

*The Transcendent Unity of Religions*

Written by Frithjof Schuon in 1957, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* is a unique title that draws the student deep into Schuon's complex mind and syntax. In the introduction written by Huston Smith, the assertion is made that "Intimations and realizations of [a] supreme identity appear in varying degrees of explicitness in all revealed religions and constitute the point at which they are one" and that Schuon's perspective of this unity is superior to others because "the defect in other versions...is that they claim unity in religions too soon, at levels where, being exoteric, true Unity does not pertain." Both Schuon and Huston are proponents of a gradation of "degrees of being" that point to their ultimate metaphysical unity behind changeable exoteric forms.

Schuon begins the short but dense book with an examination of exoterism versus esoterism; using the analogy of a circle to explain metaphysical reality, he links various points along that circle to the revealed religions who by definition [of a point] cannot help but disbelieve all other points. Schuon sums up this idea nicely, "The exoteric viewpoint is...doomed to end by negating itself once it is no longer vivified by the presence within it of the esoterism of which it is both the outward radiation and the veil." In other words, exoterism is limited while esoterism is universal.

The three Abrahamic religions are discussed in significant detail later in the book, where Schuon states they "present themselves in the form of irreconcilable differences" but is quick to state that "religion divides outwardly, but not inwardly." Schuon's overall belief is that each revealed religion is an improvement upon that which came before it, but only insofar as it advances an aspect of the "Divine Message." Thus Christianity "improved" the form of Judaism, as Islam improved the form of Christianity, but these improvements are only to be understood in

the exoteric physical dogma and not as affecting the timelessness of the Divine Message common to each. Schuon, in fact, concerns himself with a careful apologetic defense of Islam throughout the book. Schuon sums up his viewpoint thusly, “...each religious form is necessarily superior to others belonging to the same order, though only in some particular aspect of its manifestation and not in its essence or spiritual possibilities.”

Schuon states that the prophet Muhammad was “symbolically identical” to the Virgin Mary as the passive ground for the reception of the active Word, and in this view lies the foundation for Mary’s “immaculate” nature as a passive, untouched, and unformed receptacle. Contrary to Judaism’s exoterism, Schuon identifies Christianity as an esoteric “initiatory religion” which is evident in its doctrine of the trinity, and in the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist. Schuon embraces a Divine Plan for humanity that involves its cyclic evolution toward the lofty goal of recognizing our ultimate unity with God, or in Schuon’s parlance, “the natural participation of the human microcosm in the Divine Metacosm by transmuting it into supernatural participation and finally into union and identity.”

1. Frithjof Schuon. *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*. Wheatson Ill, Theosophical, Repr, 2011.

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