immanent in the unanimous sapiential tradition—"The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17: 21)—"*I am seated in the hearts of all.*" (Bhagavad-Gîtâ, XV, 15.)

Notes

1. For a traditional and orthodox point of view (*darshana*) of the caste system (*varna dharma*) and Hindu tradition altogether see the following work by a providential representative of the *sanâtana dharma*, Jagadguru His Holiness Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Swamigal, Sankaracharya of Kanchi, *Introduction to Hindu Dharma: Illustrated*, ed. Michael Oren Fitzgerald (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008); See also Sister Nivedita, *The Web of Indian Life* (Calcuta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989); Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, "Book Review: Introduction to Hindu Dharma", *Sophia: The Journal of Traditional Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer 2009), pp. 151-158; Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, "Book Review: Introduction to Hindu Dharma", *Studies in Comparative Religion*, (2009 - Web Edition) available online at: http://www.studiesincomparativereligion.com/Public/articles/review_of-Introduction_to_Hindu_Dharma_Illustrated.aspx

***Frithjof Schuon and the perennial philosophy*, by Harry Oldmeadow. Forward by William Stoddart. (World Wisdom, 2010). 376 pp. Softbound, \$22.95. ISBN 9781935493099.**

Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos

"It has been said more than once that total Truth is inscribed in an eternal script in the very substance of our spirit; what the different Revelations do is to 'crystallize' and 'actualize', in differing degrees according to the case, a nucleus of certitudes." – Frithjof Schuon

The axial influence of the perennial philosophy or *philosophia perennis* upon the foundations of transpersonal psychology and its central tenants is extensively recognized by those in the field (Bendeck Sotillos, 2009) and yet fewer individuals are familiar with the ensuing role that Frithjof Schuon (1953, 1968, 1981, 1997, 1998, 2005, 2009) has played both directly and indirectly within what has been termed the “forth force” in modern psychology (Adams, 2006; Anthony, Ecker & Wilber, 1987; Ferrer, 2002, 2002; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008; Gibbs, 2005; Grof, 1998; Murphy, 1992; Paulson, 2008; Rothberg, 1986; Rothberg & Kelly, 1998; Walsh, 1999a, 1999b, 2007; Walsh & Shapiro, 1983; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993; Wilber, Engler & Brown, 1986; Wilber, 1975, 1977, 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1982a, 1982b, 1983a, 1983b, 1984a, 1984b, 1991, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Wittine, 1989; Woodhouse, 1996).

Albeit Ken Wilber has since distanced himself from the *philosophia perennis*, including transpersonal psychology itself,¹ he interestingly began his work in the field quite the contrary. Wilber quoted from Frithjof Schuon to inaugurate what has been acclaimed as a ground-breaking work within the field of transpersonal psychology: “There is no science of the soul without a metaphysical basis to it and without spiritual remedies at its disposal” (Wilber, 1977, p. 11). Wilber then continued by way of disclosure, “One might say that the entire aim of this volume [*The Spectrum of Consciousness*] is simply to support and document this statement of Frithjof Schuon, a statement that the siddhas, sages and masters of everywhere and everywhen have eloquently embodied” (Wilber, 1977, p. 11).² In addition one could also propose Schuon’s role in the “third force” of modern psychology *per* the following allusion: “I am in agreement with the thrust of his [Wilber’s (1977)] thesis...that Western psychologies are but parts of a much greater spectrum of consciousness” (Schneider, 1987, p. 197).

Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) is the pre-eminent exponent of the traditionalist or perennialist school of comparative religion along with other significant members such as René Guénon (1886-1951), Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), Titus Burckhardt (1908-1984) including a more contemporary exponent Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933)³—a good number of whom have also been widely referenced throughout publications on transpersonal psychology.

Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy,

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by Harry Oldmeadow, is intended to be a companion volume and complement to a biography and hitherto unpublished writings of Frithjof Schuon (Fitzgerald, 2010). While this work, as Oldmeadow confirmed, is an introductory guide to Schuon’s work, it nonetheless demonstrates itself to be a luminous contribution to not only the Schuonian *opus*, but the perennialist canon *in toto*.

The book is divided into five parts capturing the breadth and depth of this word-renowned philosopher: I Frithjof Schuon and Perennialism; II Timeless Truths and Immutable Principles; III Religious Forms and Sacred Symbols; IV Signs of the Times and V The Spiritual Life. Included in this elucidation is an overview of integral metaphysics—the “transcendent unity of religions”—a presentation of spirituality East and West including the spiritual heritage of the American Indians, Schuon’s critique of modernism, his paintings and poetry and insights into prayer and virtue on the spiritual path which are all contextualized within the *philosophia perennis* in its plenary expression.

While no single study can present the fullness of Schuon’s work, this book will unquestionably provide those yearning for the essential keys abiding at the heart of the world’s spiritual traditions and correspondingly their integral spiritual psychologies *in divinis*. It hardly needs to be restated the decisive role that the perennial philosophy has upon the roots of transpersonal psychology, for those willing to recall what might be called the essential truths, will clearly benefit from this work.

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Notes

- 1 Shambhala: Do you consider yourself part of the transpersonal movement today? KW: No, I don't. Shambhala: Tell us about that. KW: Well, the basic

difficulty is that transpersonal psychology, to its great credit, was the first major school of present-day psychology to take spirituality seriously. Yet because there is a great deal of disagreement as to what actually constitutes spirituality itself, there is a great deal of disagreement as to what constitutes transpersonal psychology. These are not minor inner tensions as one might find in, say, the various schools of psychoanalysis or Jungian psychology. They are instead major internal divisions and barbed disagreements as to the nature, scope, and role of transpersonal psychology itself. This makes the field more rife with political schisms and warring ideologies. This is why, I believe, that in three decades, and aside from one or two specific theorists, the actual school of transpersonal psychology has had no major impact outside of the Bay Area, and it is today, many people agree, in an irreversible, terminal decline. What's left of the four forces (behavioristic, psychoanalytic, humanistic, transpersonal) will survive, if they survive at all, only by being taken up and into a fully integral approach [see "A Summary of My Psychological Model," section "The Death of Psychology and the Birth of the Integral," posted on this site.] Ken Wilber, "Part I: The Demise of Transpersonal Psychology" in "On Critics, Integral Institute, My Recent Writing, and Other Matters of Little Consequence: A Shambhala Interview with Ken Wilber", available online at: <http://wilber.shambhala.com/html/interviews/interview1220.cfm/>; In response to the above declaration made by Wilber, one might add the following: "To the extent that 'integral psychology' requires the adoption of a specifically Wilberian paradigm, it essentially precludes alternative perspectives and, consequently, open, critical debate and it will, therefore, alienate many people. Integral psychology, then, is in danger of becoming a dogma and most independent thinkers in the field will, I predict, refuse to have anything much to do with it." [Michael Daniels, "Whither Transpersonal Psychology?" in *Shadow, Self, Spirit: Essays in Transpersonal Psychology* (Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2005), p. 264]

- 2 Wilber and his colleagues acknowledge *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (1977) as "Romantic" or "Wilber/Phase-1" that emphasizes the "integration of [modern] Western psychology with Eastern mysticism, focusing primarily on individual interior

consciousness (Upper-Left quadrant), yet without a complete pre/trans developmental understanding.” (Reynolds, 2004, p. 76) The latest development of Wilber’s theoretical succession is “Integral Post-Metaphysics” or “Wilber/Phase-5” which has expanded his quadrant theory or known as AQAL—“all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types”—expressed in such terms as: “the Integral Approach involves the cultivation of body, mind, and spirit in self, culture, and nature” (Wilber, 2007, p. 26). Readers can thus connect the dots for themselves to see that although Wilber first situated all of his work within the *philosophia perennis* during “Wilber/Phase-1” he has along his evolving theoretical trajectory attempted to appropriate the perennial philosophy all together under the guise of “The Neo-Perennial Philosophy” (Wilber, 1992). In *à la* “Wilber/Phase-3” he paradoxically appears to be abandoning the perennial philosophy entirely *via* his “Integral Post-Metaphysics”, but in turn he resurrects his own parody of the “transcendent unity of religions” void of its “metaphysical baggage”. That is not only misleading but fundamentally erroneous on the level of the spiritual principles which are not contingent on subjective speculation or theory nor should they need to prove themselves to the modern or postmodern mindset. As Wilber (2007) points out: “modernity and postmodernity might be wrong in this instance” (p. 233) and we could not agree more. Although Wilber shared much ground with the traditionalist or perennialist authors we cannot consider him to have ever belonged to this school as some have attempted to suggest (Rothberg & Kelly, 1998; Visser, 2003; Woodhouse, 1996). Due to the many seductions of modern thought that Wilber has not been able to renounce, the most evident being evolutionism not to mention syncretism, he is not qualified to be considered a traditionalist or perennialist *de facto*. We cannot be too vigilant in making this clear enough as this very trend of mixing truth with error is a sign of the times which Wilber himself is a consummate example.

- 3 Others associated or strongly influenced by the traditionalist or perennialist school are Martin Lings (1909-2005), Marco Pallis (1895-1989), Whitall N. Perry (1920-2005), Lord Northbourne (1896-1982), Joseph Epes Brown (1920-2000), Leo Schaya (1916-1985), Victor Danner (1926-1990),

William Stoddart (b. 1925), Gai Eaton (1921-2010), E.F. Schumacher (1911-1977), Huston Smith (b. 1919), William Chittick (b. 1943), Kathleen Raine (1908-2003), Philip Sherrard (1922-1995), Keith Critchlow (b. 1933), Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), Henry Corbin (1903-1978), Wendell Berry (b. 1934), Charles Upton (b. 1948), M. Ali Lakhani (b. 1955), Reza Shah-Kazemi, Mateus Soares de Azevedo (b. 1959), Algis Uždavinys (1962-2010), Rama P. Coomaraswamy (1929-2006), Robert Bolton (b. 1941), Marty Glass (b. 1938), Wolfgang Smith (b. 1930), among others.

About the Author

Harry Oldmeadow is Coordinator of Religious Studies in the Department of Arts, La Trobe University, Bendigo, Australia. He studied history, politics, and literature at the Australian National University, obtaining a First Class Honors degree in history. In 1971 a Commonwealth Overseas Research Scholarship led to further studies at Oxford University. In 1980 Oldmeadow completed a Masters dissertation on the “perennialist” or “traditionalist” school of comparative religious thought. This study was awarded the University of Sydney Medal for excellence in research and was later published under the title, *Traditionalism: Religion in the Light of the Perennial Philosophy* (2000).

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