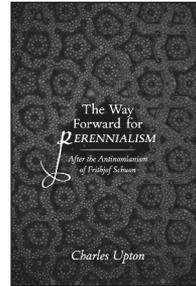


Book Review: The Way Forward for Perennialism: After the Antinomianism of Frithjof Schuon

By Charles Upton

The Dialogos Series, Sophia Perennis, NY, 2022, 246pp

Reviewed by Joseph A. Fitzgerald



Reaffirming Perennialism:

A Response to Charles Upton's "Way Forward"

This article offers a partial response to Charles Upton's recent book and paper, which share the title "*The Way Forward for Perennialism: After the Antinomianism of Frithjof Schuon*".¹ In both, Upton seeks to describe what he sees as "the apparent contradiction between his [Schuon's] doctrines and certain elements of his practice, as well as by the seeming contradictions—few but glaring—within the doctrines themselves."² I begin by responding to three of his perceived doctrinal contradictions—those he highlights in his paper—before addressing his broadest challenge, which is that leveled against Schuon's person and in particular his orthodoxy. Each titled section below begins with an italicized quote from Upton, either from his paper or his book, followed by my commentary.

¹ Charles Upton, *The Way Forward for Perennialism: After the Antinomianism of Frithjof Schuon* (Philmont, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2022) and Charles Upton, "The Way Forward for Perennialism: After the Antinomianism of Frithjof Schuon", paper as delivered and circulated at the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana on October 4, 2022 at the conference "Converging Wisdom? Questioning the Continued Relevance of the Perennial Philosophy".

² "The Way Forward for Perennialism", p. 4.

On Love and Sincerity

Upton: *In Gnosis, Divine Wisdom* he [Schuon] says: “One can love something false, without love ceasing to be what it is”; in other words, it is possible to have a true love for a false object—a demon, for example. Yet elsewhere he rails against the error of “sincerism”, which holds that subjective sincerity of feeling and belief can obviate the limitations of objective error.³

It is helpful here to quote not just a phrase taken out of context, but the entire sentence, which occurs as part of a broader discussion on the difference between knowledge and love:

One can love the false without love ceasing to be what it is; but one cannot “know” the false in the same way, which is to say that knowledge cannot be deluded about its object without ceasing to be what it is; error always implies a privation of knowledge, whereas sin does not imply a privation of will.⁴

Thus, a person may have love of a kind for a false object—a demon perhaps, to take Upton’s extreme example—but this love is sin, precisely,⁵ the “sincerity” of which does not obviate the objective error. For Schuon, such love is not—as Upton seems to infer—what one calls “true love”, any more than “sincerism” is true sincerity. Of the first, Schuon writes: “[L]ove, to the extent that it transcends itself in the direction of its supernatural source, is the love of man for God and of God for man, and finally it is Beatitude without origin and without end.”⁶ And of the second: “The root of all true sincerity is sincerity towards God, not towards what suits our own good pleasure; in other words, it is not enough to believe in God, one must also draw all the implications of this in our outer and inner behavior.”⁷

³ Ibid., p. 4.

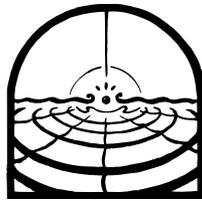
⁴ *Gnosis, Divine Wisdom: A New Translation with Selected Letters* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006), p. 66.

⁵ This at least is the case with those who, due to disbelief, love a false object because it is so, those such as the followers of Moses who drank the golden calf into their hearts (see Koran 2:93).

⁶ *The Transfiguration of Man* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1995), p. 25.

⁷ *Esoterism as Principle and as Way: A New Translation with Selected Letters* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2019), p. 118.

To read the balance of this article, please subscribe to this volume.



SACRED WEB

A JOURNAL OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

www.sacredweb.com