

Response to a Letter: Aspects of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Orthodoxy

By Gustavo Polit

[Editorial note: it has been decided that owing to its length, and for the convenience of our readers, it would be best to publish this response to Mr. Rinehart's letter as an article.]

Mr. Rinehart's letter (published in this volume of *Sacred Web*), which replies to two letters in volume 30 of *Sacred Web*, mine as well as the one by Mr. Patrick Moore, raises a number of objections regarding the relationship of Christian theology and dogma to the metaphysical perspective of the *sophia perennis et universalis* expounded by Frithjof Schuon. As a preface to this response, we would allow ourselves here a somewhat lengthy quote by Schuon because of its pertinence to the case at hand, and so as to recall once again that this perspective both transcends and includes all that is essential in formal orthodoxy: in other words, this perspective pertains to no particular religious or traditional orthodoxy, but is identified with the universal, intemporal, and immutable principles that transcend as well as underlie all traditional orthodoxies.

In a review of a book on Christian esoterism, and comprising also a Preface by another author, Schuon notes that the author of the Preface:

"tells us that [the book's writings] ... make known the properly esoteric dimension of 'Christian dogmatics.' But what is this 'dogmatics'? Is it the dogmas or is it their theological explanation? If it is the latter, is it the theology of Catholicism or of Orthodoxy? ... [Theological] formulations, Catholic or otherwise, are relative, on the one hand in relation to Revelation, and on the other hand in relation to the underlying truth which transcends them, and which esoterism, precisely, is called upon to reveal..."

“[The same author] declares rather regretfully that for many readers of Guénon, when they interpret the ideas and symbols of Christianity, ‘it is almost always a question of consigning to the sidelines the official dogmatics of the Church, whose esoteric dimension seems to them to be capable of being perceived only in spite of or outside its recognized forms.’ But what is the ‘official dogmatics of the Catholic Church’ other than the exoterism from whose limitations the esoterist, precisely, wishes to escape? This being so, how can one make an esoteric interpretation if it is not in spite of the exoteric interpretation and outside the formalism that it implies? How can one find the kernel if it is not in spite of the shell?”

“The writer of the preface distinguishes in the esoteric attitude a ‘way’ which consists in taking account of the ‘horizontal relations between the religions,’ and another ‘perhaps more vertical,’ which attempts to ‘recognize, in the specificity of each traditional form and according to the unique economy of each perspective, the gnostic or metaphysical dimension whereby it rejoins the Absolute and reflects it as far as is possible.’ But who has ever said anything else; who has ever dissociated the comparison of sacred forms from what constitutes the *raison d’être* of this comparison, namely the realization of the supra-formal sap of these forms? This distinction between two ‘ways’ does not correspond to any reality, for the two preoccupations are logically inseparable; no esoterist takes the trouble to compare religious concepts except from the starting-point of the axiom that each of these concepts possesses an intrinsic value that is to be discovered, and that this is facilitated precisely by having recourse to analogous concepts; in this there is no ‘verticality’ pertaining specifically to the author of this book. ‘This way therefore ... does not so much seek to authenticate the Christian perspective by referring to a group of metaphysical concepts, of which for example René Guénon provides the normative exposition, but seeks rather to penetrate to the heart of this perspective and its logic...’ But why has one ‘authenticated the Christian perspective by referring to a group of metaphysical concepts’ if it is not for the sole reason of ‘penetrating to the very heart of this perspective’? What sufficient reason, what possible motive, could the esoterist have for avoiding a reference to metaphysical concepts—certainly normative!—which would provide him with the keys for his ‘penetration’ of the symbols; all the more so since by definition he is an esoterist whose starting-point is intellectual discernment and not mystical empiricism? The writer of the preface continues: ‘by means of an attentive contemplation that listens to precisely what this religion says, without seeking to superimpose on its discourse another discourse, or without wishing to translate metaphysically what is declared religiously, but by grasping it in its own language...’ Here I would comment, firstly, that this amounts in practice to renouncing esoterism and to limiting oneself to an exoteric mysticism... I would add further that the superimposed ‘discourse,’ far from being an inexplicable luxury, has no other function than to render more intelligible and in depth the ‘discourse’ of the Church, and especially of Revelation.

“The esoterist, we are told, does not have to ‘consign to the sidelines the official dogmatics of the Catholic Church.’ To speak in concrete terms: this dogmatics would have us believe, for example, that no man can be saved except by Christ, and that consequently no one is saved outside the one Roman Catholic Church; in this case,

I would like to know, what is the ‘esoteric dimension’ of this conviction? Esoterism, which considers the nature of things, has no choice: it is obliged to note that, above and beyond the literal and institutional application, it is the one and universal Word which speaks when Christ says: ‘No man cometh to the Father but by me’; this is a necessary and not an arbitrary viewpoint, otherwise one would have to accept that the non-Christian religions are false... Consequently the esoterist must fairly and squarely ‘put on the sidelines’ the ‘official dogmatics.’”¹



Let us begin by pointing out that James Cutsinger, who is an expert in Orthodox theology, has affirmed the complete orthodoxy of Schuon’s expositions of Christian doctrine.² However, the doctrine of the Two Natures and the Trinitarian doctrine could not, as formulated in theology, comprise an integral metaphysics for Christianity, for the simple reason that this would require taking fully into account the reality of relativity *in divinis*. It goes without saying that the theological doctrine has its rights, but those of the Divine Essence are greater, and in fact the profound truth of Christ leads to this reality, as Eckhart, the master of Christian gnosis, has affirmed.³ To be sure, the Christian Mystery of the coincidence in Christ of the divine and human natures means not only that Christ saves, but that union with Christ means union with God. Schuon has never denied this, but on the contrary has plumbed its depths and explained it magisterially; he has asserted that authentic Christian gnosis is based squarely on Christ and has its Scriptural foundation above all in the Gospel of St. John. Nonetheless, the doctrine of the Two Natures is relative in the sense that it derives its meaning within the context of a relationship

¹ Frithjof Schuon, from a review dated 1979.

² See James S. Cutsinger, “The Mystery of the Two Natures,” in *Every Branch in Me*, edited by Barry McDonald (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2002), pp. 87-119.

³ “If it is wrong to reproach Christ for not having explicitly taught pure gnosis—which in fact he did teach by his very coming, and by his person, his gestures and his miracles—it is equally wrong to deny the gnostic meaning of his message, and thus to deny to intellectual contemplatives—who are centered on metaphysical truth and pure contemplation, or on pure and direct Intelligence—any right to existence, and to offer them no spiritual way in conformity with their nature and vocation” (Frithjof Schuon, “Christian Gnosis,” in Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude, *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings* [Albany, NY: SUNY, 2004], pp. 133-135).

between the Uncreated and the created.⁴This relationship ceases to exist as a cosmic reality “after” the *Apocatastasis* or the great *Pralaya*, while its essential reality subsists eternally as the pure Possibility which is its supreme origin and end. “Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away.”

As for “the very ‘touchy’ topic of whether there is indeed something ‘new’ or ‘different’ about Christian metaphysics, leaving aside the question of ‘superior;’” it is not a delicate topic for us, but rather it is simply an error if by this is meant anything other than that the Christian archetype manifests a new spiritual perspective expressing eternal truths. Moore’s objection to the notion that “Christianity should bring anything essentially different or new or superior to that offered by the other revelations” is completely correct since, clearly, what is meant by “essentially” is that in terms of metaphysical realities there could be nothing essentially different. It goes without saying that Christianity represents an esoteric transcendence in relation to the point of view of the Judaic Law, *quod Moisés velat, Christi doctrina revelat*, and that in the figure of Christ, in the redemptive power of the Sacrifice and the miracle of the Resurrection, and in the sacramental presence of Christ

⁴ “The problem of the two natures of Christ can be reduced, in the last analysis, to the relationship between the relative and the Absolute: if Christ is the Absolute entered into relativity, it follows, not only that the relative should return thereby to absoluteness, but also and above all that the relative should be prefigured in the Absolute; this is the meaning of the uncreated Word, which manifests itself in the human order; not only in the form of Christ or the *Avatara* but also and *a priori* in the form of the immanent Intellect, and this brings us back to the complementarity between Revelation and Intellection...

“In order to be as clear as possible, it is necessary to insist on the following principle: there is no possible relationship between the Absolute as such and relativity; for such a relationship to exist there must be something relative in the Absolute and something absolute in the relative. In other words: if one admits that the world is distinct from God, one must also admit that this distinction is prefigured in God Himself, which means that His unity of Essence—which is never in question—comprises degrees; not to admit this polarization *in divinis* is to leave the existence of the world without a cause, or it is to admit that there are two distinct realities and thus two ‘Gods’, namely God and the world... We once again emphasize that divine Relativity, the cause of the world, fulfills the role of the Absolute in relation to the world; in this sense, theologians are right to uphold in certain cases the absoluteness of all that is divine; absoluteness, for them, is thus synonymous with Divinity” (Frithjof Schuon, “The Mystery of the Two Natures,” in *The Fullness of God: Frithjof Schuon on Christianity*, edited by James S. Cutsinger [Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004], pp. 152-153).

in holy communion, Christianity possesses a unique superiority in relation to other religions, and which precisely is its sufficient reason.⁵ Every religion possesses something essential and unique which makes it superior to other religions in some crucial respect, and which stems from the absoluteness and saving power of its divine archetype; each religious archetype is a “Face of God.” Spiritual reality, being limitless, allows of “many mansions in my Father’s house.”

As for the fact that “Patristic metaphysics broke away from the Platonist mold at its very inception,” of course it did, and necessarily so. Platonism is a type of jñanic esoterism and not a religion; Schuon has explained this at great length in several essays.⁶ As a world religion representing above all a perspective of love and sacrifice, the starting point and the aim of the Christian religion are altogether different from those of the Platonic doctrine. At the same time, Christian doctrine in its most profound formulations is necessarily “Platonic”; not for nothing did Eckhart call Plato “that great priest.” It is the Platonic element in Christian doctrine that renders its mysteries and symbolisms most transparent metaphysically.

Wolfgang Smith writes: “It appears that with the advent of Christ everything on earth has changed; even the metaphysical landscape is no longer the same: not for the Christian!” Indeed, for such is necessarily the case with every new Revelation. It goes without saying that the Church Fathers wrote under inspiration, and it is self-evident that a new doctrine had to be formulated to take into account the real-

⁵ The very reason for the existence of Christ, and His manifest Quality, is to be “God-man.” And this quality incontestably furnishes Christianity with an element of unsurpassable superiority—it is in fact the Christian’s chief “argument” before other religions. It is in vain that one would look for the equivalent excellence in other religions, even though every Founder of a religion is necessarily an “incarnation” or an *Avatara* of the first rank. Thus, for example, the Buddha does not incarnate the same excellence as Christ: the Buddha had to embody the “Noble Eightfold Path,” and, above all, Enlightenment as the culmination of the Path, hence the unsurpassable Peace of Liberation, of *Nirvana*.

⁶ See chap., “The Dialogue between Hellenists and Christians,” in *The Fullness of God: Frithjof Schuon on Christianity*, pp. 61-73. See also Frithjof Schuon, chap. “Two Esoterisms,” in *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2000), p. 119, and Frithjof Schuon, chap. “Rationalism, Real and Apparent,” in *Logic and Transcendence* (Bedfont, Middlesex: Perennial Books, 1984), pp. 50-55, and chap. “The Enigma of Diversified Subjectivity,” in *Roots of the Human Condition* (Bloomington, IN, World Wisdom, 1991), p. 51.

ity of the God-man as the center of the new religion. The advent of Christianity means that necessarily a new intellectual perspective or “landscape” was disclosed corresponding to a newly revealed “Face” and its corresponding cosmic sector of the universal Logos. Schuon never said otherwise, and in fact no one has written more profoundly on this matter than he. Again, this must be the case with every new major Revelation. But when Smith asserts that “the ultimate gnosis ... is no longer doctrinal, no longer conceptual, no longer mediated: ‘For now we see through a glass darkly...’” it has to be pointed out that no authentic gnosis has ever confused its doctrinal formulations with the concrete reality of gnosis as such. Moore’s statement that metaphysical Truth is one and eternal and can never become other than itself nor be changed by any temporal event is impeccable.

Rinehart believes that our letter “insisted” on a supposed definition regarding the difference between theology and metaphysics. What was actually stated was simply that there is a fundamental difference between theology and metaphysics. They are different things, and the difference is crucial and definitive. Anyone who wishes to understand this difference will find that Schuon’s works explain it exhaustively, beginning with the Preface of his book, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, and repeated and elaborated throughout almost all his works.

Rinehart further imagines that the motive of our letter was to “seek to correct Christian dogma from the standpoint of ‘intrinsic metaphysical orthodoxy.’” Certainly not! The motive for our letter was to correct Smith’s assertion that the distinction between *Brahma Saguna* and *Brahma Nirguna*, which corresponds exactly to the altogether essential and fundamental metaphysical distinction between the creative ontological Principle and the pure Absolute or the Divine Essence, is considered by him to be heretical from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. Rinehart goes so far as to write that in effect our letter denies “the revealed status of the ‘theology of the Trinity.’” The revealed status regarding the reality of the Trinity is unquestionable, but there is no such thing as a revealed theology of the Trinity. There are the Scriptural foundations of the Trinity, as in the words of Christ in Matthew 28:19;

and it is Christ who is the Revelation in Christianity. As for Trinitarian theology, it is variable in the several Churches, along with other items of doctrine. Further, the theology of the Trinity is one thing and its metaphysical penetration and explication is quite another.⁷

Rinehart maintains that “this theology, which in truth comprises metaphysical dimensions including gnosis, is dismissed as a matter of ‘exoteric’ devotional sentiment.” But where has Schuon ever said that Christian theology does not comprise openings to metaphysical truth? On the contrary, he has affirmed the exact opposite. And where has he “dismissed” the entire edifice of Christian theology as simply “exoteric devotional sentiment”? Rinehart feels it necessary to point out that the doctrines in question are “intended ontologically, not as affairs of devotional sentiment, however much of the latter may be implicated.” An important stumbling block here seems to be a certain failure to grasp fully the meaning of the term *upaya*, which is by no means a pejorative. Religion as such is an *upaya*—a major one—which

⁷ It is worth repeating this footnote which was included in our “Response to a Letter on the Trinity”: “The theology of the Trinity does not constitute an explicit and homogeneous revelation; it results on the one hand, like the concept of transubstantiation, from a literalistic and quasi-mathematical interpretation of certain words in the Scriptures and on the other hand from a summation of different points of view that are related to different dimensions of the Real”

(Frithjof Schuon, chap. “Evidence and Mystery” in *Logic and Transcendence*, p. 96).

And again: “It suffices to recall once more that esoteric formulations, if they do not specifically need the crutches of theology—and this does not mean that theology does not offer other things than this—certainly find their supports in the Scriptures and in sacramental and liturgical symbolism; consequently they are, by right, parallel to the formulations of the ‘official dogmatics of the Church.’ And if the indirect and rigid character of theological thought favors a certain compensatory tendency to divagation—by way of reaction, precisely, but inversely dogmatism prevents this tendency—it is on the contrary the characteristic of esoteric thought to reduce difficulties to their underlying solutions, and therefore to the simplicity of that which is. Without doubt, sapience cannot describe the ineffable, and this is not its intention, but it seeks to furnish points of reference which permit us to open ourselves, as far as is possible, to the ineffable, and according to the will of God... Certainly, the line of demarcation between theology and gnosis is fluctuating; there is no absolute barrier between them, but in the last analysis this line does exist, and it has its openings as well as its closings; in any case it would be vain to deny, either out of pity or out of reverential sentiment, the limitations which intervene in certain theological definitions, and especially in Trinitarian doctrine” (Frithjof Schuon, from a review dated 1979).

in addition comprises many minor ones, of which the most important are so many manifestations of its “skill in means” in saving souls.⁸

Schuon furnishes a clear and decisive refutation of the anti-metaphysical opinion that the *Hypostases* are neither substances nor modes, but merely “relations” and yet that they are persons. Schuon is not interested in Sabellianism *per se*, but he is interested in coherence and in metaphysical truth. There is no earthly reason why Christian opinion could not be mistaken here and there, all the more so in that the opinion pertains to theology and not to metaphysics.

Rinehart goes on to say that “the ancient ecumenical understanding of the Persons is repeatedly misrepresented as purely relational, whereas the Creeds characterize each Person symbolically, in addition to sketching their mutual relations.” At this point it is clear who is “reproaching” whom! One has to wonder if Rinehart has read Schuon attentively or has understood what he has read. The problem is not solely that the *Hypostases* are presented as relational and yet that they are also Persons, but that theological Trinitarianism comprises several paradoxes, and this incoherence is presented as a proof of the loftiness of the doctrine. In truth, only metaphysics can adequately render a full, coherent, and profound account of the reality of the Trinity. This is what Schuon does in his writings, as in the following:

“The mystery of the Trinity is *a priori* that of the ontological ‘projection’—and polarization—of the Supreme Principle; that this Principle, being the Absolute, is thereby the Sovereign Good and consequently tends—according to the Augustinian principle—

⁸ “If in one respect form is a prolongation of Essence, in another it contradicts it, which accounts on the one hand for the ambiguity of the exoteric *upaya*, whereas the other is independent of it to the point of being able to contradict it. To the objection that esoterism also belongs to the formal order, one must respond that esoterism is aware of this and that it tends to transcend the accidentality of its own form, whereas exoterism is totally and heavily identified with its form.

“What results from this, in an altogether self-evident way, is that the dividing line between orthodoxy and apparent, and therefore merely extrinsic heresy, depends on psychological or moral contingencies of an ethnic or cultural provenance; while the fundamental *upaya*, quite clearly, transmits total truth through its symbolism, the same cannot be said of that minor *upaya* which is theology... It is a radical error to believe that the greatest spokesmen of theology, even if they are canonized saints, hold *ipso facto* all the keys to supreme wisdom; they are instruments of Providence” (“The Mystery of the Two Natures,” in *The Fullness of God: Frithjof Schuon on Christianity*, pp. 149-150).

to communicate itself, and so to radiate both intrinsically and extrinsically; that this ontological tendency coincides with the Divine Infinitude; and that the Principle (*in divinis*), by projecting itself, actualizes 'degrees,' and, by polarizing itself, actualizes 'modes'; that the projection pertains to the Infinite, and that the polarization pertains to the 'dimension' of Perfection, from which derive all possible cosmic qualities; that the *Hypostases*, depending on our manner of envisaging them, are, precisely, either degrees or modes; that the projection or radiation, is nothing other than Love, or Will, whereas the polarization, refraction, or diversification, pertains to Knowledge or Intelligence, and thus to the Creative Word. The Trinity reveals itself in the Scriptures, and there is no need—esoterically speaking—to pass through the meanders of theology, or theologies, in order to take note of it... Esoterically speaking ... the key to the Trinitarian mystery is that the Absolute by definition is the Good; that the Good, also by definition, comprises radiation (or projection) and refraction (or polarization), the latter actualizing in differentiated mode the potentialities of the Good, and the former giving rise to the levels—more and more contingent—for this actualization; whence—in the divine order—the *Hypostases*, which one can envisage in the double respect of degrees [from radiation] and modes [from refraction]. To the principle of radiation or projection—inherent in the Absolute—corresponds the 'Holy Spirit,' and to the principle of polarization or refraction, corresponds the 'Son'... Yet a further precision may be necessary, but, to tell the truth, one would never end if one wished to forestall all possible objections"⁹

But Rinehart feels that metaphysical exposition undervalues or misrepresents this Trinitarian mystery, so that what is required is a "new metaphysics" that stops short at the distinction "Uncreated and created!"

While agreeing that the fundamental metaphysical distinction between the Absolute and the relative is not specifically Vedantic, Rinehart adds, however, that "in Christian metaphysics the fundamental distinction is between the Uncreated and the created, and the whole Trinity stands on the Uncreated side." Now in the first place, no one has ever denied that the Trinity is an uncreated reality. By definition, the Three Persons in God are an uncreated reality. As for the assertion that the fundamental distinction is between Uncreated and created, indeed it is, in theology, but not in metaphysical science, for which it is rather that between the absolutely Uncreated and the "relatively Uncreated." It is precisely the theological distinction which does not attain to the metaphysical distinction between the pure Absolute and

⁹ Frithjof Schuon, from a review dated 1979. See also Frithjof Schuon, chap. "The Interplay of the Hypostases," in *From the Human to the Divine* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 1981), pp. 35-42, and especially Frithjof Schuon, chap. "Evidence and Mystery," in *Logic and Transcendence*, pp. 96-113.

the “relative Absolute”—the creative ontological Principle. To claim that the fundamental distinction in Christian metaphysics is that between the Uncreated and the Created amounts to eliminating the most profound dimension in Christianity in favor of a sublimism that fails to comprehend the idea of the Absolute transcending all relativity and thus conceives as absolute everything within Divine reality despite the complexity of this order of the Real. Rinehart ventures that “perhaps there can be ‘different kinds of non-dualism’ so far as the difference is ultimately non-different.” But “ultimately non-different” could never mean a blurring of differences where these are real and meaningful. Scriptural examples of a difference of levels of reference or of degrees of the Real are when St. John differentiates the Word that was “with God,” from the Word that “was God,” and when Christ said that the Father was “greater” and also that he and the Father “are one.” Before one can legitimately unite one has to differentiate properly and situate things accordingly.

The truth is that the entire religious order, starting from the ontological archetypes that originate and rule it, is situated necessarily within the domain of *Maya* or Relativity, since by definition it concerns the relationship between Divine Reality and the created order. All “vertically” linked causal relationships relate to the degrees of the Real, which are strictly relative, and necessarily originate with the ontological Principle within the Divine Reality.¹⁰

As for gnosis within the Christian tradition, this would of course have to be formulated with reference to the supreme and eternal essential

¹⁰ “At the risk of repeating ourselves ... whoever admits the presence of the Absolute in the world, in the form of Christ, for example, must admit equally the presence of the relative in God—in the form of the Word, precisely; whoever denies that there can be any relativity in God must consider the Creator, the Revealer, or the Redeemer as being situated beneath God, in the manner of the demiurge; for the Absolute as such neither creates, nor reveals, nor saves. In refusing to admit the relativity of the *Hypostases*, there is an element of confusion between the absolute and the sublime; since the Divine deserves or demands worship, there are some who want the Divinity to be ‘absolutely absolute’ in every possible respect, if we may express ourselves, provisionally and incidentally, in such a manner. Now God is deserving of the worship of *latría*, not inasmuch as He comprises no relativity—for in this respect He is humanly inaccessible—but inasmuch as He is absolute with respect to the relativity of the world, while comprising an aspect of relativity in view of this very contact” (Frithjof Schuon, chap. “The Mystery of the Two Natures,” pp. 153-154; see also chap. “The Human Margin,” in *In the Face of the Absolute* [Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 1989], pp. 77-79).

Identity of the uncreated Word with the Divine Essence, of which it is the immediate Self-determination; for the supreme truth is that of the sole or absolute and infinite Reality of the Essence. Eckhart expresses this in the most uncompromising terms.¹¹

Rinehart reaches the culminating point in his zeal with this statement: “with sincere respect to the honored sage (may God bless and be pleased with him) to whom so many, this writer included, owe so much, it is saddening to find the dogmatics of Christian tradition contradicted from a philosophical perspective that professes to assure and to protect the integrity of each unique, revealed confessional form.” With this imprudent blow following on the heels of his reverence, he basically—if words have a meaning here—sweeps away an entire portion of the Schuonian corpus, namely that which deals with the relationships between the form and the Substance of religions, while also qualifying this corpus as a “philosophy,” which is not entirely incorrect, supposing what is intended is the term in the best sense as “love of wisdom,” nor of course, if what is meant is the *Philosophia Perennis et Universalis*. For what is in question in Schuon is precisely his quality of representing the *Sophia Perennis*, the Sanskrit *Sanātana Dharma*, and in particular the core of that wisdom and spirituality corresponding to what the Hindu term *Brahmavidya*. Rinehart adds: “and this after having undergone the withering attack of secular modernity over several centuries—for make no mistake, it is Christianity which has thus far borne the brunt of this spiritually corrosive activity.” Here it is as if he overlooks the very obvious fact that the modern world did not arise in the contexts of Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam, but in the Christian world! And this occurred partly owing to its persistent refusal to face the reality of gnosis, as Schuon has pointed out.

¹¹ “As for Christly gnosis, it goes without saying that it implies an appropriate doctrine, founded on the equation ‘Logos-Intellect’—‘Christ in us’—and on the complementarity between ‘Incarnation’ and ‘Deification’; nevertheless, as the initiation is already in the fundamental sacraments, gnosis is not conditioned—any more than is the way of sacrificial love—by a new initiation, and in this respect one can say that the esoterism of gnosis is also accomplished in sanctity; in the mode of sanctity which corresponds to it, and without requiring a particular institutional framework”

(Frithjof Schuon, from a review dated 1979).

Regarding the Intellect, we recall Eckhart’s famous dictum that “there is something uncreated and uncreatable in the soul ... and that is the Intellect.”

Rinehart makes reference to “a certain doctrinal understanding of the universal order of Reality.” In this connection, he mentions Upton’s remark to the effect that the supra-formal, metaphysical point-of-view does not and cannot go against an orthodox theological perspective in the sense of contradicting it. We have already replied to this mistaken notion in a previous letter in *Sacred Web* concerning Transubstantiation¹². Once again, there is the crucial distinction between exoterism and esoterism, and also between a partial and an integral, sapiential esoterism. The opinion that it is not intellectually legitimate to contradict doctrines—that is, the essential dogmas—taught by an orthodox tradition makes sense from within a particular religious exoterism, but none at all from a metaphysical standpoint. Different revealed and therefore orthodox religious traditions clearly contradict one another, as well as furnish examples of important internal formal differences, such as the chief divisions within the Christian tradition. Similarly, Schuon’s distinction between extrinsic or formal orthodoxy and intrinsic or metaphysical orthodoxy is crucial. If one admits that there can be more than one authentic Revelation, one has already taken a step out of the purely exoteric and exclusivist perspective. Integral esoterism, being disinterested, puts everything in its proper place, and thus gives to each thing its due. To be sure, exoterism cannot always acknowledge the authenticity of other Revelations, despite that “there are many mansions in my Father’s house”; but in our day, in which religions confront one another in ways that were not possible in the past, any believer can at least respect sincere religious faith in contrast to the rampant unbelief and materialism in the modern world, and acknowledge that Heaven is good and merciful and free to save whomever it wishes, knowing as well that “Heaven knows its own.”

What is in question in metaphysics, the science of the integral Real, are universal principles, hence it has in view the fundamental difference between “form” and “Substance.” It has no difficulty in confirming the truth of the Christian view that God is both One and Three or Three-in-One and also the truth of the Islamic view that God is not Three but only One. Both formal assertions correspond to legitimate points of view, and thus to possible or archetypal relationships between the

¹² *Sacred Web*, Volume 28, p.162.

Absolute and the relative. The points of view and their respective economies necessarily contradict each other and even clash at their formal surface, but they are reconciled in their metaphysical depth, rather as the divergent directions of the radii of a circle are unified or “fused but not confused” at their supra-formal center, which is both origin and end. Religious exoterism is bound to its formalism, but not so the metaphysical point of view, which penetrates to the underlying transcendent and also immanent unity of religions, on the one hand, and by the same token to the archetypal essence of each distinct religious form, on the other. Exoterism confuses the form with the essence and absolutizes the former, whereas for esoterism the revealed sacred form with all its profound symbolic content is transparent in relation to the universal essence which generates it in the first place and gives it all its meaning and very reality. Each archetypal reality in God, as a distinct “Face of God” turned towards men, is not other than the One and Only infinite God.

Rinehart attempts a conciliatory conclusion with these words: “In the end, our spiritual solidarity overrides our differences of doctrine, whether theological or metaphysical: Common Word, Common Ground, love of God and compassion for neighbor, in the face of a systematic atheism and cultural nihilism that are ever more dominant. M. Ali Lakhani’s lapidary editorial (one would like to say, sermon) reflects beautifully the underlying metaphysical orientation, away from sensory transience and toward spiritual intellect.” However, while appreciating the author’s sentiment of solidarity with believers of the various religions, which has always been counseled by Schuon, it is important to understand that the differences between religions are at the level of their respective formalisms and corresponding theologies and not at that of their metaphysical depth, where there is necessarily complete unanimity. The essential formal differences, however, are the result of the saving Divine Will of each religion, revealed for a given humanity, and can by no means be overridden. What men can and ought to do is respect the faith and piety of people of all the great religions and their civilizations—of all “men of good will”—and hence also the necessary providential differences between them and, notwithstanding the absence of the metaphysical penetration of their essential unity

as well as of the respective archetypal origins and essences of their differences, trust and repose in God's goodness and judgment. In the words of the Koran:

“For each We have appointed a Law and a Way. Had God willed, He could have made you one community. But that He might try you by that which He hath given you [He hath made you as you are]. So vie with one another in good works. Unto God ye will all return, and He will inform you of that wherein ye differed” (5:48).