

Mysticism,
the Perennial Philosophy
and
Interfaith Dialogue

by

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Author's Biographical Notes & Contact Details

Philip Brown is an independent researcher in the field of Contemplative Studies. He spent his working life teaching children with severe and multiple disabilities and developing training programs to prevent the physical and sexual abuse of people with disabilities. Baptised and confirmed in The Church of England, he has practised meditation for 40 years and over the last 22 years he has studied and practiced the Dzogchen Teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. Prior to that he practised Transcendental Meditation and Vipassana (Insight) Meditation. Since the age of 14, when he first read Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*, he has had an abiding interest in this philosophy and the field of comparative religion. This essay was written in memory of his late brother Ian Allan Brown who was a Sufi and fellow Wayfarer.

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Introduction

In a world in which *religious sectarianism* and *religiously-justified violence* are all too common ¹, the possibility that an essential mystic truth is shared by most, if not all the world's Great Religious Traditions, nurtures and strengthens the hope that this discrimination and violence, born of sectarianism, may eventually be replaced by sincere and comprehensive interfaith dialogue and cooperation based on love, compassion and wisdom.

In the hope of making some small contribution to the wider acceptance of such a truth, an anthology of quotations is offered from the writings of renowned and acknowledged mystics from various religious traditions. These writings express their understanding that non-dual consciousness, which by nature is transcendent and immanent, is a fundamental if not the fundamental aspect of the ultimate nature and realisation of *Divinity* -- a *Divinity* which, by its very *non-dual nature* as well as our *dualistic conception of non-duality*, is not, nor can be, exclusive to any religion. It is the author's fervent hope that the essay will contribute to existing interfaith dialogue between contemplatives of different religious traditions. It is also hoped that it will encourage readers to start, recommence or continue and deepen personal contemplative (mystic) practice and use the understandings arising from such practice to promote interfaith dialogue and tolerance.

As context for both the *Anthology* and discussion of this truth concerning *Divinity*, *transcendence* and *immanence*, the terms *Divinity*, *transcendence*, *immanence*, *non-duality* and *mysticism* will be defined and an overview of the *perennial philosophy* will be offered using the key schema of Frithjof Schuon's theory of the *transcendent unity of religions* (see diagram below). This schema differentiates the *esoteric* (internal, contemplative, mystic, non-literalist-scriptural) and *exoteric* (external, ritual, literalist-scriptural) dimensions of religious practice of the world's Great Religious Traditions and provides an explanation for the convergence of these Traditions at the esoteric level and their divergence at the level of the exoteric. The overview of the *perennial philosophy* and *transcendent unity of religions* is also intended to give insight into what mystics (i.e. esoterics / contemplatives) of different religious traditions have in common. Furthermore, it explores the nature of the difficulties

they face promoting mystic practice among the exoteric practitioners of their own traditions, as well as promoting such practice as a natural foundation for interfaith dialogue and tolerance. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the essay explains the importance of persisting in these endeavours and gives reasons for optimism about their success.

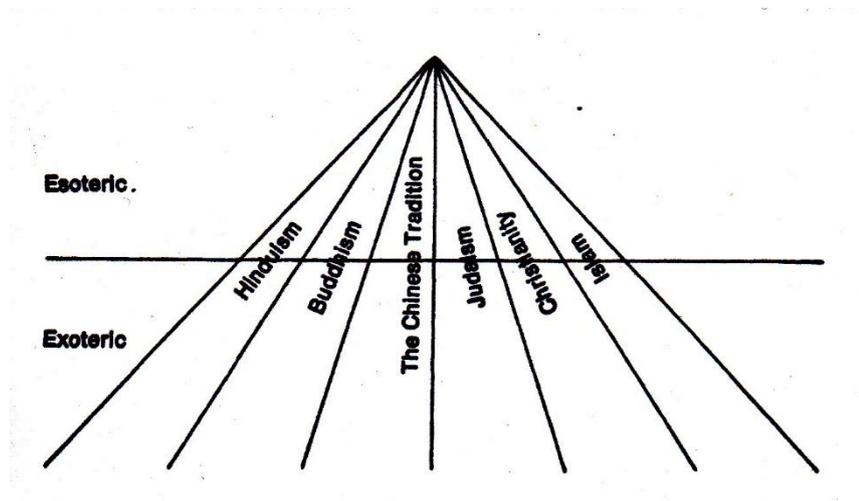


Diagram: The Transcendent Unity of Religions

Source: Smith, H. (1993). 'Introduction to the Revised Edition' of Schuon, F. (1993). The Transcendent Unity of Religions. Illinois, Quest Books. (p. xii)

The essay uses two broad strategies, each of which has elements that are ultimately complementary but at first may not seem to be so.

Firstly, the *dualistic-rational mind* of the reader is engaged by intellectual discussion in order to convince the reader to use *non-dual, non-rational faculties* to gain true spiritual insight. That is, through the intellectual discussion provided, the author seeks to co-opt the reader's dualistic mind to convince him or her, if this is not already the case, that through certain techniques of *contemplative prayer, meditation or contemplation* it is possible to directly apprehend *Divinity* in a manner not possible via the dualistic mind.

Secondly, while acknowledging that the topic of the essay provides rich opportunity for theological and metaphysical inquiry, and that the essay contains extensive intellectual discussion for the purpose just described, its principal and unapologetic aim is to allow the

reader, based on the *Anthology* of quotations, an opportunity to assess for them self the possibility that all, or at least most of the world's Great Religious Traditions share the same essential mystic Truth, namely, that *Divinity* is non-dual, transcendent and immanent. The short yet poignant *Anthology* includes offerings from the mystic streams of five of the world's Great Religious Traditions: 'Advaita Vedanta' from Hinduism; 'Christian Mysticism' from Christianity; 'Dzogchen' and 'Zen' from Buddhism, 'Sufism' from Islam, and Taoism; and compared to works such as Aldous Huxley's anthology of mysticism '*The Perennial Philosophy*', is a mere hint of the cornucopia of such writing available in mystic scripture and literature. The intention to have the reader directly and personally engage with the quotations is appropriate because, as stated by many mystics and writers on the *perennial philosophy*, the ineffable nature of mystic experience is not usually, solely, or principally obtained through reason or scriptural and ritual observance related to the dualistic exoteric form of religions; but rather, it is *apprehended directly* through the diligent application of mystic forms of spiritual practice via *contemplative prayer, meditation or contemplation* designed to foster non-dual consciousness ², and/or through engagement with *sacred art* ³ (see Glossary entry - 'Contemplation, Meditation & Contemplative Prayer'). It is hoped that by allowing the mystics quoted in the *Anthology* to speak for themselves through their writings, the reader may engage, through their own spiritual intuition, knowledge and experience, with this essential mystic / esoteric truth concerning the non-duality, transcendence and immanence of *Divinity*.

This strategy of letting writers "speak for themselves" is also employed with regard to the C20th and C21st writers mentioned in the essay. These writers are both leading authorities on the *perennial philosophy* and exponents (and in many cases diligent practitioners) of contemplative spirituality. They include: Aldous Huxley, Thomas Merton, Huston Smith, Ken Wilber, Frithjof Schuon, Laurence Freeman OSB, Richard Rohr OFM, Reza Shah-Kazemi, Harry Oldmeadow and Dana Sawyer. Given the scholarship, simplicity of expression and clarity of thought these writers bring to the discussion of issues raised in the essay, the author often deemed it appropriate to directly quote rather than paraphrase their work. In the case of Huston Smith, Ken Wilber and Thomas Merton some quotations are quite extensive due to their pertinence to the matter at hand. Quotations may include text in

square brackets inserted by the author of the essay to enhance readability. The result is however in all cases faithful to the original intention of the writer quoted.

Before proceeding to the *Anthology* and as context for the writings it contains, let us now explore the concepts of *Divinity, transcendence, immanence, non-duality, mysticism, the perennial philosophy* and the *transcendent unity of religions*.

Divinity

Divinity is referred to by many names in the world's Great Religious Traditions. These include but are not limited to: *God*; the *Godhead*; *Spirit*; *Brahman*; the *Self*; the *Divine Ground of Being*; the *Universal Consciousness of the Risen Christ*; the *Unutterable Mystery*; the *Christ Mystery*; *Abba*; *YHWH*; the *Truth*; the *One Reality*; the *Ultimate Reality*; *Unitive Consciousness*; the *Tao*; *Shunyata*; *Buddha-Nature*; *Rigpa*, the *True Nature of Mind*; *Dharmakaya*; the *Primordial State and the Self-Perfected State*. However, for the sake of convenience, the term *Divinity* will be used in this essay as a synonym for all such terms. As indicated by the meaning ascribed to these terms by Contemplative Traditions and Schools, as well as by the writings of the mystics quoted in the *Anthology*, the term *Divinity* is used in this essay to indicate the *Absolute Undifferentiated Unity of Being which, as the Ground of Being, is both the inherent Primordial Nature of, and origin of, all manifest forms, human or otherwise*.

People have the potential to experience a range of states or levels of consciousness, and what is 'known' depends on the consciousness of the 'knower'. As Aldous Huxley explained:

"Knowledge is a function of being. When there is a change of being of the knower, there is a corresponding change in the nature and amount of knowledge." ⁴

This is, for example, the case with *Divinity*. The nature of *Divinity* is perceived differently depending on whether it is viewed from the perspective of dual or non-dual consciousness. From the perspective of an individual experiencing dual (dualistic) consciousness, *Divinity* may be said to be the *highest* and *ultimate* attainment of spiritual realisation, whereas this does not make sense from the perspective of non-dual consciousness. As will be seen in the following sections on *transcendence*, *immanence*, *mysticism* and *non-duality*, as well as the writings quoted in the *Anthology*, *Divinity* from a non-dual perspective not only transcends the individual spiritual seeker but in fact transcends and is immanent in all manifest things. That is, whereas from a dualistic perspective *Divinity* is the highest and ultimate spiritual realization, from a non-dual perspective, although *Divinity transcends* all manifest things and hence may appear to be *greater* in that it is not exclusively related to any particular

thing, it cannot in fact be *higher* or *greater* than anything else because it is equally *immanent* in all manifest things.

Notwithstanding this paradox, it should be remembered that both dual and non-dual perspectives on *Divinity* have a valid and necessary role to play as the spiritual seeker progressively transitions from dual to non-dual consciousness through mystic (esoteric) spiritual practice.

The term *mystic* will be used to describe spiritual practitioners who elsewhere may be referred to as *contemplative* or *esoteric*. Consequently, the terms *mystic*, *esoteric* and *contemplative* should be viewed by the reader as synonyms. The term *mystic* will be used as the default term in the essay, however the terms *contemplative* and *esoteric* will also be used when they better fit the context of discussion.

The phrase “*the Arts*” is used in its broadest sense and therefore includes painting, drawing, sculpture, music, dance, theatre, film making, poetry and literature.

Transcendence & Immanence

As explained by Ken Wilber using the term *Spirit* rather than *Divinity*:

“ ... the **transcendent** nature of Spirit ... far surpasses any “worldly” or creaturely or finite things. The entire earth (or even universe) could be destroyed, and Spirit would remain

... the **immanent** nature of Spirit ... is equally and totally present in all manifest things and events, in nature, in culture, in heaven and on earth, with no partiality ... no phenomenon whatsoever is closer to Spirit than another, for all are equally “made of Spirit”. Thus, Spirit is the highest goal of all development and evolution, and the ground of the entire sequence, as present fully at the beginning as at the end. Spirit is prior to this world, but not other to this world.”⁵

Described more succinctly, we may say that **transcendence** means *beyond, not limited to the individual spiritual seeker or any other manifest form*, whereas **immanence** means *within the individual spiritual seeker and all other manifest forms*.

Mysticism / Mystic Experience

What is mysticism & mystic experience?

Given the ineffable nature of mystic experience ⁶, attempts to provide a 'definition of mysticism' seem "a fool's errand" or at very least an oxymoron. Nonetheless, while acknowledging that this essay is neither definitive nor scholarly, and furthermore, that a full understanding of mysticism can only be apprehended through direct experience, the following descriptions of mysticism are offered to provide some provisional sense of the term's meaning.

According to the scholar and philosopher of mysticism Professor Walter T. Stace:

"The most important, the central characteristic in which all fully developed mystical experiences agree, and which in the last analysis is definitive of them and serves to mark them off from other kinds of experiences, is that they involve the apprehension of an ultimate nonsensuous unity of all things, a oneness or a One to which neither the senses nor reason can penetrate. In other words, it entirely transcends our sensory-intellectual consciousness." ⁷

Another source of insight into the nature of mystic experience comes from *The Minimum Working Hypothesis* developed by Aldous Huxley to encapsulate his understanding of the truths shared by contemplative / esoteric spiritual practitioners.

This hypothesis states:

THAT there is a Godhead, Divine Ground of Being, or Brahman that our reality depends upon for its existence.

THAT the Ground both transcends the world and is immanent as the world.

THAT it is possible for human beings to love, know and, from virtually, to become actually identified with the Divine Ground.

THAT to achieve this unitive knowledge is the ultimate end and purpose of human existence.

*THAT there is a Way or Dharma that must be obeyed if people are to achieve their final end, and this Way is a way of peace, love, humility and compassion.”*⁸

The Christian Contemplative and Franciscan Friar Richard Rohr wrote:

*“To speak of mysticism in simple terms means we speak of experiential knowledge of God instead of merely mental or cognitive knowledge of God ... God is another word for the heart of everything and for everything precisely in its connectedness”.*⁹

Similarly, and with striking brevity, Professor Brian Colless defined mysticism as:

*“ ... religious experience involving a non-rational encounter with ultimate divine reality, which imparts a sense of unity.”*¹⁰

Mystic experience therefore refers to the non-rational direct apprehension of *Divinity* [i.e. the non-rational direct apprehension of the *Absolute Undifferentiated Unity of Being, which as the Ground of Being, is both the inherent Primordial Nature of, and origin of, all manifest forms, human or otherwise*].

This “non-rational encounter with ultimate divine reality” [i.e. direct apprehension of ultimate reality] mentioned by Professor Colless is a core feature of mysticism¹¹. As seen above, mysticism has been variously described as: “*entirely transcend[ing] our sensory-intellectual consciousness*”; “*the apprehension of an ultimate nonsensuous unity of all things, a oneness or a One to which neither the senses nor reason can penetrate*”; “*a non-rational encounter with the divine*”, “*experiential knowledge of God*” and “*an apprehension of the One*”. Importantly, experience of non-duality and its attendant transcendence and immanence are implicit in the attainment of this “unity of all things”, this “apprehension of the One”. This is logical from the perspective of rational (dualistic) thinking, as well as self-evident to those with the perspective that arises from non-dual consciousness. From the perspective of rational (dualistic) thinking, if “God” (i.e. *Divinity*) is *transcendent* (i.e. beyond, not limited to

the individual spiritual seeker or any other manifest form) and *immanent* (i.e. within the individual seeker and all other manifest forms), then “union with God” is necessarily *non-dual*. It is also important to note that describing *mysticism* as a “non-rational” process does not imply ‘irrationality’, but rather, the use of capacities other than rational thinking. This is because rational thinking is not sufficient to generate metaphysical / mystic understanding¹². As explained by the renowned Vedantist-Hindu mystic Adi Shankara, in relation to “the *Atman* or immanent eternal Self [that is] one with *Brahman*, the Absolute Principle of all existence”¹³ :

*“the pure truth of Atman can be reached by meditation, contemplation, and other spiritual disciplines such as the knower of ‘Brahman’ [Divinity] may prescribe – but never by subtle argument.”*¹⁴

Similarly, the great Sufi mystic and metaphysician Ibn ‘Arabi held that “speculative philosophy and theology were of limited value and that the intellect could not lead to certainty and the truths it revealed were only relative”¹⁵. He said:

*“The science of philosophy is not totally in vain but there is no single thing that cannot be known through revelation or spiritual experience. Besides, to devote oneself to speculative reflection is a veil, and if there are a few of those philosophers who experience spiritual states, such as Plato the sage, that is extremely rare.”*¹⁶

The difference between the ‘concept of mysticism’ and ‘mystic experience’ is important. As stated by Professor Stace in his work *The Teachings of the Mystics*:

*“...a mystical idea is a product of the conceptual intellect, whereas a mystical experience is a non-intellectual mode of consciousness”*¹⁷

Hence Ken Wilber noted:

“... dualism is ultimately overcome, not with any model [theory], no matter how “nondualistic” it calls itself, but only with satori, which is a direct and radical realization (or change in level of consciousness), and that transformation cannot be

*delivered by any model, but only by prolonged spiritual practice. As the traditions say, you must have the actual experience to see what is actually revealed, just as you must actually see a sunset to know what is involved.”*¹⁸

It is also for this reason that Adi Shankara explained:

*“Disease is not cured by pronouncing the name of medicine, but by taking medicine. Deliverance is not achieved by repeating the word ‘Brahman’, but by directly experiencing [it] ...”*¹⁹

Practices that foster mystic experience:

Mystic experience requires *direct apprehension of Divinity*, however this direct apprehension is obscured by the typical functioning of the ego with its sense of being a separate-self and the egotistical passions associated with it²⁰. In this regard, using the term “the Self” to indicate *Divinity* the Hindu mystic and sage Sri Ramana Maharshi said:

*“ ... the Self is not reached. You **are** the Self. You are already That. The fact is that you are ignorant of your blissful state. Ignorance supervenes and draws a veil over the pure Bliss. Attempts are directed only to remove this ignorance. This ignorance consists in wrong knowledge. The wrong knowledge consists in the false identification of the Self with the body, the mind, etc. This false identity must go and there remains the Self”.*²¹

As also explained by the renowned Sufi mystic Fakhruddin Iraqi:

*“If this screen ... which is you ... is struck from before your eyes, the Beloved will find the Beloved, and you will be entirely lost”.*²²

Similarly, the renowned Buddhist 'Dzogchen' master Chogyal Namhkai Norbu wrote:

"... ordinary ego-centred consciousness is ... the limited cage of dualistic vision that closes off the experience of the one's own true nature, which is the space of the primordial state [Divinity]." 23

This obscuration of *direct apprehension of Divinity* created by the ego's sense of separate-self is referred to as *Maya* (illusion) in Buddhism and Hinduism ²⁴ and the *Veil* in Sufism ²⁵. In Orthodox Christianity the purification of the egotistical passions which obscure *Divinity* is referred to as the spiritual stage of *Catharsis* ²⁶. *Contemplative prayer, meditation* and *contemplation* are key spiritual tools by which mystics seek to transcend the ego and attain non-dual consciousness in which *Divinity* both transcends and is immanent in all things. Importantly, the obscuration of *Divinity* caused by the ego is not removed by destroying the ego but rather by transcending it. In fact, the ego cannot destroy itself "because the desire to get rid of the ego is itself a manifestation of the ego" ²⁷. It can however be transcended. This is achieved when the mystic spiritual practitioner, usually through diligent *contemplative prayer, meditation* or *contemplation* becomes identified with the entire *Divine Ground of Being (Divinity, Ultimate Reality, the Absolute Unity* etc.) rather than their former *exclusive identification* with their ego. In this process the ego is not destroyed but the illusions previously related to it are revealed and its nature and function are placed in true perspective ²⁸. One approach to facilitating the transcendence of the ego, which is common to a number of religious traditions, is the systematic, rigorous, though relaxed and gentle observation, analysis and interrogation of the true nature of the ego and its sense of being a separate-self. There are a range of techniques of *contemplative prayer, meditation* and *contemplation* that give insight into questions such as: How does one's sense of self arise? From where do thoughts and feelings arise and where do they abide and go? What happens if one develops the capacity to remain in a state of *relaxed presence without distraction*, thereby simply observing and acknowledging rather than being distracted by thoughts and feelings? Do thoughts and feelings, and one's sense of separate-self have any *inherent self-nature* (i.e. individual essence independent of other phenomena / entities)? ²⁹

Further explanation of how transcendence of ego may be achieved through *contemplative prayer, meditation* and *contemplation* is beyond the scope of this essay, and also beyond the authentic and legitimate spiritual authority of the author. As mentioned earlier however, as well as the key spiritual practices of *contemplative prayer, meditation* and *contemplation, the Arts* provide important tools for the *direct apprehension* of mystic truths and are a powerful vehicle for the expression of mystic insight³⁰. This role of artists is apparent in many of the artistic offerings of online publications such as the *Beshara Magazine, The Culturium, and Science and NonDuality (SAND)*, as well as anthologies of sacred poetry such as Mitchell (1989). Of course, *the Arts* are used for many purposes, but the expression of the *Divine* through *sacred art* is by definition its paramount purpose, and when the artist does so, it can be an act arising from deep spiritual understanding. “Sacred art is that which symbolically renders visible (or audible) that which is “incommensurable” and “transcendent” and “is an indispensable part of every religious tradition”³¹.

Furthermore, even *Art* which appears to the viewer as ostensibly *profane rather than sacred* can fulfil the role of *sacred art* by what it elicits in the individual experiencing it. For example, some landscape paintings by the Australian artist William Robinson, or the architectural installations called *Skyspaces* by the US artist James Turrell which explore space and light (such as the one called *Within without* at the National Gallery of Australia), have this impact on the author.

Also, the apprehension of *beauty* in ourselves, other people and the world can be an important tool of spiritual practice³² and hence expression of *beauty* can play a valuable role in *sacred art*. As stated by the Sufi Master Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan in his work *That Which Transpires Behind That Which Appears*:

“Somehow [beauty] does not speak to our mind; it touches a very deep point in us where there is a kind of unconscious recollection of a state prior to our incarnation.”³³

Summarising and quoting Frithjof Schuon on the role of *beauty*, Professor Harry Oldmeadow explained:

Beauty ... is a manifestation of the Infinite on a finite plane and so introduces something of the Absolute into the world of relativities. Its sacred character "confers on perishable things a texture of eternity". ³⁴

Sacred Art, therefore, along with *contemplative prayer, meditation and contemplation* has an important role to play in the *direct apprehension of Divinity* that is characteristic of mysticism.

Mystics included in the Anthology

For the purposes of this essay, only the writings of *renowned and acknowledged mystics with a clear spiritual vocation in the world's Great Religious Traditions* are included in the *Anthology* so as to ensure certainty in the reader's mind that those quoted are in fact 'mystics', and that the inspiration from whence their writing arises is their own spiritual experience. Notwithstanding the logic and practicality of this rationale, a number of caveats should be stated concerning the occurrence of mystic experience. Firstly, it must be acknowledged that mystic experience and understanding can arise as a result of spiritual practices unrelated to the world's Great Religious Traditions (for example – as may be the case through Primal Religions ³⁵). Secondly, while it is acknowledged that non-dual consciousness is the highest of the transpersonal states of consciousness associated with mystic experience, there are other states of consciousness that give rise to other forms or degrees of mystic experience ³⁶. Thirdly, as suggested above, the work of some artists clearly indicates they have been graced by mystic experience. Fourthly, it is acknowledged that ordinary or lay people are capable of and in fact have mystic experience ³⁷, sometimes quite spontaneously and at any point during their spiritual and personal development ³⁸. This having been said, although artists and other lay or ordinary people may have mystic experience, unlike the experiences of *acknowledged and renowned mystics*, their experiences are usually not spoken of or recorded ³⁹; and even if they are, as may be the case with artists, the depth, quality, authenticity, stability or persistence of their spiritual insight may be subject to debate ⁴⁰. Consequently, only the writings of *renowned and acknowledged mystics from the world's Great Religious Traditions* have been included in the

Anthology. Hopefully this will not only enhance in the reader's mind the credibility of the mystics quoted, but justify the reader's serious consideration of the concordance of these mystics' spiritual insights given the disparity of the orthodoxies held by their respective religious traditions.

For readers wishing to further confirm the credibility of the *renowned mystics* quoted in the *Anthology*, *Appendix 1* provides a brief biography of each mystic. Similarly, it provides brief biographies of the prominent writers whose commentaries on the *Perennial Philosophy*, the *Transcendent Unity of Religion* or related matters have been quoted or otherwise referred to in the essay.

Non-duality

For the purposes of this essay, 'non-dual consciousness' is defined as a radical union of the manifest and the unmanifest, a union of the entire world of Form with the Formless [i.e. causal emptiness] ⁴¹. Although this definition has been offered, it is important to note that non-duality is "*not an idea or a concept it is a direct realization*" ⁴². The following extensive excerpt from Ken Wilber's book *The Eye of Spirit* is provided because, despite the ineffable nature of mystic experience, it gives an uncommonly clear description of non-duality and explanation of why people usually do not experience non-duality even though it is part of their being, their inherent nature.

"... the Nondual mystics from Plotinus and Eckhart in the West to Nagarjuna and Lady Tsogyal in the East universally maintain that absolute reality and the relative world are "not-two" (which is the meaning of "nondual"), much as a mirror and its reflections are not separate, or an ocean is one with its many waves. So the "other world" of Spirit [Divinity] and "this world" of separate phenomena are deeply and profoundly "not-two", and this nonduality is a direct and immediate realization which occurs in certain meditative states – in other words, seen with the eye of contemplation – although it then becomes very simple, very ordinary perception, whether you are meditating or not. Every single thing you perceive is the radiance of Spirit itself, so much so that Spirit is not seen apart from that thing: the robin sings,

and just that is it, nothing else. This becomes your constant realization, through all changes of state, very naturally, just so.

But why is it, then, that we ordinarily don't have that perception?

All the great Nondual wisdom traditions have given a fairly similar answer to that question. We don't see that Spirit is fully and completely present right here, right now, because our awareness is clouded with some form of avoidance. We do not want to be choicelessly aware of the present; rather, we want to run away from it, or run after it, or we want to change it, alter it, hate it, love it, loathe it, or in some way agitate to set ourselves into, or out of, it. We will do anything except come to rest in the pure Presence of the present. We will not rest with pure Presence, we want to be elsewhere, quickly

In nondual meditation or contemplation, the agitation of the separate-self sense profoundly relaxes, and the self uncoils in the vast expanse of all space. At that point, it becomes obvious that you are not "in here" looking at the world "out there", because that duality simply collapses into pure Presence and spontaneous luminosity.

This realization may take many forms. A simple one is something like this: You might be looking at a mountain, and you have relaxed into the effortlessness of your own present awareness, and then suddenly the mountain is all, you are nothing. Your separate-self sense is suddenly and totally gone, and there is simply everything that is arising moment to moment. You are perfectly aware, perfectly conscious, everything seems completely normal, except you are nowhere to be found. You are not on this side of your face looking at the mountain, you are the sky, you are the clouds, you are everything that is arising moment to moment, very simply, very clearly, just so.

.... Once you glimpse that state – what the Buddhists call One Taste (because you and the entire universe are one taste or experience) – it becomes obvious that you are not entering this state, but rather, it is a state that, in some profound and mysterious way, has been your primordial condition from time immemorial. You have, in fact, never left this state for a second. ⁴³

To summarize the essay thus far, *mysticism* is the non-rational direct apprehension of *Divinity*; *Divinity* being the Ultimate Reality, the Divine Ground of Being, the Absolute Unity and inherent Primordial Condition of all manifest forms, human or otherwise; and as such, it is by nature non-dual and both transcends and is immanent in all manifest forms ⁴⁴. Furthermore, *sacred art*, *contemplative prayer*, *meditation* and *contemplation* are common spiritual tools or vehicles for this direct apprehension of *Divinity*.

The Perennial Philosophy

The *perennial philosophy*, also known as the *perennial wisdom*, is the principal conceptual framework supporting the view that the world's Great Religious Traditions share the same mystic experience as their ultimate goal. It is a philosophy which has been taken many different forms from ancient to modern times. Aldous Huxley described it as:

"... the metaphysic that recognises a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being – [it therefore] is immemorial and universal." ⁴⁵

The *perennial philosophy* states that: "... the experience of union with the *Divine* is identical in all the mystic branches of all the world's religions", and Huston Smith, one of the most renowned scholars of comparative religion of the 20th, considered it to be the "esoteric essence of all spirituality and the inspiration of all religion" ⁴⁶. Although many people are not familiar with the term *perennial philosophy*, its influence in the Twentieth Century has been pervasive and is not only evident in theology, metaphysics and spirituality, but also fields as diverse as self-help therapies, medicine and science ⁴⁷.

This philosophy was encapsulated with elegant simplicity by Frithjof Schuon when he said:

"...direct knowledge of the mysteries [i.e. Divinity] could not be Muslim or Christian just as the sight of a mountain is the sight of a mountain not something else". ⁴⁸

Although the expression of the *perennial philosophy* is not limited to the adherents of any one of the world's Great Religious Traditions; in recognition and celebration of the rebirth, reemphasis and growing practice of meditation and other contemplative practices among lay and ordained Christians ⁴⁹, let us first consider examples of its expression by three modern Christian Contemplatives. Firstly, in his book *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, the

Trappist Monk Thomas Merton expressed this philosophy while commenting on Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism. He said:

“The greatest religions are all, in fact, very simple. They all retain very important essential differences, no doubt, but in their inner reality Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism are extremely simple... and they all end up with the simplest and most baffling thing of all: direct confrontation with Absolute Being, Absolute Love, Absolute Mercy or Absolute Void, by an immediate and fully awakened engagement in the living of everyday life”. ⁵⁰

Secondly, the Franciscan friar Richard Rohr stated in a recent radio interview:

“The different world religions will use different vocabulary, different metaphors, but finally they are all talking about union with the Divine.” ⁵¹

and thirdly, Laurence Freeman OSB, the Benedictine monk and current meditation mentor and teacher of the *World Community for Christian Meditation* explained:

“It is important to understand that we all meditate within a Tradition and all traditions belong to one great Tradition of Humanity. All our Traditions we could say are connected. They have a root Tradition. But that root Tradition is held in a pre-historical silence, in a very primeval awakening to our human meaning and purpose. As history unfolded and civilizations and cultures developed so did different religions, each one of them giving birth to unique insights and perceptions about this silent mystery. And common to all these Traditions is the existence of a practice of silence that takes us beyond words, that takes us from the mind to the heart, to the way of pure attention and the way of pure being, meditation.” ⁵²

The renowned Zen Master D.T. Suzuki made similar observations. Professor Dana Sawyer summed up Suzuki’s thoughts as follows:

“Hindus and Buddhists are seeking the same goal. [Suzuki] even went so far as to claim, ... in agreement with Vedanta (and, for that matter, the perennial philosophy),

that Meister Eckhart's view of Godhead also was in 'perfect accord' with the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness. [Suzuki also] ... argued that the traditional controversy over [such] terms was based mainly in semantic misunderstanding and philosophical nitpicking." ⁵³

The book *Paths to Transcendence* by the Islamic Scholar Reza Sha-Kasemi also provides strong support for the *perennial philosophy*. It compared the *paths of transcendence* described by three renowned mystics from different religious traditions; namely, the Hindu 'Advaita-Vedantist' – Adi Shankara, the Muslim 'Sufi' - Ibn 'Arabi, and the Christian 'Mystic' - Meister Eckhart. Based on his exhaustive and rigorous academic study of the transcendent experiences of these mystics and the question of whether "different religions have the same or different summits", he concluded:

"[The question as to] whether the summit is in fact one and the same – is answered emphatically in the positive. In respect of conceiving and realizing transcendence the evidence ... leaves no doubt that the [three] sages are indeed speaking of the self-same reality. Coming from such prominent mystical authorities within their faiths, this evidence of spiritual unanimity on the ultimate values and goal of religion is of particular importance in demonstrating the oneness of religions, not on the formal, but on the transcendent plane, precisely." ⁵⁴

The *perennial philosophy* has been expressed by many different people, in different geographical locations and at different times. As explained by Ken Wilber this philosophy is known as the 'perennial' philosophy:

"... precisely because it shows up across cultures and across the ages with essentially similar features – this worldview has, indeed, formed the core not only of the world's great wisdom traditions, from Christianity to Judaism to Buddhism to Taoism, but also some of the thinking of some of the greatest philosophers, scientists, and psychologists East and West, North and South. So overwhelmingly widespread is the perennial philosophy ... that it is either the single greatest intellectual error ever to appear in humankind's history – an error so colossally widespread as to literally

*stagger the mind – or it is the single most accurate reflection of reality yet to appear.”*⁵⁵

As will become apparent in the next section, the *transcendent unity of religions* is the key principle and truth underpinning the *perennial philosophy*.

The Transcendent Unity of Religions

Overview of Frithjof Schuon's Theory

In his work titled *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* as well as subsequent works, Frithjof Schuon provided what is regarded by many to be one of the most insightful, comprehensive and cohesive expressions of the *perennial philosophy* to date ⁵⁶.

Revisiting the diagram of the *transcendent unity of religions* provided in the *Introduction* to this essay, it can be said that models of comparative religion prior to Frithjof Schuon's model could be conceived of diagrammatically as showing the world's Great Religious Traditions as parallel bands differentiated and separated by parallel lines. The essence and originality of Schuon's model is that he shows the lines between the Traditions converging at the apex of the diagram, and a line cutting horizontally across the traditions differentiating the esoteric (mystic) and exoteric practitioners of each tradition. Broadly speaking, for the purpose of this essay, the *esoterics* of each tradition may be regarded as its *contemplatives*, its practitioners of *mysticism*.

With reference to this diagram Huston Smith stated in his *Introduction* to the 1993 edition of Schuon's book *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*:

"Schuon draws the line between esoteric and exoteric. And immediately we begin to suspect that we are in the presence of something different. The fundamental distinction is not between religions; it is not, so to speak, a line that, reappearing, divides religion's great historical manifestations vertically, Hindus from Buddhists from Christians from Muslims, and so on. The dividing line is horizontal and occurs but once, cutting across the historical religions. Above the line lies esotericism, below it exotericism". ⁵⁷

As for the convergence of the traditions at the apex of the diagram in the domain of esoteric practice, Huston Smith said:

For Schuon existence is graded, and with it cognition as well. Metaphysically, in God at the apex, [revealed] religions converge, below they differ. The epistemological concomitant of this metaphysical fact is that religious discernment, too, unites at its apex while dividing below it [For Schuon, what then is the nature of the requisite religious discernment achieved or aspired to by esoteric practitioners operating towards or at the apex of the diagram? This discernment is] ... Unity: absolute, categorical, undifferentiated Unity. Anthropologically this Unity precludes final distinction between human and divine, epistemologically between knower and known. It bespeaks a knowing that becomes its object, or rather is its object, for temporal distinctions are likewise inapposite at this point ... The Unity must ... be of an exceptional, indeed unique, kind, for it must include everything; if anything possessed reality apart from it, this would reintroduce the division that Absolute Reality by definition precludes. Absolute Unity must be All-Possibility: every possibility must be actualized within it.” ⁵⁸

Professor Dana Sawyer summarised Schuon’s rationale for this convergence as follows:

“(on the physical or exoteric level) ... the various traditions are as unique as the times and places they arise, each exhibiting its own personality and values; however on the metaphysical or esoteric level they merge, becoming identical for the simple reason that mystics share an experience of what transcends all differences, the Oneness of the Divine Ground ... [and hence the traditions have a] ... transcendent unity on the esoteric level.” ⁵⁹

In this model of comparative religion, the distinction between exoteric and esoteric practice is of critical importance to the transcendental unity of religions. Of Schuon’s concerns with previous models, Huston Smith noted:

From his perspective the defect in other versions ... is that they claim unity in religions too soon, at levels where, being exoteric, true Unity does not pertain and can be posited only on pain of Procrusteanism or vapidness.” ⁶⁰

Esoterics & exoterics: Differences & typical relationship

Explaining the differences between the esoteric minority and the exoteric majority of religious practitioners within each religious tradition, Huston Smith stated:

*“The esoteric minority consists of men and women who realize that they have their roots in the Absolute. Either they experience the identification directly or, failing this, they stand within earshot of its claims: something within them senses that the claim is true even if they cannot validate it completely. The exoteric majority is composed of the remainder of [humankind] for whom this way of talking about religion is sterile if not unintelligible.”*⁶¹

Ken Wilber’s mapping of the spectrum of human consciousness provides further insight into the nature and function of exotericism and esotericism, which he refers to as ‘translative religion’ and ‘transformative religion’ respectively. In ‘translative religion’ (exoterism) the self remains separate from *Divinity*, whereas ‘transformative religion’ (esotericism) facilitates the end of this separation. In his book *One Taste* (2000) he says:

“[Translative religion] - which is by far the most prevalent, widespread, and widely shared function of religion ... acts as a way of creating ‘meaning’ for the separate self: it offers myths and stories and tales and narratives and rituals that, taken together, help the separate self make sense of, and endure, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. This function of religion does not usually or necessarily change the level of consciousness in a person; it does not deliver radical transformation. Nor does it deliver a shattering liberation from the separate self altogether. Rather, it consoles the self, fortifies the self, defends the self, promotes the self. As long as the separate self believes the myths, performs the rituals, mouths the prayers, or embraces the dogma, then the self, it is fervently believed, will be “saved” - either now in the glory of being God-saved or God-favoured, or in an after-life that ensures eternal wonderment.

[Transformative religion] ... in a usually very, very small minority - serves the function of radical transformation and liberation. This function of religion does not fortify the

*separate self, but utterly shatters it - not consolation but devastation, not entrenchment but emptiness, not complacency but explosion, not comfort but revolution - in short, not a conventional bolstering of consciousness but a radical transmutation and transformation at the deepest seat of consciousness itself.”*⁶²

It is for this reason the majority of religious practitioners are more disposed towards the comforting embrace of Translative Religion (i.e. exotericism) than the confronting and challenging embrace of Transformative Religion (esotericism). However Wilber goes on to say:

*“ ... at some point in our maturation process, translation itself, no matter how adequate or confident, simply ceases to console. No new beliefs, no new paradigm, no new myths, no new ideas, will staunch the encroaching anguish. Not new belief for the self, but the transcendence of the self altogether, is the only path that avails. ... For those few individuals who are ready - that is, sick with the suffering of the separate self, and no longer able to embrace the translative [exoteric] worldview - then a transformative [esoteric] opening to true authenticity, true enlightenment, true liberation, calls more and more insistently. And depending upon your capacity for suffering, you will sooner or later answer the call of authenticity, of transformation, of liberation.”*⁶³

Clearly there are significant and radical differences between exotericism and esotericism. This having been said, it does not mean that there is some form of spiritual apartheid inherent in the relationship between exoteric and esoteric practitioners, and this point is usually better appreciated by esoteric practitioners than their exoteric brethren. It is important to acknowledge that while some esoteric practitioners may undertake spiritual training apart from exoteric practitioners and the typical patterns of exoteric practice, this is not necessarily the case. Exoteric practice is often a foundation or gateway to esoteric practice within a religious tradition, a catalyst that can elicit some degree of mystic understanding. In fact, it is common for esoteric practitioners not to discard ritual and other external elements of exoteric practice once they commence esoteric practice. Rather, they

transcend them, performing them with a *different spiritual understanding* that respects the observance of exoteric practice while at the same time progressing the goals of their esoteric practice⁶⁴. After all, it is in the nature of esotericism to *transcend form*, and a major difference between exotericism and esotericism can be understood as one of *perspective*:

“... exotericism particularises the universal, while esotericism universalises the particular”

*“esotericism ... is the discernment of the universal in the particular, of essence in the form.”*⁶⁵

While it is the thesis of this essay that religious discrimination and sectarianism arises to a large degree from the perspective and behaviour of exoterics, it would be unjust and inaccurate to suggest that all exoterics practise overt or even covert discrimination and sectarianism, and hence, for example, that exoterics do not participate in interfaith dialogue. This having been acknowledged, although Frithjof Schuon, Huston Smith and Ken Wilber each explain that the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of religions are inextricably interdependent and that the exoteric cannot be simply discarded in favour of the esoteric⁶⁶, Schuon described significant differences between the two that have bearing on many matters, including sectarianism and the dogmatic literal approach to scripture common among exoteric practitioners. Regarding exotericism and esotericism he said:

*“Exotericism consists in identifying transcendent realities with the dogmatic forms, and if need be, with the historical facts of a given Revelation, whereas esotericism refers in a more or less direct manner to these same [transcendent] realities.”*⁶⁷

In his *Introduction* to Schuon’s work *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, Huston Smith explained:

“The corollaries of the esoteric/exoteric distinction are far-reaching:

For the exoteric, God’s personal mode is his only mode; for the esoteric this mode resides in one that is higher and ultimately modeless: the Absolute, the Godhead, Nirguna Brahman of the Vedantists, the Tao that cannot be spoken.

For the exoteric the world is real in every sense; for the esoteric it has only qualified reality from the human standpoint and no separate reality whatsoever from the standpoint of the Godhead. The same holds for the human soul.

For the exoteric, God is primarily loved; for the esoteric He is primarily known; though in the end the exoteric comes to know what he loves and the esoteric to love what he knows.”⁶⁸

Despite the interdependent relationship of the exoteric and esoteric practitioners within religious traditions; and notwithstanding the fact that exoteric practitioners often contribute enormous social good by social action inspired by scriptural teaching on love, tolerance and compassion; esoteric practitioners can be perceived with suspicion, and sometimes ostracised or otherwise punished as heretics by the exoteric practitioners of their own traditions⁶⁹. On the attitude that esoterics and exoterics have for each other, Huston Smith noted:

“The attitude of each spiritual type towards the other must in the nature of things be, at best, ambivalent. The esoteric will honour the exoteric’s faith, for he will see it as invested in scripture and/or incarnation that truly are God’s revelations. He will not, however, be able to share the exoteric’s conviction that the text or life in which he encounters his revelation is the only, or in any event supreme, mode in which God has spoken. The exoteric’s assessment of the esoteric is likely to be less charitable, not because exoterics are less endowed with that virtue, but because, a portion of the esoteric position being obscured from him, he cannot honour it without betraying the truth he does see. If, as the esoteric maintains, Revelation has multiple and equal instances, no single instance can be absolute. But single instance – be it Christ, the Koran, or whatever – is what the exoteric faith is anchored in, so esotericism looms as exotericism’s subverter. It is in this light that Christianity’s ambivalence towards its mystics and Islam’s toward its Sufis to the point even of crucifying [the Sufi mystic] Al-Hallaj, are to be understood.”⁷⁰

The potential of esotericism (mysticism) to mitigate religious sectarianism

It is reasonable to assume that a corollary of the *Perennial Philosophy* and its underpinning concept the *Transcendent Unity of Religions*, is that, initially at least, interfaith dialogue is more likely to be fruitful between the esoterics rather than the exoterics of different religious traditions because esoterics have more in common. This was certainly the experience of Thomas Merton. In the years between the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965) and Merton's death in 1968, contemplatives from a wide range of religious traditions visited him at the Abbey of Gethsemane in Kentucky. These traditions included but were not limited to Raja Yoga, Zen, Hasidism, Tibetan Buddhism and Sufism ⁷¹. In response to these visits and with regard to the role of esoterics (contemplatives) in interfaith dialogue, he observed:

A little experience of ... dialogue [between contemplatives of different traditions as well as scholars versed in the contemplative aspects of their own traditions] shows at once that this is precisely the most fruitful and the most rewarding of ecumenical exchange. While on the level of philosophical and doctrinal formulations there may be tremendous obstacles to meet, it is often possible to come to a very frank, simple, and totally satisfying understanding in comparing notes on the contemplative life, its disciplines, its vagaries, and its rewards. Indeed, it is illuminating to the point of astonishment to talk to a Zen Buddhist from Japan and to find that you have much more in common with him than with those of your own compatriots who are little concerned with religion, or interested only in its external practice.” ⁷²

Using the term *ecumenism* to mean communication and sharing between different religious traditions rather than just the sub-traditions of Christianity, Merton further observed:

... ecumenism implies dialogue: genuine ecumenism requires communication and sharing, not only of information about doctrines which are totally and irrevocably divergent, but also of religious intuitions and truths which may turn out to have something in common, beneath surface differences. Ecumenism seeks the inner and ultimate “ground” which underlies all articulated differences. A genuinely fruitful

dialogue cannot be content with a polite diplomatic interest in other religions and their beliefs. It seeks a deeper level, on which religious traditions have always claimed to bear witness to a higher and more personal knowledge of God than which is contained simply in exterior worship and formulated doctrine. In all religions we encounter not only the claim to (divine) revelation in some form or other, but also a record of special experiences in which the absolute and final validity of that revelation is in some way attested. Furthermore, in all religions it is more or less generally recognised that this profound "sapiential" experience, call it gnosis, contemplation, "mysticism", "prophecy", or what you will, represents the deepest and most authentic fruit of the religion itself." ⁷³

This ecumenism, according to Merton, was "one of the most important aspects of interfaith dialogue". ⁷⁴

As well as the capacity of esoterics from different traditions to relate to facets of contemplative practice shared by other traditions, there are a number of other reasons for optimism about the potential of mysticism (esotericism) to promote interfaith dialogue and mitigate religious sectarianism. Firstly, plausible psychological and theological / metaphysical causes of religious sectarianism can be identified and are hence potentially amenable to mitigation. For example, the manner in which exoteric practitioners *personify Divinity* provides a plausible explanation for the significant role played by some, if not many of them, in the genesis of religious sectarianism. As observed by Aldous Huxley:

"... personifying the Absolute as a god ... often leads devotees of that god into conflict with those who personify oneness differently, mistaking their personification of Brahman [Divinity] for the only proper or possible personification." ⁷⁵

In addition to the *personification of Divinity*, the implications of *dualistic thinking* are likely to be a contributing factor to religious sectarianism. In a 2013 radio interview, the Christian Contemplative Richard Rohr OFM explained the role that *nondual* contemplation /

meditation can play in mitigating religious sectarianism arising from *dualistic thinking*. He said:

... the contemplative mind does not 'divide the field of the moment'. It lets the moment, the person, the situation, the idea, come at you as it is. [You don't] judge it, pigeon-hole it, dismiss it, or even totally agree with it. [You] just let it be its mysterious self [without] dividing the field of the moment. [When you] let it present itself as it is, without your judgement, that's 'contemplation'. It takes years to re-wire the dualistic mind [especially if you have a modern Western mentality] but I promise that you are going to be much happier afterwards. You can enjoy just about anything. You [then] wonder why people torture themselves [with] this argumentative mind, this dualistic mind, that we now take for granted."

*"If I had to describe contemplation in one descriptor it would be 'nondual thinking'. When [we] stop the argumentation that the mind loves, the ego loves, [because] the ego loves to divide things into sides and then take sides, [then] we get out of [a] win / lose mentality about religion [a mentality that says] our religion has to be 100% right and your religion has to be 100% wrong."*⁷⁶

While *dualistic thinking* and the *personification of Divinity* may not always cause religious sectarianism or be the only causes of this sectarianism, *dualistic thinking* provides a plausible *psychological* explanation, and the strong focus by exoterics on the *personification of Divinity* provides a plausible *theological* and *metaphysical* explanation, for much of the religious sectarianism that does occur. If so mysticism has potential to mitigate religious sectarianism when esoteric practitioners facilitate among the exoteric brethren, a mystic understanding of *Divinity* as ultimately transcending the personification of God and hence being by nature non-dual, transcendent and immanent. When we speak of 'mystics' (esoterics) taking action to mitigate religious sectarianism, we are of course not just speaking of mystics of the standing of the *renowned and acknowledged* ones quoted in the *Anthology* below. Rather, we are speaking of all spiritual practitioners following a contemplative path. This includes those who have direct and full realization of mystic

experience, as well as those who while they are yet to do so, nonetheless behave towards practitioners of other faiths in a manner informed by their awareness of the tolerance and compassion that is naturally occasioned by direct and full mystic experience.

Based on what has been said, some readers might conclude that religious sectarianism and religiously-justified violence are best mitigated by discarding exoteric religious practice entirely. In this regard, however, it should be noted that writers on the *perennial philosophy* differ as to whether the exoteric dimension of religious practice should, or even could be reformed or discarded. Frithjof Schuon, Huston Smith and Ken Wilber for example, view exotericism as inevitable and essential ⁷⁷, whereas Aldous Huxley held that the fruit of esotericism (mysticism) could be realized without the structures and orthodoxy of exotericism ⁷⁸. Even more radically, Professor Walter Stace held that although mysticism and religion can have some connection, mystic experience does not necessarily require adherence to or practice of a religion. Rather, mysticism and religion are connected in that the experiences of mystics are usually interpreted via the religion of the culture in which they occur; and, while not all religion is mysticism, “all mysticism can be called religious, namely because it carries with it the feeling of the sacred and that of a transcendental reality”. To this end he cites the ancient philosopher Plotinus as a mystic who did not adhere to a specific religion. ⁷⁹

The fact that there are differences of opinion about the necessity for exotericism in no way precludes esotericism (mysticism) from having a positive influence on the religious practice of exoterics. In fact, notwithstanding fluctuations in the tolerance of exoteric practitioners over the course of history, such as the current wave of war and terrorism by Islamic fundamentalists, and the current use of Buddhism as a tool of Burmese Nationalism occasioning the persecution of the Rohingya people, esotericism has had a positive influence, albeit slowly, on the overall development of religion. After all, although beyond the purview of the current essay, a sharing of mystic understanding has occurred and is occurring through the increased and increasing availability since the C19th of information about the *perennial philosophy*. This also offers some basis for optimism about the potential of mysticism to mitigate religious sectarianism. To take but one example of progress

towards shared mystic understanding, there is increasing interfaith dialogue between the mystics of different religious traditions. One has only to enter the descriptors “contemplative”, “interfaith”, “prayer” and “meditation” into an internet search-engine to find a plethora of grass roots organisations promoting interfaith dialogue between mystic practitioners. Furthermore, over the last century and a half, there has been a greater sharing and availability, both within and between Eastern and Western religious traditions, of mystic teachings and spiritual practices which facilitate profound spiritual transformation through *contemplative prayer, meditation and contemplation*. In the West for example, access to these profound and transformative practices is now available through, but not limited to: Advaita Vedanta; Dzogchen; Sufism; the Buddhist Insight Meditation Movement; Zen Buddhism; Tibetan (Vajrayana) Buddhism, and importantly, contemplative Christian organisations such as the *World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM)*, which since the 1970s have been re-establishing a tradition of Christian meditation dating back to the Desert Fathers and Mothers ⁸⁰. This ecumenical work of the WCCM and other contemplative Christian organisations such as Fr. Thomas Keating’s *Contemplative Outreach*, Fr. Richard Rohr’s *Centre for Action and Contemplation* and Tilden Edward’s *Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation* is most heartening in that, contemplative Christian practice in Western Europe, which was largely the province of specialised monastic orders for over a thousand years, is now slowly but steadily growing beyond the cloisters as a daily practice of both lay and ordained *Contemplative Christians*. Furthermore, Eastern Orthodox Christianity preserved and developed the mysticism of early Christianity as *part of its orthodoxy*, and unlike Western Christianity, its mystic tradition and practices were not significantly diminished by the fall of the Western Roman Empire, nor the Dark Ages that subsequently befell Western Europe. Nor were they significantly diminished by decline of monasticism associated with the Protestant Reformation or by the rise of Aristotelian Philosophy, secularism, rationalism, materialism and science ⁸¹. It is therefore another important source of esoteric teachings offering profound spiritual transformation through *contemplative prayer, meditation and contemplation* ⁸². Eastern Orthodox Christianity, for example, includes among its sacred texts *The Philokalia* which is an anthology of ascetic and mystic writings. It also includes in its practices *The Jesus Prayer* which utilizes mantra repetition ⁸³ and hence is both a prayer and meditation practice.

The decline of traditional religious practice in the West, and other places where the increasingly materialistic and secular influence of the West has taken root, may at first seem grounds for pessimism about whether mysticism can help to mitigate religious sectarianism. However, this pessimism may be unwarranted, because the decline in traditional religious practice in the West may not necessarily herald a decline in religiosity in general and mysticism in particular. In fact, there is some evidence that the practice of mysticism is increasing in the West. For example, in 2004, Michael Ford presented an episode of the radio program *Heart and Soul* for the BBC World Service which explored how mysticism plays an increasingly influential role in our contemporary experience. During that episode the author and philosopher of mysticism Timothy Freke observed that:

*“many people have left religion behind but have not left spirituality or mysticism behind at all ... [mysticism] is the new spirituality that is being born out of the old.”*⁸⁴

The rise of *Contemplative Christianity* as previously described, demonstrates that, even if *mysticism* is on the rise among those who have left traditional religions, it is also on the rise among those still worshipping or practicing within them. This is certainly the case with Christianity. It may well be that we are in fact witnessing not so much the decline of religious adherence in the West, but rather the commencement of the gradual yet increasing process of its transition from exoteric forms to esoteric forms of religious practice, the extent and pattern of which is being hidden by the nature of current data collection on religion and spirituality. That is, statistics about religious affiliation are readily accessible via census data, and statistics about regular religious attendance are available from religious organisations, and both of these measures ostensibly show a decline in religiosity. However, as is the case in Australia, there are no comparable and reliable measures available of spiritual rather than religious participation in general, or mystic / contemplative practice in particular. This data could and should be captured across the Western World through carefully and appropriately designed questions about spirituality and religion during future censuses and other valid and reliable surveys. This would be desirable because declining church attendance and affiliation with traditional religious

organisations would seem to be an increasingly poor measure of both spirituality and religiosity, and provide no measure of mystic practice whatsoever.

Another trend in contemplative practice over the last three decades, that runs counter to the decline of participation in traditional religious practice in the West, is the teaching of meditation in schools and universities to both staff and students. Although comparatively recent, this innovation is likely to continue and become more common, as there are already a number of reviews of empirical research literature demonstrating secular, educational and psychological benefits to students and staff such as: increased sense of well-being; stress reduction; and improved self-regulation, pro-social behaviour and metacognitive skills such as planning and problem solving⁸⁵. While often practised in a secular format, meditation in schools and universities nonetheless enhances participants' experience of contemplative practice and hence the possibility that meditation may also or eventually be undertaken in the context of religious or spiritual practice by individuals who originally learned a secular version of it in educational institutions. It is likely that similar if not better outcomes will eventuate from the introduction of Contemplative Studies Programs at Universities in recent years, such as at Naropa, Rice, Oregon State, Brown and San Diego Universities in the U.S.

There are two other reasons to be optimistic about the potential of mysticism to mitigate religious sectarianism. Firstly, there is the comparatively recent capacity of internet technology to circumvent the cultural and political boundaries which traditionally bolster sectarianism. The largely unfettered availability of web-based publications by contemplatives and their organisations effectively counters censorship of mysticism by dogmatic exoteric religious practitioners. To mention just one of numerous examples, general information about contemplative practice as well as specific instruction on contemplative prayer and meditation is now widely available via YouTube from Christian contemplative organisations such as the *World Community for Christian Meditation* and *Contemplative Outreach*. Secondly, there is reason to be optimistic because of the capacity of *the Arts* to counter some of the adverse outcomes of *the digital age* and *modernity* and to focus people's attention on religion in general and mysticism in particular. When

discussing the topic of ‘distraction from spiritual practice’, Aldous Huxley described our age as one of “systematized irrelevances”⁸⁶. Given the pervasiveness in modern life of individualism, consumerism and materialism, as well as the trivial, narcissistic, ego-enhancing distractions of *the digital age*⁸⁷, *the Arts* have a powerful role to play in gaining our attention and focusing it on both exoteric and esoteric forms of religion and spirituality. Ironically, this role of *the Arts* can be skilfully and powerfully served by online platforms, the self-same vehicle of so much that otherwise distracts us in modern life. Furthermore, both *the Arts* and *specific instruction on contemplative practice* are likely to appeal to a much broader audience than those who read scholarly treatises on theology and metaphysics, and that wider audience is now easily accessible via the internet.

Also of relevance to this discussion, recent work by Western researchers on the impact of *an individual’s stage of self-development* on their *interpretation of their own mystic experience*, gives reason for both concern and optimism about the capacity of mysticism to mitigate religious sectarianism. This new understanding arises from the development of psychology in the West over the last one hundred years or so. Ken Wilber has drawn attention to the fact that, notwithstanding the degrees to which religious traditions have focused on and explained *stages of spiritual practice leading to the direct apprehension of Divinity*, they have yet to demonstrate understanding of the *stages of human development* now understood as a result of modern psychological research, and this has significant implications for how mystic experience is interpreted. He summarises the progressive stages of human development as *Egocentric, Ethnocentric, World-centric* and *Kosmo-centric* (see Glossary) and asserts that an individual’s development can be arrested at any one of these stages. The consequence of this is that, bearing in mind that mystic experience can occur at any time irrespective of the stage of personal development currently attained by the individual experiencing it, if an individual has a mystic experience while at either the *Egocentric* or *Ethnocentric stage of self-development*, they are likely to interpret the mystic experience in a manner that encourages religious sectarianism; whereas if they have the same experience once they have attained either the *World-centric* and *Kosmo-centric stages of self-development*, they are likely to interpret their mystic experience in a way facilitative of religious tolerance. Those who have mystic experience while at either the *Egocentric* or *Ethnocentric stage of self-development* are likely to promote a sectarian culture of religious

practice, either as religious leaders or as devout religious practitioners⁸⁸. Within the framework of the theory of *multiple intelligences*, Wilber explains that progression through these developmental stages effects the development of the individual's multiple intelligences, and in this case, the development of *spiritual intelligence*. That is, individuals not only need to enhance their *spiritual experience* (through certain religious practices) but also enhance their *spiritual intelligence* through the achievement of a *World-centric* view if not a *Kosmo-centric* view, or as he prefers to call it, the *Integral* view. Wilber's pithy encapsulation of this is that individuals not only need to "Wake up" (in terms of *religious experience*), but also "Grow Up" (in terms of *spiritual intelligence*). However, notwithstanding the potential veracity of this theory, the author of this essay believes it is reasonable to acknowledge that the spiritual practices of the great religious traditions which enhance the prospect of *direct apprehension of Divinity* through refining if not mitigating the egotistical passions resulting from the typical functioning of the ego and its sense of being a separate-self, are thereby likely to have always contributed at least to some degree to this process of "Growing up". Nonetheless, if this new theory is supported by further research then it has important if not revolutionary implications for how religious sectarianism may best be mitigated. That is, as well as the strategy of promoting higher levels of participation in esoteric religious practice conducive to mystic experience, further action is required to enhance the likelihood that each individual progresses during their formative years to the higher *World-centric / Kosmo-centric* stages, rather than have their development arrested at the *Egocentric / Ethnocentric* stages. A further clear implication of Wilber's theory is that very acceptance of the *Perennial Philosophy* and its underpinning concept *Transcendent Unity of Religions* may require the fruition of the *World-centric* or *Kosmo-centric* stages of personal development. As explained by Wilber, *if one has "a worldcentric (not just ethnocentric) identity [one is likely to see one's spiritual tradition's Teacher (Messiah, Prophet, Supreme Being etc.)] as a humanistic world teacher bringing wisdom and insight still of importance for the world today; one of many such world teachers, each of which potentially has something important to teach us; [and know that] a belief in this being is not necessary for salvation, but some sort of belief and practice is necessary for liberation; [and further know that] others teachers can deliver a comparable salvation as this being, even though this being feels best for [oneself] (see Wilber, 2017b).*

While this theory may give rise to some pessimism because it adds another layer of complexity to the mitigation of religious sectarianism, it gives reason for optimism because it casts light on why this problem has proven so intractable to date, and hence offers greater hope of finding a solution. For an in-depth exploration of the theory, the reader is referred to Wilber (2014, 2016, 2017a, 2017b).

Notwithstanding that the ultimate efficacy of attempts to share and facilitate mystic understanding remains to be seen and is likely to play out over the long rather than short-term, its potential and importance should not be underestimated. As explained by Aldous Huxley:

*“The mystics are channels through which a little knowledge of reality filters down into our human universe of ignorance and illusion. A totally unmystical world would be a world totally blind and insane.”*⁸⁹

In a similar vein and speaking of the importance of contemplative practice, the Reverend Dr Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury explained:

“In the early church, there was a clear understanding that we needed to advance: from the self-understanding or self-contemplation that taught us to discipline our greedy instincts and cravings, to the “natural contemplation” that perceived and venerated the wisdom of God in the order of the world, and allowed us to see created reality for what it truly was in the sight of God – rather than what it was in terms of how we might use it or dominate it.

In this perspective, contemplation is very far from being just one kind of thing that Christians do: it is the key to prayer, liturgy, art and ethics, the key to the essence of a renewed humanity that is capable of seeing the world and other subjects in the world with freedom – freedom from self-oriented, acquisitive habits and the distorted understanding that comes from them.

Contemplation is the only ultimate answer to the unreal and insane world that our financial systems, our advertising culture, and our chaotic and unexamined emotions

encourage us to inhabit. To learn contemplative practice is to learn what we need so as to live truthfully and honestly and lovingly. It is a deeply revolutionary matter.”⁹⁰

Despite the suspicion and all too frequent antagonism, that the history of religion has shown exoterics exhibit towards the esoterics of their own religious traditions, and towards the exoterics and esoterics of other traditions, the *perennial philosophy* can play an important role in mitigating these tensions. On this point, a current authority on the *perennial philosophy* is quite certain. In his accessible and authoritative work *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy*, Professor Harry Oldmeadow asserted that:

“At the present juncture in history the perennialist outlook provides the only satisfactory resolution of the formal diversity (with the inevitable antagonisms which it entails) and the inner unity of the different traditions.”⁹¹

Are the ultimate goals of the world’s Great Religious Traditions identical at the esoteric level of practice?

Notwithstanding what has been said above about the *perennial philosophy* and the *transcendent unity of religions*, based on their own assessment, some readers may conclude that there is at least some degree of difference in the ultimate goals of some if not all of the world’s Great Religious Traditions. That is, in terms of Schuon’s diagram of the *transcendent unity of religions* presented earlier in the *Introduction* to this essay, while there is convergence of the lines in the esoteric domain, some if not all of these lines should not meet at the apex. For example, as explained by Professor Kyriacos Markides in a paper on mysticism and the Eastern Orthodox Church:

“According to the tradition of the holy elders [of the Orthodox Church], and Christianity in general for that matter, the individual soul does not lose its uniqueness upon its return to God. It does not merge with God in such a way that its autonomy is compromised or annihilated ...

This may be one of the key differences when one compares the spirituality of the Christian elders with some Buddhist and Hindu interpretations concerning the final destination of the human soul.”⁹²

Notwithstanding perceived or actual differences, in the view of the author, upon reading the writings of the renowned mystics quoted in this essay, it is reasonable to acknowledge that there is a great deal of convergence in the views of esoteric practitioners of different religions, whereas both history and one’s own life experience clearly reveals great divergence in the views of their exoteric practitioners. Furthermore, in terms of reducing the discrimination and violence associated with religious sectarianism, the interests of humanity are likely to be better served by mystic practitioners of the Great Religious Traditions collaborating with each other on interfaith dialogue and tolerance, and seeking to promote a greater degree of contemplative spiritual practice among exoteric practitioners within their own religious tradition, than focusing on the exact differences of the ultimate goal of their own Tradition and those of other Traditions, should these in fact exist. After all, with regard to focusing on such differences we should remember the ineffable nature of mystic experience. As stated by Professor Markides in the same paper:

“The best of all the wisdom traditions warn that the nature of the final destination of our spiritual journey is beyond all humanly constructed notions, all dogmas and beliefs.”⁹³

Furthermore, regarding interfaith dialogue by contemplatives, Laurence Freeman OSB explained in a talk on the stages of development of religious practice:

“It is the Mystical [rather than ‘Magical’ or ‘Mythological’] stage of development of religion that is most fruitful for humanity as a whole. So ... it is important for religions and religious leaders and teachers to be conscious of their own contemplative tradition, to teach it to their young members and make it a conscious part of their formation and their community life ... out of that dimension the relationship with other religions will become empowered for the common good of humanity.”⁹⁴

In summary, it is for these reasons that the author asserts there are grounds for optimism about the potential of mysticism to mitigate religious sectarianism. However, as we will see in the next section, this change may not occur at the rate and hence within the time-frame desired by all who read this essay.

The likelihood of esoterics influencing their exoteric brethren

Given the role of exotericism in the genesis of religious sectarianism, and the potential mitigation of this sectarianism through wider adoption of esotericism, how likely is it that esoterics (mystics) can influence exoterics in their own traditions, and how might esoteric practitioners best share their spiritual understanding and practices with their exoteric brethren? The answers to these questions are complex and there are a number of reasons why it may be prudent for esoterics to act conservatively, *making esoteric practices accessible to those who seek them, and encouraging their use by, rather than imposing their use on their exoteric brethren*. Firstly, it is consistent with the nature of exotericism and esotericism, that esoterics are less disposed to prescribe the religious practice of others than are exoterics and hence are less likely to heed the call to do so. Secondly, it is also in the nature of exotericism and esotericism, that exoterics tend to hold the reins of temporal power within their religious traditions, even if outwardly this does not always appear to be the case, and so attempts at prescription by esoterics are likely to be thwarted. Thirdly, insisting on or imposing esoteric practices is unlikely to meet with success given that direct apprehension of *Divinity* requires a certain capacity of the spiritual practitioner, the seed of which is often naturally present in the practitioner and grows progressively via sustained contemplative practise related to *contemplative prayer, meditation or contemplation*. That is, esoteric understanding cannot be imposed. Relevant to this last point and using “hearing” as a metaphor for the medium of knowledge acquisition, Frithjof Schuon remarked:

*“That which is lacking in the present world is a profound knowledge of the nature of things; the fundamental truths are always there, but they do not impose themselves because they cannot impose themselves on those unwilling to listen.”*⁹⁵

Similarly, using “sight” as a metaphor Ken Wilber described a spectrum of modes of knowing. That is, “the eye of flesh” (for knowledge via the senses), “the eye of mind” (for knowledge via thinking) and “the eye of contemplation” (for knowledge via direct apprehension of the Absolute i.e. *Divinity*). He suggested that unless the spiritual practitioner has opened the “eye of contemplation” through meditation and contemplation to some degree then direct apprehension of *Divinity* is unlikely. ⁹⁶

Furthermore, other writers have expressed concerns about esoterics being too demanding of exoteric practitioners. For example, as explained by Professor Sawyer with regard to Huston Smith and Frithjof Schuon:

Huston and Shuon believed that mystics who experience the “transcendent unity of religions” shouldn’t confuse their exoteric brethren by giving them descriptions of what is literally beyond their comprehension, nor should they preach what might be construed as a universalism that threatens the beliefs that have guided their societies for centuries. Mystics may discuss their insights with those who can comprehend and within their own circles, but they should not interpret the esoteric unity of religion as a clarion call against exoteric religion or an impetus for merging the traditions. People need the forms of religions they have relied upon, that shape their daily lives. In addition, esoterics should recognise that even for those seeking esoteric insight there is benefit to preserving the exoteric structures.” ⁹⁷

For these reasons, as previously stated, it is prudent for esoteric practitioners to make esoteric practices *accessible to those who seek them, and encourage their use by, rather than impose their use on exoteric practitioners*. Of course, it goes without saying that even greater prudence is required of some esoterics, such as Sufis who are currently subject to persecution by exoterics within their own tradition. In 2016 and 2017, for example, at Sehwan in Southern Pakistan; on the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt; at Timbuktu in Northern Mali, and in Baluchistan, Islamic fundamentalists bombed Sufi Shrines, and in some cases conducted mass executions of Sufi clergy and worshippers because they consider the veneration of Sufi Saints at Sufi Shrines to be heretical. ⁹⁸

How quickly might religious sectarianism be mitigated?

Based on what has been said there is a conundrum at the heart of this essay which can be summarized in three points: firstly, exoteric religious practice is a significant source of religious sectarianism; secondly, the *perennial philosophy* and its underpinning concept the *transcendent unity of religions* provides an excellent basis for interfaith dialogue and tolerance but this unity is more likely to be apparent to esoteric (mystic) rather than exoteric practitioners within religious traditions; and thirdly, the capacity of esoteric practitioners to influence exoteric practitioners to engage more with esoteric practice would seem to have inherent limitations and must be undertaken in a measured, prudent and patient manner. Therefore, the wider adoption of esoteric practice within religious traditions is likely to be slow and its influence as a factor mitigating religious sectarianism gradual. The pace and nature of such change is likely to be more akin to *evolution* than *revolution*. As explained by the Tibetan Buddhist 'Dzogchen' Master Chogyal Namkhai Norbu, *revolution* (i.e. imposing change in the world) invariably brings superficial and temporary social, political and economic change, whereas the profound, real and sustained *evolution of society* requires the *spiritual evolution of individuals*. According to Namkhai Norbu, people invariably have differences of opinion and it is very difficult, if not impossible, to change their opinion without their willing participation in a process that fosters such change. Rather than looking outside ourselves to change people who we consider to be causing problems, he said we should observe the physical, energetic and mental aspects of our own being and *take responsibility for and change those things about ourselves that are contributing to these problems*. Furthermore, we should observe and understand how we and others are *interdependently creating the problems that are of concern*. When most people do so through contemplative practice the problem will be resolved in a deep and sustained way. In his view the evolution of society is dependent on the evolution of each individual⁹⁹. Similarly, the Theravadin Buddhist Nun and writer Ayya Khema explained that individual spiritual development is necessary because the defensive nature of each individual's ego is the psychological basis for the armed conflict between nations. Her argument is as follows and applies equally well to religious sectarianism as to international conflict. This is so because exoteric religious practice can be conceptualised as another type

of 'territory' that the ego seeks to defend, and often does so through ostracism or attack on those perceived to threaten it. In 1987 Ayya Khema wrote:

"Every thinking person bemoans the fact that there is no peace between nations. Everybody would like to see peace on this globe. Obviously there isn't any. In this century there has been a war somewhere practically all the time. Every country has an enormous defence system where a lot of energy, money and manpower is used. This defence system is turned into an attack system the minute anyone even makes the slightest unfriendly remark or seems to be moving towards an invasion of airspace or territorial waters. This is rationalised and justified with, 'We have to defend the border of our country in order to protect the inhabitants'.

Disarmament is a hope and a prayer, but not a reality. And why? Because disarmament has to start in everyone's heart or wholesale disarmament will never happen. The defence and attack which happens on a largescale happens constantly with us personally. We're constantly defending our self-image. If somebody should look at us sideways or not appreciate or love us enough, or even blame us, that defence turns into attack. The rationale is that we have to defend this person, 'this country' which is 'me', in order to protect the inhabitant, 'self.' Because nearly every person in the world does that, all nations act accordingly. There is no hope that this will ever change unless every single person changes. Therefore it is up to each of us to work for peace inside ourselves. That can happen if each ego is diminished somewhat, and ego only diminishes when we see with ruthless honesty what's going on inside us." 100

While the likely timescale for such change may give rise to pessimism in some readers, there is nonetheless grounds for optimism. As previously discussed, direct apprehension of *Divinity* is obscured by the typical functioning of the ego with its sense of a separate-self and this dualistic perspective has significant negative personal, social and spiritual implications for each individual experiencing it. Consequently, both esoteric and exoteric religious practices that mitigate the ego's dualistic perspective at least to some degree, can have an important role to play in the *spiritual development or evolution of individuals*. For example,

provided it is undertaken with humility so as not to inadvertently strengthen the ego, the adherence by both esoterics and exoterics to codes of spiritual / moral conduct which promote altruistic behaviour can help to mitigate the deleterious effects of dualistic thinking associated with the experience of a separate-self, and provide useful preparation for the eventual transcendence of the ego. Furthermore, esoteric practice in its own right directly seeks the transcendence of the ego and development of non-dual consciousness. Notwithstanding this, it must be acknowledged that the potential realization of these outcomes can be compromised when the religious institutions that support exoteric or esoteric practice become embroiled in the profane, temporal, partisan priorities of culture, politics and economics.

A key perspective on this matter is the time scale of human cultural change and the role of temporal power in such change. Firstly, it should be acknowledged that use of temporal power may lead to some temporary provisional benefits for a greater number of people. This is evident in the labour, health and welfare provisions, democratic principles and human-rights laws of Western democracies. It is also evident, for example, by the fact that Tibetan Buddhism has continued to flourish in India and other democratic countries despite its proscription in Tibet following the Chinese invasion of that country in 1950. This is so because the Tibetan diaspora resulting from that invasion found safe cultural havens in these countries, and the cultural change which enabled this tolerance occurred in these countries in part due to the use of temporal power by social reform movements during the C18th - C20th. This having been said, in the long-term, because change by temporal power invariably comes about through one group of individual egos (who are invariably deluded because they each mistakenly and exclusively identify themselves as being their ego, mind and body), imposing their will on another group of individual egos (who are invariably deluded in the same way), it is unlikely to lead to sustained, long-term substantial change. After all, the hard-won rights thought to be durable by those who fight for them often prove not to be so or less so than desired. For example, the Welfare State, union brokered working conditions, and human rights such as the right to privacy are increasingly being eroded in some Western Democracies. Similarly, Western notions of human rights enshrined in the Charters and Declarations of the League of Nations and the United Nations, have from their

inception, been seen by many non-Western countries as a cultural imposition by the West. With the decline of Western power this 'cultural imposition' may be weakened and eventually replaced by the 'cultural impositions' of rising non-Western powers. History's course shows that temporal-power-based structures like tribes, nation-states and empires and their related cultures are transitory relative to the slow pace of what might be conceived of as the 'cultural development or evolution of humanity'. It is in this context that the above statements about the *spiritual development or evolution of individuals* are best considered. This is not to say that religious or spiritual practitioners should not be socially and politically engaged based on the notions of love, kindness and compassion arising from their religious or spiritual tradition; but rather, as well as non-violent social and political action which does not contravene the tenets of their tradition, they should focus on the *spiritual development or evolution of humanity* via the promotion of the contemplative practices of their tradition.

The prospect of such slow progress is of course an anathema to the modern view that all people have inalienable human rights, such as the right to religious freedom, and that failure to respect these rights should be rectified as a matter of urgency. Notwithstanding this view, in the author's opinion, even if sustained and increasing esoteric practice only leads to a gradual shift in the religious mentality required to mitigate religious sectarianism, the essential and fundamental nature of such change nonetheless warrants persistent promotion of such practice as one of a number of strategies employed to mitigate this form of sectarianism. The arguments and information presented in this essay, as well as any understanding that may arise from the writings of the mystics included in the *Anthology*, are intended as a small contribution to this gradual but nonetheless profound shift in religious understanding.

Despite the natural desire of the author and his readers to have religious sectarianism mitigated as quickly as possible, the slow pace of humankind's *spiritual development or evolution* may simply reflect the pace at which profound and sustained change actually occurs. Ken Wilber, for example, argues that there has been a gradual evolution of human spirituality during which some periods of accelerated change have occurred. He

acknowledges, however, that some theorists contest the validity of models of spiritual evolution ¹⁰¹. Even if the objections of these theorists are in fact legitimate, and the typical pace of evolutionary change cannot be used to explain the slow rate of change of humankind's *spiritual development*, this slow rate of change is nonetheless a reality. It is evident in three ways. Firstly, the relatively small number of esoteric spiritual practitioners compared to the number of exoteric ones in all religious traditions ¹⁰². Secondly, the reluctance of Churches in the Western Christian tradition (as opposed to the Eastern Orthodox Church) to provide their clergy with contemplative training ¹⁰³. For example, with regard to Catholicism, in 2014 Father Richard Rohr OFM lamented:

"... we have thus far been totally unsuccessful in getting a single seminary of any denomination to have a contemplative emphasis or curriculum." ¹⁰⁴

Thirdly, it is evident by the slow pace at which religious sectarianism is being mitigated around the world. This is despite the separation of Church and State in some countries; protection of religious freedom under International Law; the Catholic Church's landmark Second Vatican Council *Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions (1965)*, and the rise of other vehicles of interfaith dialogue in the second half of the C20th.

One hypothesis that explains the slow pace of spiritual development and the gradual mitigation of religious sectarianism, is that of necessity, in both cases, the pace of *sustained* development necessarily occurs in large measure at the *rate individuals who are not esoteric religious practitioners adopt and rigorously pursue esoteric spiritual practice*, and to the degree that religious traditions promote, or at least support such practice as it occurs. This change pertains to individuals who are *exoteric religious practitioners* as well as to *non-religious individuals who exclusively identify themselves as being their ego, mind and body*. That the pace of this change is dictated principally via the transformation of individuals, may in fact be a reality of the human condition, irrespective of whether it engenders optimism or pessimism in us or conflicts with our preferred views on the importance of certain social change and the mechanisms by which sustained social change occurs. Certainly, the current pace of change would seem to be consistent with this hypothesis.

Consequently, in the author's view there are a number of reasons to be optimistic about the capacity of mysticism to mitigate religious sectarianism over the long-term at the rate which he thinks *significant* and *sustained cultural change* is likely to occur. This optimism, however, may not be shared by readers who have a personal, political or philosophical disposition that requires change to occur at a pace more akin to *revolution* than *evolution*. For this reason, readers need to judge for themselves whether they are being realistic about the rate at which *significant* and *sustained cultural change* can occur. In the final analysis, each individual's capacity for 'optimism' is affected by their own assessment of reality, and their sense of optimism that religious sectarianism can be mitigated is likely to depend on what they intellectually determine to be, and can emotionally accept as, a *realistic time-frame for significant and sustained national and international cultural change*.

Let us now return to the main theme of the essay.

If as suggested by the *perennial philosophy* there is a *transcendent unity of religions*, and if the recognition of this truth will assist the mitigation of religious sectarianism, then a crucial step in this process is to establish evidence of the *transcendent unity of religions*. To this end, let us now turn our attention to the *Anthology* of quotations from renowned and acknowledged mystics.

Mystic Experience: A Brief Anthology of Quotations

When speaking of mystics who have realized the full fruit of their spiritual practice, Dana Sawyer, Professor of Religion and Philosophy and biographer of both Aldous Huxley and Huston Smith, remarked:

*“When the mystics of the world experience the Divine Ground, they transcend the relative difference between their religions, grasping the Truth at their core, and this is when the testimonies of mystics begin to sound alike – suggesting [as it did] to [Aldous] Huxley and [Frithjof] Schuon the existence of a perennial philosophy.”*¹⁰⁵

What then, is the ultimate realization experienced by mystics that is the basis for the *perennial philosophy* and *transcendent unity of religions*? Is it, as suggested in this essay, *Divinity* as non-dual consciousness that both transcends and is immanent in all things? As explained earlier, mystic understanding is ‘ineffable’ and mysticism is a ‘non-rational’ encounter with the *Divine*. Therefore, rather than offering the reader further intellectual discourse, the following *Anthology* of quotations from the writings of *renowned and acknowledged mystics*, is provided so the reader might discern the answer to this question based on their own intuition and spiritual experience. It is also provided so the reader can decide for them self whether the ultimate realization of the Great Religious Traditions mentioned is one and the same. To facilitate this comparison, the *Anthology* is divided into sections reflecting the religious tradition of the mystics quoted: Christianity, Hinduism (Advaita Vedanta), Buddhism (Zen & Dzogchen), Islam (Sufism) and Taoism.

As to how the reader might best approach reading the *Anthology*, it is respectfully suggested that a deeper understanding of these precious teachings is likely to be fostered by:

- repeated and considered reading of each quotation
- careful review of the specialised terms in the Glossary

- and, perhaps most importantly, preceding each session of reading with *contemplative prayer, meditation* or *contemplation* as per the contemplative practice within the reader's spiritual or religious tradition.

CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

Meister Eckhart (1260 – 1328) – Germany (Christian Mystic & Theologian)

“Come now, noble souls, and take a look at the splendour you are carrying within yourselves! But if you do not let go of yourselves completely, if you do not drown yourself in this bottomless sea of the Godhead, you cannot get to know this divine light.

When the soul is totally lost, it finds that it is the very self which it sought for so long in vain. Here the soul IS God. Here it enjoys supreme bliss; here it is sufficient unto itself; here it shines with its own radiance. Here at last it has found that the Kingdom of God is itself!”

Source: Star, J. (1996). Two Suns Rising: A Collection of Sacred Writings. Edison, New Jersey, Castle Books (p. 160)

“There is something in the soul that is uncreated and uncreatable.”

Source: Smith, H. (1993). 'Introduction to the Revised Edition' of Schuon, F. (1993). The Transcendent Unity of Religions. Illinois, Quest Books. (p.xiv)

“God is something that must transcend being, date or location ...and although he is in all creatures, yet he is more than all of them”.

Source: Maguire, A. (2013). Praying with Christian Mystics. County Dublin, The Columba Press. (p. 79)

“Once the birth of God in the soul has occurred, no creature can hinder you; instead they will direct you to God ... Yes, all things become simply God to you, for in all things you notice and love only God, just as a man who stares long at the sun in heaven sees the sun in whatever he afterwards looks at.”

Source: Maguire, A. (2013). Praying with Christian Mystics. County Dublin, The Columba Press. (p. 79)

St Teresa of Avila (1515 – 1582) – Spain (Christian Mystic & Saint)

[See the Glossary for an explanation of the term ‘Spiritual Marriage’]

[In her work ‘The Interior Castle’ St Teresa described spiritual development in terms of seven dwelling places. This quotation relates to the final and] ... *seventh dwelling place, wherein there is total absorption in God and the lover and Beloved are joined in spiritual marriage:*

“Union may be symbolized by two wax candles, the tips of which touch each other so closely that there is but one light; or again, the wick, the wax, and the light become one, but the one candle can again be separated from the other and the two candles remain distinct; or the wick may be withdrawn from the wax.

But spiritual marriage is like rain falling from heaven into a river or stream, becoming one and the same liquid, so that the river and rain water cannot be divided; or it resembles a streamlet flowing into the ocean, which cannot afterwards be disunited from it. This marriage may also be likened to a room into which a bright light enters through two windows—though divided when it enters, the light becomes one and the same.”

Source: Excerpt from St Teresa’s work ‘The Interior Castle’ quoted in *The Culturium* online article ‘Teresa of Ávila: The Ecstasy of Love’ Sept 9, 2016.

HINDUISM (ADVAITA VEDANTA)

Adi Shankara (788 – 820) – India (Hindu Mystic & Saint)

[See the Glossary for an explanation of the terms 'Atman' and 'Brahman']

“Brahman is the only truth, the world is illusion, and there is ultimately no difference between Brahman and individual self.”

Source: Quote from *Brahma Jnanavali Mala* quoted in Taft, M. W. (2014). *Nondualism: A Brief History of a Timeless Concept*. United States, Cephalopod Rex.

“Now I shall tell you the nature of this absolute Witness. If you recognize it, you will be freed from the bonds of ignorance, and attain liberation.

There is a self-existent Reality, which is the basis of our consciousness of ego. The Reality is the Witness of the states of ego consciousness and of the body. That Reality is the constant Witness in all three states of consciousness – waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep. It is your real Self. That Reality pervades the universe. It alone shines. The universe shines with its reflected light.

Its essence is timeless awareness. It knows all things, Witnesses all things, from the ego to the body. It is the Witness of pleasure and pain and the sense-objects. This is your real Self, the Supreme being, the Ancient. It never ceases to experience infinite release. It is unwavering. It is Spirit itself.”

Source: Quoted in Wilber (2000, p. 69)

The Atman is that by which the universe is pervaded, but which nothing pervades; which causes all things to shine, but which all things cannot make to shine ...

The nature of the one Reality must be known by one's own clear spiritual perception; it cannot be known through a pandit (learned man). Similarly the form of the moon can only be known through one's own eyes. How can it be known through others?

Who but the Atman is capable of removing the bonds of ignorance, passion and self-interested action? ...

Liberation cannot be achieved except by the perception of the identity of the individual spirit with the universal Spirit. It can be achieved neither by Yoga (physical training), nor by Sankhya (speculative philosophy), nor by the practice of religious ceremonies, nor by mere learning

Disease is not cured by pronouncing the name of medicine, but by taking medicine. Deliverance is not achieved by repeating the word 'Brahman', but by directly experiencing Brahman ...

The Atman is the Witness of the individual mind and its operations. It is absolute knowledge ...

The wise man is the one who understands that the essence of Brahman and of Atman is Pure Consciousness, and who realizes their absolute identity. The identity of Brahman and Atman is affirmed in hundreds of sacred texts ...

Caste, creed, family and lineage do not exist in Brahman. Brahman has neither name nor form, transcends merit and demerit, is beyond time, space and the objects of sense-experience. Such is Brahman, and "thou art That." Meditate upon this truth within your consciousness.

Supreme, beyond the power of speech to express, Brahman may yet be apprehended by the eye of pure illumination. Pure, absolute and eternal Reality – such is Brahman, and “thou art That”. Meditate upon this truth within your consciousness ...

Though One, Brahman is the cause of many. There is no other cause. And yet Brahman is independent of the law of causation. Such is Brahman, and “thou art That”. Meditate upon this truth within your consciousness ...

The truth of Brahman may be understood intellectually. But (even in those who so understand) the desire for personal separateness is deep-rooted and powerful, for it exists from beginningless time. It creates the notion, “I am the actor, I am he who experiences.” This notion is the cause of bondage to conditional existence, birth and death. It can be removed only by earnest effort to live constantly in union with Brahman. By the sages, the eradication of this notion and the craving for personal separateness is called Liberation.

It is ignorance that causes us to identify ourselves with the body, the ego, the senses, or anything that is not the Atman. He is a wise man who overcomes this ignorance by devotion to Atman ...

When a man follows the way of the world, or the way of the flesh, or the way of tradition (i.e. when he believes in religious rites and the letter of the scriptures, as though they were intrinsically sacred), knowledge of Reality cannot arise in him.

The wise say that this threefold path is like an iron chain, binding the feet of him who aspires to escape from the prison-house of this world. He who frees himself from the chains achieves Deliverance.

Source: Excerpts from Shankara's treatise 'The Crest-Jewel of Wisdom' (Viveka-Chudamani) quoted in Huxley, Aldous. (1970). The Perennial Philosophy. New York, Harper & Row. (pp. 5 – 7)

Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879 – 1950) – India (Hindu Mystic & Sage)

[See the Glossary for an explanation of the terms 'Self' and 'self']

“The Self is always there. It is you. There is nothing but you. Nothing can be apart from you.”

*“There is no reaching the Self. If the Self were to be reached, it would mean that the Self is not now and here, but that it should be got anew [is yet to be obtained]. What is got afresh, will also be lost. So it will be impermanent. What is not permanent is not worth striving for. So I say, the Self is not reached. You **are** the Self. You are already That. The fact is that you are ignorant of your blissful state. Ignorance supervenes and draws a veil over the pure Bliss. Attempts are directed only to remove this ignorance. This ignorance consists in wrong knowledge. The wrong knowledge consists in the false identification of the Self with the body, the mind, etc. This false identity must go and there remains the Self”.*

“It is enough that one surrenders oneself. Surrender is to give oneself up to the original cause of one’s being. Do not delude yourself by imagining such source to be some God outside you. One’s source is within yourself. Give yourself up to it. That means that you should seek the source and merge in it.”

“To say that one is apart from the Primal Source is itself a pretension; to add that one divested of the ego becomes pure and yet retains individuality only to enjoy or serve the Supreme, is a deceitful stratagem. What duplicity is this - first to appropriate what is really His, and then pretend to experience or serve Him! Is not all this already known to Him?”

Source: Excerpts from Maharshi, Sri. Ramana. (2000). [Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi \(Extract Version\)](#), Tiruvannamali, V.S. Ramanan / Sri Ramanasramam. (Talks 208 & 251)

BUDDHISM (ZEN)

Yung-chia Ta-shih (7th Century) – China (Zen Master)

One Nature,

*perfect and pervading,
circulates in all natures.*

One Reality,

*all-knowing,
contains within itself all realities.*

The one moon is reflected

wherever there is a sheet of water,

And all the moons in all the waters

are embraced within the one moon.

The embodied Truth of all the Buddhas

enters into my own being,

And my own being is found in union with theirs.

The Inner Light is beyond both praise and blame,

Like unto space it knows no boundaries;

Yet it is right here with us,

ever retaining its serenity and fullness.

Source: Star, J. (1996). Two Suns Rising: A Collection of Sacred Writings. Edison, New Jersey, Castle Books. (p. 72)

Seng Ts'an (Late 6th Century) – China (Zen Master)

Poem: *The Mind of Absolute Trust*

[See the Glossary for an explanation of the terms 'Tao', 'Way' and 'Great Way']

*"The Great Way isn't difficult
for those who are unattached to their preferences.
Let go of longing and aversion,
and everything will be perfectly clear.
When you cling to a hairbreadth of distinction,
heaven and earth are set apart.
If you want to realize the truth,
don't be for or against.
The struggle between good and evil
is the primal disease of the mind.
Not grasping the deeper meaning,
you just trouble your mind's serenity.
As vast as infinite space,
it is perfect and lacks nothing.
But because you select and reject,
you can't perceive its true nature.
Don't get entangled in the world;
don't lose yourself in emptiness.
Be at peace in the oneness of things,
and all errors will disappear by themselves.*

If you don't live the Tao,

you fall into assertion or denial.

Asserting that the world is real,

you are blind to its deeper reality;

denying that the world is real,

you are blind to the selflessness of all things.

The more you think about these matters,

the farther you are from the truth.

Step aside from all thinking,

and there is nowhere you can't go.

Returning to the root, you find the meaning;

chasing appearances, you lose their source.

At the moment of profound insight,

you transcend both appearance and emptiness.

Don't keep searching for the truth;

just let go of your opinions.

For the mind in harmony with the Tao,

all selfishness disappears.

With not even a trace of self-doubt,

you can trust the universe completely.

All at once you are free,

with nothing left to hold on to.

*All is empty, brilliant,
perfect in its own being.
In the world of things as they are,
there is no self, no non-self.
If you want to describe its essence,
the best you can say is "Not-two."
In this "Not-two" nothing is separate,
and nothing in the world is excluded.
The enlightened of all times and places
have entered into this truth.
In it there is no gain or loss;
one instant is ten thousand years.
There is no here, no there;
infinity is right before your eyes.
The tiny is as large as the vast
when objective boundaries have vanished;
the vast is as small as the tiny
when you don't have external limits.
Being is an aspect of non-being;
non-being is no different from being.
Until you understand this truth,
you won't see anything clearly.
One is all; all
are one. When you realize this,*

what reason for holiness or wisdom?

The mind of absolute trust

is beyond all thought, all striving,

is perfectly at peace, for in it

there is no yesterday, no today, no tomorrow.”

Source: Mitchell, Stephen, Ed. (1989). The Enlightened Heart: An Anthology of Sacred Poetry. New York, Harper & Row Publisher (pp. 26 – 28)

BUDDHISM (DZOGCHEN)

Vairocana (8th Century) – Tibet (Renowned Translator & Student of Padmasambhava)

*Although apparent phenomena
manifest as diversity
yet this diversity is non-dual,
and of all the multiplicity
of individual things that exist
none can be confined in a limited concept.
Staying free from the trap of any attempt
to say 'it's like this', or 'like that',
it becomes clear that all manifested forms are
aspects of the infinite formless,
and indivisible from it,
are self-perfected.*

*Seeing that everything is self-perfected
from the very beginning,
the disease of striving for any achievement
is surrendered,
and just remaining in the natural state
as it is,
the presence of non-dual contemplation
continuously spontaneously arises.*

Source: 'The Six Vajra Verses' (Rigbai Kujyug - The 'Fortune Bringing Cuckoo of Non-dual Awareness (rigba) Tantra') – Author unknown. A Dzogchen (Buddhist) text transmitted in Oddiyana by Shri Singha to Vairocana who introduced it to Tibet. Translated by Brian Beresford & John Shane, quoted in Chogyal Namkhai Norbu: *Crystal and The Way of Light* (1986, p. xv)]

Longchenpa (1308 – 1364) – Central Tibet (Renowned Meditation Master & Teacher of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism)

[See the Glossary for an explanation of the terms 'Dharmakaya', 'Nirvana' and 'Samsara']

*Stainless meditation, the essence of luminous clarity,
Is to be free of dullness, agitation, and proliferation of thoughts
while abiding within the state of knowledge,
An undistracted mind-free great openness
Totally pure like the sky, without limitation or partiality,
Beyond all thought, expression, and objectification.*

*Whatever manifests is unreal and pure:
Inside, whatever grasping concepts arise self-liberate;
Outside, the objects of grasping are like a dream
or a magical display;
In reality, neither of these exist, so the conduct is to act
without accepting or rejecting.*

*These phenomena – the grasper and the grasped, emotions
and concepts of negation and affirmation –
Are self-liberated upon arising:
they are liberated by you knowing their nature.
Being liberated, they are the primordially perfect dharmakaya state
of equality,
So do not turn away from samsara to seek nirvana.*

*Whatever appears is a mirror showing you the real nature,
And whatever arises within it is self-liberated awareness,
the dynamic energy of the dharmakaya.*

Like water and waves, they are the single evenness within the dharmakaya.

This is the ultimate and actual state of knowledge,

The summit of all views, Total Perfection.

Source: Chogyal Namkhai Norbu (2014). The Light of the Sun: Commentary on 'Longchenpa's Precious Mala of the Four Dharmas'. Arcidosso, Italy, Shang Shung Institute. (pp. 33 & 35)

TAOISM

Chuang Tzu (4th Century BC) – China (Renowned Taoist Master & Student of Lao Tzu)

Do not ask whether the Principle is in this or in that; it is in all beings. It is on this account that we apply to it the epithets of supreme, universal, total It has ordained that all things should be limited, but Itself unlimited, infinite. As to what pertains to manifestation, the Principle causes the succession of its phases, but is not this succession. It is the author of causes and effects, but is not the causes and effects. It is the author of condensations and dissipations (birth and death, changes of state), but is not itself condensations and dissipations. All proceeds from It and is under its influence. It is in all things, but it is not identical with beings, for it is neither differentiated nor limited.

Source: 'Book of Chuang Tzu' quoted in Huxley, Aldous. (1970). The Perennial Philosophy. New York, Harper & Row. (pp. 7 – 8)

ISLAM (SUFISM)

Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273) – Persia & Konya, Turkey (Renowned Sufi Mystic & Poet)

Listen, O drop, give yourself up without regret,

and in exchange gain the Ocean.

Listen, O drop, bestow upon yourself this honour,

and in the arms of the Sea be secure.

Who indeed should be so fortunate?

An Ocean wooing a drop!

In God's name, in God's name, sell and buy at once!

Give a drop, and take this Sea full of pearls.

Source: Excerpted from "Mathnawi IV, 2619–2622" - quoted in Helminski, K. (2000). The Rumi Collection: An Anthology of Translations of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, Shambhala Classics. (p. 179)

Not Christian or Jew or

Muslim, not Hindu,

Buddhist, Sufi, or Zen.

Not any religion

or cultural system.

I am not from the east

or the west, not

out of the ocean or up

from the ground, not

*natural or ethereal, not
composed of elements at all.*

*I do not exist,
am not an entity in this
world or the next,
did not descend from
Adam and Eve or any
origin story.*

*My place is
the placeless, a trace
of the traceless.
Neither body or soul.*

*I belong to the beloved,
have seen the two
worlds as one and
that one
call to and know,
first, last, outer, inner,
only that breath breathing
human being.*

Source: Barks, Collin and John Moyne (2004). Essential Rumi. New York, HarperCollins Publishers Inc. (quoted on the website of *Science and NonDuality (SAND)*. Accessed 12 May, 2018 at <https://www.scienceandnonduality.com/not-christian-or-jew-or-muslim-not-hindu/>)

[In the next excerpt from Rumi, ‘**Mansur**’ refers to the Persian Sufi Saint Mansur al-Hallaj who was executed for heresy on March 26, 922]

*All through time that same Beauty
has risen in a different shape,
beckoned the soul, and disappeared.*

*Every moment that Loved One
puts on a new garment –
now of old, now of new.*

*Entering the heart of the world
like potter's clay,
the Spirit plunges in like a diver,*

*Then rises up from the mud,
molded and baked.*

*He appeared as Noah, and safely entered the Ark
when a deluge swept over the world.*

*He became Abraham,
and walked through the midst of fire,
which turned into roses for His sake.*

*For a while He roamed the earth, unknown,
helping those in need.*

*Then He became Jesus,
and ascended to the dome of heaven
in glory of God.*

*In all, it was He
who came and went in every generation.*

Then He appeared in the form of the Prophet,

and gained the empire of Islam.

What essence is preserved?

What moves from one reality to the next?

The lovely winner of hearts became a sword

and appeared in the hand of Ali,

the slayer of time.

When Mansur yelled out, "I am the Truth"

they hanged him as a heretic.

*But no! No! It was **He** that cried out,*

"I am the Truth."

*It was **He** that mounted the scaffold.*

Rumi has spoken the truth.

But no! Do not listen to Rumi –

*It is **He** that speaks the truth.*

Source: Excerpt from 'Diwan-i Shams-i Tabiz' – quoted in Star, J. (1996). Two Suns Rising: A Collection of Sacred Writings. Edison, New Jersey, Castle Books (pp. 125 - 126)

Fakhruddin Iraqi (1213 - 1289) – Persia, Pakistan & Turkey (Renowned Sufi Mystic & Poet)

[The following excerpts are from Iraqi's 'Divine Flashes', a work which intersperses poetry with lyrical prose, often with the former an ecstatic rendering of the latter.

See the Glossary for an explanation of the terms 'Love', 'Beloved' and 'Lover'.]

"The lover desires to see the Beloved with Certainty's Eye, and wanders a bewildered lifetime in this aspiration. Then suddenly with his heart's ear he hears a voice;

*The magic spring
that gives eternal Life,
is in your own heart
but you have blocked the flow."*

"Everyone with eyes sees just such a vision ... but remains ignorant of what he perceives. Every ant which leaves its nest and goes to the desert will see the sun, but not know what it sees. What irony! Everyone perceives Divine Beauty with Certainty's Eye, for in reality nothing exists but Transcendent Unity;

*They look, they see, but do not comprehend.
They take no pleasure in the View,
For to enjoy it one must know
through the Truth of Certainty
What he is seeing,
through Whom, and why."*

"And so, the lover seeks the Vision in order that he might pass away from existence; he knocks on the door of non-existence, for there he was once at peace. There he was both seer

and seen, Both viewer and viewed ... Because nothing in himself. When awakening from that peace and coming to be, he became the veil of his own sight and was deprived of Vision.

*Know yourself: a cloud
drifting before your sun.
Cut yourself off from your senses
and behold your sun of intimacy."*

"If this screen ... which is you ... is struck from before your eyes, the Beloved will find the Beloved, and you will be entirely lost. Then you will say:

*"Beloved, I sought you
here and there,
asked for news of you
from all I met;
then saw you through myself
and found we were identical.
Now I blush to think I ever
searched for signs of you."*

*"By day I praised You
but never knew it;
by night slept with You
without realising;
fancying myself
to be myself;
but no, I was You
and never knew it."*

Source: Selected excerpts from Chittick, W. and P. Wilson (1982). Fakhruddin 'Iraqi - Divine Flashes (Preface by Seyyed Hossein Nasr), Paulist Press.

Ibn 'Arabi (1165 – 1240 AD) – Moorish Andalusian Spain (Renowned Sufi Mystic, Philosopher, Poet and Sage)

“When the mystery of the oneness of the soul and the Divine is revealed to you, you will understand that you are no other than God. ... Then you will see all your actions to be His actions and all your attributes to be His attributes and your essence to be His essence.

... Thus, instead of [your own] essence, there is the essence of God and in place of [your own] attributes, there are the attributes of God. He who knows himself sees his whole existence to be the Divine existence, but does not experience that any change has taken place in his own nature or qualities. For when you know yourself, your sense of a limited identity vanishes, and you know that you and God are one and the same.”

Source: Landau, Rom. (1959). The Philosophy of Ibn 'Arabi. New York, The MacMillan Company. pp. 83-8

“If the believer understood the meaning of the saying 'the colour of the water is the colour of the receptacle', he would admit the validity of all beliefs and he would recognise God in every form and every object of faith.”

Source: Ibn 'Arabi, from “The Ringstones of Wisdom” [Fusûs al-Hikam] (quoted on the website of the *The Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*. Accessed 12 May, 2018 at <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/ibnarabi.html>)

“It is He who is revealed in every face, sought in every sign, gazed upon by every eye, worshipped in every object of worship, and pursued in the unseen and the visible. Not a single one of His creatures can fail to find Him in its primordial and original nature.”

Source: Ibn 'Arabi, from “The Openings of Mecca” [Futûhât al-Makkiyya] (quoted on the website of the *The Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*. Accessed 12 May, 2018 at <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/index.html>)

[Thus whispers the Divine Beloved]

“Listen, O dearly beloved!

I am the reality of the world, the centre of the circumference,

I am the parts and the whole.

I am the will established between Heaven and Earth,

*I have created perception in you only in order to be the
object of my perception.*

If then you perceive me, you perceive yourself.

But you cannot perceive me through yourself,

It is through my eyes that you see me and see yourself,

Through your eyes you cannot see me.

Dearly beloved!

I have called you so often and you have not heard me

*I have shown myself to you so often and you have not
seen me.*

*I have made myself fragrance so often, and you have
not smelled me.*

Savourous food, and you have not tasted me.

Why can you not reach me through the object you touch

Or breathe me through sweet perfumes?

Why do you not see me? Why do you not hear me?

Why? Why? Why?

*For you my delights surpass all other delights.
And the pleasure I procure you surpasses all other
pleasures.
For you I am preferable to all other good things,
I am Beauty. I am Grace.
Love me, love me alone.
Love yourself in me, in me alone.
Attach yourself to me,
No one is more inward than I.
Others love you for their own sakes,
I love you for yourself.
And you, you flee from me.
Dearly beloved!
You cannot treat me fairly
For if you approach me,
It is because I have approached you.
I am nearer to you than yourself,
Than your soul, than your breath.
Who among creatures
Would treat you as I do?
I am jealous of you over you.
I want you to belong to no other,
Not even to yourself.
Be mine, be for me as you are in me.
Though you are not even aware of it.
Dearly beloved!
Let us go toward Union.
And if we find the road
That leads to separation,
We will destroy separation.*

*Let us go hand in hand.
Let us enter the presence of Truth.
Let it be our judge
And imprint its seal upon our union
For ever. “*

Source: Corbin, H. (1998). Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi (Translated by Ralph Manheim) Princeton University Press.

[Quoted in the article by Ralph Austin titled *The Lady Nizam – an Image of Love and Knowledge* published on the website of *The Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* (accessed 11 May, 2018) at <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/nizam.html>]

Bulent Rauf (1911 – 1987) – Turkey (C20th Sufi Mystic, Sage & founder of the Beshara School for Esoteric Education & the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society)

In this quotation Bulent Rauf answers the question:

‘What is the single most important point that must be understood by a person who wants to know?’

“It is that there is only One, Unique, Absolute, Infinite Existence.

It must be more than an idea.

One has to be so completely certain of it that one adopts it through reason and an intuition as the basic unshakeable fact of one’s existence.

When it is like that in one’s existence then every possible ramification that occurs to one is seen as not being outside The Existence, but as being an aspect of it.

Accept and completely adopt the idea that there is only the Unique, Absolute Existence, apart from which there is not. Then constantly, or as much as possible, keep it in mind. Then, as only He can adopt such an idea, you disappear in the face of the awareness of this idea (which is Him in any case – who else could think of it?). Then your consciousness of this idea is your consciousness of His Existence; His consciousness of Himself. Then where are you? You never were.

He shows you He is yourself, then bit by bit He shows you how He is all that there is. These showings are His caprices, until all exterior existence is known as Him. He shows you He is you, then shows you (Himself) that all else is Him.

In the instant, all so-called progress is annihilated in Him.

Source: Excerpt from Bulent Rauf - *'What is the single most important point that must be understood by a person who wants to know?'* (<http://beshara.org>)

Concluding remarks

The experience of *Divinity* revealed in the writings of Meister Eckhart, St Teresa of Avila, Adi Shankara, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Young-chia, Seng Ts'an, Vairocana, Longchenpa, Chang Tzu, Jalaluddin Rumi, Fakhreddin Iraqi, Ibn 'Arabi and Bulent Rauf, **is available to each of us** when we come to directly apprehend *Divinity* as our *Primordial State*, our *Original Nature*, the *Divine Ground of our Being*. While this truth can be asserted, it can only be substantiated by the reader's own experience. It cannot be proven through rational inquiry by the dualistic mind because its proof involves direct apprehension of *Divinity* by processes other than the rational mind. Nonetheless, in addition to any intellectual understanding that arises from information provided in this essay concerning the *perennial philosophy* and the *transcendent unity of religions*, it is hoped that through the words of these mystics, the reader, if it was not previously the case, has confidence that the ultimate goal of the spiritual practice of most, if not all the Great Religious Traditions, is the same, at least in so far as it involves an apprehension of *Divinity* as non-dual consciousness that is transcendent and immanent. This confidence may arise from the resonance of these quotations with the intuition and spiritual experience of the reader. It may also arise from reflection on the striking concordance of the quotations concerning the non-duality, transcendence and immanence of the *Divine*; a concordance which belies the fact that, with the exception of the Sufis Ibn 'Arabi, Jelaluddin Rumi and Fakhreddin Iraqi, these mystics lived either at different times, or lived apart, in what were in their day, distant geographical regions. It is also hoped that this truth which is shared by the world's Great Religious Traditions, offers some grounds for optimism that the future holds promise of greater religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue. As observed by Aldous Huxley:

"If the world [is] ever to live in peace it must learn to distinguish truth from how truth expresses itself in any particular culture at any particular time." ¹⁰⁶

Regarding *religious truth*, this goal is achieved when the *transcendent unity of religions* is understood and accepted as true by the thinking /dualistic mind or known to be true through direct apprehension of *Divinity*. While the latter is preferable to the first, the first is sufficient for religious tolerance. In the C11th both the truth of the *transcendent unity of*

religions that underpins the *perennial philosophy*, as well as the religious tolerance concomitant with this truth, were expressed with beauty and tenderness by the renowned Sufi mystic-poets and metaphysicians Ibn 'Arabi and Fakhreddin Iraqi. Hopefully, the increasing prominence and influence of the *perennial philosophy* in the C20th and C21st as a vehicle for understanding the *transcendent unity of religions*, heralds this truth as one whose time has come. ¹⁰⁷

In the words of 'Arabi and Iraqi:

*“ My heart is open to every form: it is a pasture for gazelles,
and a cloister for Christian monks, a temple for idols,
the ‘Kaaba’ of the pilgrim, the tables of the ‘Torah’,
and the book of the Koran.*

*I practice the religion of Love; in whatsoever direction His caravans advance, the
religion of Love shall be my religion and my faith.”* ¹⁰⁸

Ibn 'Arabi

*... every lover gives a different sign of the Beloved and every Gnostic a different
explanation; every realised one seems to point to something different, yet each of
them declares,*

*"Expressions are many
but Thy loveliness is one;
Each of us refers
to that single Beauty.”* ¹⁰⁹

Fakhreddin Iraqi - *Divine Flashes*

Recommendations for Further Reading about the Perennial

Philosophy

As this essay does not seek to offer a scholarly and comprehensive description, analysis and critique of either the *perennial philosophy* or Frithjof Schuon's theory of the *transcendent unity of religions*, the reader is referred to the *References* section below for further reading. In particular, readers with an interest in theology and metaphysics, who wish to further explore the central question of whether religions share the same ultimate goal, will find that the works of Aldous Huxley (1970), Frithjof Schuon (1993), Seyyed Hossien Nasr (1981), Harry Oldmeadow (2010), Huston Smith (1992), Lings and Minnaar (2007), Reza Sha-Kasemi (2006) and Ken Wilber (2001) provide insightful explanations that support the proposition. For an alternative perspective the reader is referred to Ferrer (2000 & 2001).

Further Reading about Mysticism & Interfaith Dialogue: The work of Raimon Panikkar

Readers wishing to explore a challenging and innovative theory of interfaith dialogue, which involves transcending the exoteric dimension of religions via an esoteric perspective borne of experience, and which preserves the integrity of the different exoteric forms, should investigate the work of the 'Christian'-'Vedanta/Hindu'-'Buddhist' Raimon Panikkar.

As the complexity and multifaceted nature of Panikkar's work cannot be adequately expressed in a few paragraphs, the author will restrict his description of Panikkar's theoretical framework to two elements which exemplify its relevance to mysticism and interfaith dialogue. These are "homeomorphic equivalence" and "cosmotheandric intuition" about ultimate reality.

Of particular relevance to the current essay, Panikkar's theory explores a 'correlation of functions' (i.e. 'functional similarities') between the specific and often irreconcilable beliefs of distinct religious traditions. These "correlations of function" (which he refers to as having "homeomorphic equivalence") must be discovered from within a religious tradition in the context of inter-religious dialogue based in 'faith', 'hope' and 'love' ¹¹⁰. Importantly, and as expressed using the term *Divinity*, for Panikkar, an essential facilitator of successful inter-

faith dialogue is a shared 'faith' by participants in an understanding of *Divinity* which underpins all religious traditions. As explained by the 'Panikkar-scholar' Associate Professor Gerard Hall:

"For Panikkar interreligious or interfaith dialog is first and foremost a religious encounter in faith, hope and love While beliefs, ideologies, doctrines and theologies divide people and traditions, they are nonetheless united by "*faith in the inexhaustible mystery beyond the reach of objective knowledge*". In faith, hope and love, one yearns for the common recognition of truth that does not obliterate the differences or mute the voices of any person or tradition. This type of dialogue is a meeting of persons rather than minds and, as with all interpersonal encounters, can only proceed on the basis of "*real mutual trust between those involved in the encounter*".

"Nonetheless, as an interreligious encounter, we do not place our ultimate faith in our human partner, but in reality itself. Panikkar calls this "*human cosmic trust*" or "*cosmic confidence*". The ultimate ground for our engagement in interfaith dialogue is the same ground that tells us, despite all signs to the contrary, reality is intelligible, ordered, trustworthy, true, beautiful and good. According to most traditions, there is an ultimate, divine reality that may go by many names. However, this divine reality is also at the centre of the cosmos and the heart of humanity. This leads Panikkar to speak of the ultimate reality in which we trust as the "*cosmotheandric*" (*cosmo / world*; *theos / God*; *aner / human*) mystery ... [that is, an ultimate reality in which the divine, human and earthly realities, are interrelated and inter-independent]. Without being confined to the religious traditions, he considers [this] cosmotheandric intuition to be "*the original and primordial form of consciousness*" and "*the emerging religious consciousness of our times*". It also provides the foundational experience upon which, he believes, religious dialogue and even spiritual communion are possible across the traditions".

"For Panikkar, the divine dimension of reality is not an 'object' of human knowledge, but the depth-dimension to everything that is. [It is] ... discernible within the depths of the human person." ¹¹¹

According to Panikkar, 'Faith' or 'Cosmic Trust' in this cosmotheandric intuition about ultimate reality arises from mystic experience, and the highest level of mystical experience involves a trinitarian vision of reality ¹¹². As explained by Hall (2014):

"[He] ... asserts that reality is neither one, nor two, but intrinsically three-fold; it is neither an undifferentiated unity nor a sheer multiplicity. In his terminology, cosmic matter, human consciousness and divine freedom interpenetrate one another in a co-constitutive relationship. They are not three individualized substances but exist in a radical relativity and mutual inter-independence".

Readers should pay particular attention to Panikkar's use of the terms: 'intra-religious dialogue', 'dialogical dialogue', 'diatopical hermeneutics', 'topological transformation', 'homeomorphic equivalence', 'cosmotheandric vision', 'love', 'hope' and 'faith'. It would also be profitable for them to explore Panikkar's "rules of the game" for interreligious dialogue and intercultural encounter. Available for free on the internet as a PDF, Hall (2004), provides a useful introduction to Panikkar's theory, terminology, and "rules of the game" for interreligious dialogue and intercultural encounter. The reader might then consider reading Panikkar's works *The Intra-Religious Dialogue* (1978), *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1981), *Blessed Simplicity: The Monk as Universal Archetype* (1982), *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (1993), *Cultural Disarmament: The Way to Peace* (1995), *The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery* (2006) and *The Rhythm of Being* (2013). Indicative of the vast scope and challenging and innovative nature of his theory, Panikkar famously wrote of himself:

"I left Europe (for India) as a Christian; found myself a Hindu; and I return as a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian."

Recommendations for Pursuing Contemplative Practice

The purpose of this essay is to assist those who have yet to do so, to recognise the truth of the *transcendent unity of religions* and to start, recommence or continue personal contemplative (mystic) practice and use the understandings arising from such practice to promote interfaith dialogue and tolerance. Information on *Divinity, mysticism, transcendence, immanence, and non-duality* was presented for this purpose and should not be taken as spiritual guidance for prospective contemplative practitioners on techniques of *contemplative prayer, meditation and contemplation*, and future progress with them. Rather, if they have not already done so, readers are encouraged to seek instruction from authorised teachers of contemplative practice from organisations within the Great Religious Traditions or from other authentic organisations that have arisen from these Traditions but are now independent of them. A list of such organisations is provided below in *Appendix 2* but should not be viewed as comprehensive let alone definitive. It is a mere starting point for readers. It is hoped that omissions will not cause offence as they indicate the ignorance of the author rather than any lack of worthiness of Traditions or organisations that may have been omitted. For example, writings from the Jewish mystic tradition of *Kabbala* have not been included in the *Anthology* nor recommendations made as to how readers can access training in this contemplative tradition. This reflects the author's ignorance of materials related to this tradition and the current accessibility of these materials compared to those of other traditions.

Advantage of pursuing Contemplative Practice with the assistance of an Authorised Teacher from an Authentic Contemplative Organisation:

It was recommended above that instruction in contemplative practice be sought from authorised teachers from within the Great Religious Traditions or from other "authentic" organisations that have arisen from these Traditions but are now independent of them. By "authentic" it is meant that the chosen organisation has a proven track record of practice-efficacy. This is not to say that there may not be other more recent efficacious options for guidance and instruction, but the advantage of working with an established, authentic organisation is that the seeker has stronger grounds for certainty and confidence. This is important because certainty about and confidence in a practice assist the practitioner to *fully surrender to it*. As mentioned earlier in the essay:

“Mystical experience requires direct apprehension of Divinity, however this direct apprehension is obscured by the typical functioning of the ego with its sense of being a separate-self and the egotistical passions associated with it.” (p. 18)

To transcend the ego without being further unwittingly controlled, manipulated or misled by the ego, the seeker is well advised to consider the following course of action. Firstly, thoroughly investigate a range of potential authentic options and select a teacher or teaching organisation that affords the seeker a strong sense of confidence and certainty. This will probably require at least some short-term trialling of different options. Then, having made a careful selection, the seeker should *surrender fully* to the contemplative practices offered and practice them *diligently with fidelity for at least a year, if not two years*. Why is this advantageous? The seeker needs to surrender to the practices because contemplative practice is a process of *transformation* which comes about usually by practicing efficacious contemplative practices with fidelity and reasonable intensity for a sustained period of time. For example, it is desirable to practice a method of *contemplative prayer, meditation or contemplation* at least twice daily, for at least twenty minutes (and if possible thirty to forty minutes), for at least a year or two, before making any judgements about the efficacy of the method. Seekers cannot force the transcendence of the ego using dualistic processes such as rational thinking, will-power or emotion (which are themselves an aspect of the ego). Rather, they need to surrender to the practice and patiently implement it with diligence and fidelity. *Transcendence or transformation will become apparent* to seekers after patient practice. If they choose to alter or customise the practice in some way without the advice of an authorised mentor or teacher, they run the real risk of their own ego subverting the process of transformation. That is, rather than the seeker being *transformed by practice*, the practice will be *manipulated and subverted by the ego*. This is why it is advisable for the seeker to carefully select a practice in which they have sufficient confidence that they feel comfortable to fully surrender to its diligent and faithful practice for a sustained time. Hence the value of guidance and instruction from authorised teachers of authentic organisations.

Recommendations for Establishing Interfaith Contemplative Groups

Once readers have commenced a regular contemplative practice, they may consider establishing or joining an *Interfaith Contemplative Group*. This provides a useful way of promoting interfaith dialogue and tolerance.

One source of guidance on how such groups might effectively promote interfaith understanding is Raimon Panikkar's "rules of the game" for interreligious dialogue and intercultural encounter. These rules are succinctly described in a journal article by Gerard Hall titled *Multi-Faith Dialogue in Conversation with Raimon Panikkar*, which may be downloaded free from the internet as a PDF (see Hall, 2004).

Interfaith Contemplative Groups could also consider using the group meeting / session format provided below. Its modified use of *Lectio Divina* naturally affords greater understanding of contemplative practices other than one's own. The following meeting or session format is suggested by an American Interfaith Contemplative Group called *Oxherds* (see <https://oxherds.wordpress.com/>).

Our gatherings will be simple. They may evolve in form over time, but initially they will begin with an opening bell. Sitting in a circle, we will meditate silently, each of us choosing his or her own silent meditative practice—centering prayer, zazen, shamatha, vipashyana, tonglen, or any other form of (or formless) practice as each practitioner chooses—for approximately twenty minutes, closed with a bell. A brief spiritual text drawn from any of a number of traditions—Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Sufi, Muslim, Hindu, Celtic, among others—will then be read. Adapting monastic practice (i.e., lectio divina, or 'sacred reading') to a group setting, participants will be asked to meditate briefly on the text and share with the group words or notions from it that particularly resonate for them. We will then read the text again, and meditate on it and share resonances with each other a second time. We will close with a prayerful thought drawn from any of a number of traditions, and perhaps another closing bell (or three).

As suggested above, *Interfaith Contemplative Groups* might *pray, contemplate or meditate* in silence together, with each participant doing so in accordance with their own religious or spiritual tradition or individual spiritual practice. The participants of the group might also share their understanding of scripture or other religious or spiritual writings of significance to a participant offering it to the group for consideration. However, so as not to cause offence to participants or other members of the religious or spiritual traditions to which they belong, the following three guidelines for conducting these meetings should be considered. The guidelines relate to issues raised in a BBC Radio 4 program on 'Interfaith Worship' which was broadcast in March 2017 (see Rea, 2017)

- the spirit in which such meetings occur should be one of sharing rather than proselytising.
- meetings might be best held in an unconsecrated space or a space designated specifically for interfaith dialogue and sharing. In the spirit of interfaith dialogue and tolerance, different traditions might share the responsibility of hosting such meetings in unconsecrated spaces within the precincts of their Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples.
- participants might consider avoiding the deliberate fusion of holy practices from different traditions in a manner which may be perceived by a participant, or other followers of that participant's tradition, as compromising the integrity of the holy practices of their tradition.

[Note: While some religious practitioners may believe that *syncretism* acknowledges an underlying unity of the ultimate goals of different religions and allows an inclusive approach to other faiths, this view may not be held by many who seek to participate in interfaith dialogue (Merton, 1999, pp. 207 – 208). It is advisable that the distinction between *interfaith dialogue* and *interfaith worship* be clearly understood by all participants. After all, regarding the nature of *interfaith worship*, there is a significant difference

between *syncretic worship*, in which holy practices from different traditions are fused or interspersed to create a new form of worship; and *parallel worship*, in which each participant uses their own form of worship or spiritual practice in relation to some shared aspiration of the group such as interfaith tolerance and understanding, world peace, the greater observance of human rights or care of the environment. *Interfaith Contemplative Groups* should make every effort to effectively advertise the processes used in their group so that prospective participants can freely choose to participate in full knowledge of this information. Controversy arising from a failure to do so may undermine the cause of interfaith dialogue and tolerance].

If participants at *Interfaith Contemplative Groups* are not disposed to hearing and sharing their reactions to the scriptures and other sacred writings of other Traditions, then they could nonetheless conduct their group sessions as a form of *parallel worship*. In this case, as mentioned above, participants could use their own form of silent worship or spiritual practice in relation to some shared aspiration of the group such as interfaith tolerance and understanding, world peace, the greater observance of human rights or care of the environment.

Interfaith Contemplative Groups may also have another purpose but it is desirable that this purpose be addressed with a similar degree of prudence. That is, their meetings might also provide an opportunity for participants to respectfully, discretely and confidentially share advice on the **success or failure of attempts to promote contemplative (mystic / esoteric) practice among the exoteric practitioners of their own religious traditions**. That such sharing takes place and the manner in which it is done, should be approached with great sensitivity. Some participants, for example, may feel compromised by such discussion because, while they are currently tolerated as contemplatives within their Tradition, control of the Tradition's institutions by exoteric practitioners makes their position as contemplatives somewhat tenuous compared to contemplatives in other Traditions. Therefore, having established that such discussions are confidential within the group,

participants who feel comfortable to share their experiences and thoughts on such matters might do so, while those who do not should feel no obligation to share their thoughts.

Glossary

Advaita Vedanta

Advaita Vedanta is regarded by its adherents as the pinnacle or highest practice of Vedanta Hinduism. It “teaches that the manifest creation, the soul and God are identical”. This doctrine was consolidated and fully expressed in the early 8th Century by the Indian mystic, philosopher and theologian Adi Shankara (Fischer-Schreiber, I., et al., 1989, pp. 4 & 315). More recently it was fully exemplified in the teachings the 19th Century Indian saint Ramakrishna and his disciple Vivekenanda, as well as the renowned 20th Century South Indian sage Sri Ramana Maharshi. Advaita is the path of *Self*-inquiry that reveals that there is no Reality other than the *Self* [Divinity]. Hence it is called ‘Advaita’ Vedanta. Advaita meaning ‘non-dual’ or ‘not two but one’ [Alan Jacobs in the *Introduction* to Marvally (2001, pp. vii – viii)]. It shares this uncompromisingly radical insight with a small number of other paths including but not limited to Sufism and Dzogchen.

Atman & Brahman

Atman is, “according to Hindu understanding, the real immortal soul of human beings” (Fischer-Schreiber, I., et al., 1989, p. 22). It is “the aspect of the self that is one with **Brahman** ... It is the individual’s spiritual essence, but in this case that essence transcends all personality and individuality and cannot be distinguished from the essence of everything else...” (Sawyer, 2014, p. 41). *Atman* is the “immanent eternal Self [that is] one with **Brahman**, the Absolute Principle of All existence” (Huxley, 1970, p. 2).

Beloved – See entry below for **Lover, Love & Beloved**

Brahman – See entry for **Atman & Brahman**

Contemplation, Meditation & Contemplative Prayer

The everyday meaning of the term *contemplation* describes consideration of a topic via the processes of dualistic thinking, whereas in this essay the term refers to being in the state of *nondual* consciousness. *Contemplation* differs from *meditation* although *meditation* can be a catalyst for becoming aware of the state of *contemplation*. *Meditation* involves one or more of a range of different techniques which use the processes of dualistic thinking to transcend and subsume such thinking and thereby facilitate *nondual* consciousness (*contemplation*) which has in fact always been present. As explained by the Christian contemplative Father Richard Rohr:

*... the contemplative mind does not 'divide the field of the moment'. It lets the moment, the person, the situation, the idea, come at you as it is. [You don't] judge it, pigeon-hole it, dismiss it, or even totally agree with it. [You] just let it be its mysterious self [without] dividing the field of the moment. [When you] let it present itself as it is, without your judgement, that's 'contemplation'. ... If I had to describe **contemplation** in one descriptor it would be 'nondual thinking'. (Rohr, 2013)*

Similarly, regarding the difference between *contemplation* and *meditation*, the Dzogchen Master Chogyal Namhkai Norbu explained:

*The distinction between what is meant by the terms 'meditation' and 'contemplation' in the Dzogchen teachings is an important one. The practice of Dzogchen itself is the practice of **contemplation**, in which one abides in that continually self-liberating non-dual state which is beyond the limits of the conceptual level of mental activity, and yet which nevertheless encompasses even the workings of what is called 'the ordinary mind', or rational thinking. Although thought can, and does, arise in contemplation, one is not conditioned by it, and it liberates of itself, just left as it is. In contemplation the mind is not engaged in any mental effort, and there is nothing to be done or not done. What is, is just as it is, self-perfected. What is meant by '**meditation**' in the Dzogchen Teachings, on the other hand, is one or other of the very many practices that involve working with the mind in some way, in order to enable one to enter the state of contemplation. These practices can include the various kinds of fixation of the gaze that are done to bring a state of calm, as well as the various kinds of visualisation*

practices, and so on. So, in what is called meditation, there is something to be done with the mind, but in contemplation there is not.

In Dzogchen contemplation one is able to integrate either the moment of calm where there is no thought, or those moments where there is the movement of thought, equally, remaining in full presence and awareness, neither sleepy nor agitated or distracted. This pure presence, this ground of awareness, neither rejecting nor following thought, is what is meant by the Tibetan term 'rigba', which is opposite of 'marigba' – the root ignorance of the dualistic mind.”

(Norbu, 1986, pp. 77-78).

Contemplative Prayer is a form of *meditation*. It includes but is not limited to practices such as *The Jesus Prayer* [see Anthony of Surozh (2012)] , *Centering Prayer* [see <http://www.centeringprayer.com/>] and the *formless apophatic prayer* of *St John of the Cross* (abiding in 'loving attentiveness to God') [see Maguire, 2013, p. 61]. Like other forms of meditation, when used diligently *Contemplative Prayer* is a powerful tool for facilitating the experience of *contemplation*.

Note: Ultimately, the veracity of the above definitions is only verifiable through the reader's contemplative experience and not via philosophical or theological inquiry based on dualistic thinking.

Contemplative Prayer (See entry for 'Contemplation, Meditation & Contemplative Prayer')

Dharmakaya is the ultimate ground of being. It is non-dual. It is one's true nature, as it is and has been from the beginning. It corresponds to the essence, the voidness of all phenomena ... [and] ... like limitless space is beyond form and colour. To have Total Realisation means that one has realized one's identity with the ultimate ground of being, the Dharmakaya (Norbu, 1986, pp. 67 & 130; Norbu, 1996a, p. 56).

Divinity: The term *Divinity* refers to the *Absolute Undifferentiated Unity of Being, which as the Ground of Being, is both the inherent Primordial Nature of, and origin of all manifest forms, human or otherwise.*

Dzogchen:

“Dzogchen, which literally means ‘Great Perfection’ [is] the primary teaching of the Nyingmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism ... [it is] ... also known as ati-yoga” (Fischer-Schreiber, I., et al, 1989, p. 97).

According to the Tibetan Buddhist ‘Dzogchen’ Master Chogyal Namkhai Norbu:

“The teaching of Dzogchen is in essence a teaching concerning the primordial state of being that is each individual’s own intrinsic nature from the very beginning. To enter into this state is to experience oneself as one is, as the centre of the universe – though not in the ordinary ego sense. The ordinary ego-centred consciousness is precisely the limited cage of dualistic vision that closes off the experience of the one’s own true nature, which is the space of the primordial state. To understand this primordial state is to understand the teaching of Dzogchen, and the function of the transmission of the teaching of Dzogchen is to communicate this state, from one who has realized it, or made real that which was previously only latent, to those who remain caught up in the dualistic condition. Even the name Dzogchen, which means the Great perfection, refers to the self-perfectedness of this state, fundamentally pure from the beginning, with nothing to reject or accept.”

Although Dzogchen is regarded as the highest of Vajrayana / Tibetan Buddhist practice it “cannot be regarded as a religion, and does not ask anyone to believe in anything. Rather, it suggests that the individual observe him or herself, and discover what their actual condition is”. One can be a Dzogchen practitioner who either has a religion or no religion at all. [Furthermore, although it is a matter of historical record the Dzogchen teachings were preserved within the Tibetan culture until the diaspora of Tibetans from Tibet following the invasion of Tibet by the Chinese in 1950, Namkhai Norbu says:] “in Tibet we nevertheless cannot finally say that Dzogchen is Tibetan, because the primordial state itself has no nationality, and is omnipresent, everywhere” (Norbu, 1986, pp. 11 - 13).

Ego-centric view: See Glossary entry for World-centric view.

Ethno-centric view: See Glossary entry for World-centric view.

Immanence means within the individual spiritual seeker and all other manifest forms.

Kosmo-centric view: See Glossary entry for World-centric view.

Lectio Divina is “a reflective reading of scripture. It is a method of prayer that leads us into the deeper meaning of scripture and the transformation of our lives ... Centering Prayer [or meditation] frees us from obstacles to hear the word of God on a much deeper level in *Lectio Divina*” (Contemplative Outreach, 2017).

Lover, Love & Beloved - Sufi poets often choose to speak of Reality in terms of Love, the Beloved and the lover. In this usage, Love refers to the Absolute or Essence, the Ground of Being, whilst lover and Beloved refer to seeker and Sought, person and God, creation and Creator, etc., respectively (Brown & Brown, 2018)

Maya: *Maya* [is the] “Sanskrit word for God’s power of illusion that brings about the whole world. This power causes the individual soul to believe that the unreal is real and that the transient is everlasting” (Star, 1996, p. 236).

Mansur refers to the Persian Sufi saint Mansur al-Hallaj who was executed for heresy on March 26, 922.

Meditation (See entry for ‘Contemplation, Meditation & Contemplative Prayer’)

Metaphysics & Theology - The following definitions of *theology* and *metaphysics* are from *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Turner, 1987, pp. 679 & 1178) and as such represent typical definitions of these terms:

Theology is the “study of or system of (esp. Christian) religion; rational analysis of a religious faith.”

Metaphysics is “theoretical philosophy of being and knowing; philosophy of mind.”

However, for the purposes of this essay, *metaphysics* and *theology* are defined as per the writings of Frithjof Schuon and are best understood in relation to each other. In this framework, *metaphysics* relates to the ineffable nature of *Divinity* whereas *theology* relates to rational philosophical analysis. That is, the realm of *metaphysics* is supra-rational non-duality whereas the realm of *theology* is that of rational dualistic philosophical thought.

Let us first consider the term *metaphysics*. There is an intrinsic relationship between *metaphysics* and *mysticism*. *Metaphysics* is the objective study of that reality which is apprehended subjectively via *mysticism*. As explained by Professor Harry Oldmeadow in his work *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy*, *metaphysics* (or more correctly ‘*metaphysic*’) is “the science of the Absolute, the Real and the true nature of things”. To be “metaphysical” is to be concerned with “universal realities considered objectively” [whereas the term] “mystical concerns the same realities considered subjectively” (Oldmeadow, 2010, p. 105). Professor Oldmeadow also mentions two other points which are defining characteristics of *metaphysics*:

[Firstly] “because the metaphysical realm lies “beyond” the phenomenal plane the validity of a metaphysical principle can be neither proved or disproved by any kind of to empirical demonstration, by reference to material or historical realities”. (p. 107)

[Secondly] “metaphysics is concerned with a direct apprehension of reality which entails a recognition of the Absolute, of God, and our relationship therewith. It thus takes on an imperative character for those capable of metaphysical discernment”. (p. 107)

Now let us consider the term *Theology*. According to Professor Oldmeadow:

“The relationship of theology to metaphysics is that of exotericism to esotericism. Exotericism ... [in the form of]... theological dogmatism elevates a particular view, or aspects of reality under specific formal guise, to an absolute value with exclusive claims. ... [whereas]... what characterizes esotericism ... is the discernment of the universal in the particular, of essence in form.” (Oldmeadow, 2010, p. 116).

That is, “esotericism universalises the particular” and “exotericism particularises the universal” (Oldmeadow, 2010, p. 97). Similarly, and in broad measure, it might be said that *theology* involves a largely rational philosophical process used to particularise or prioritise aspects of the Universal, whereas *metaphysics* is a supra-rational activity that universalises the particular through the direct apprehension of Universal, Absolute Reality.

Mystic experience is the direct non-rational apprehension of *Divinity* [i.e. the non-rational direct apprehension of the *Absolute Undifferentiated Unity of Being, which as the Ground of Being, is both the inherent Primordial Nature of, and origin of all manifest forms, human or otherwise*].

Nirvana is freedom from or the state beyond suffering (arising from enlightenment / total realisation / knowledge of the Dharmakaya i.e. one’s mind being in its purified condition). The conceptualisation of *nirvana*, however, like that of *samsara* is necessarily dualistic. Both *samsara* and *nirvana* are in fact creations of the dualistic mind. The achievement of *nirvana* (as opposed to its conceptualisation) actually occurs when one goes beyond the dualistic mind thereby abiding in the non-dualistic real-nature of mind (Norbu, 1986, pp. 139 – 141; Risoli, 2012, p. 17)

One-Taste: In Buddhism, and especially the Buddhist Teachings called Dzogchen, this term refers to the state that occurs when “you and the entire universe are one taste or experience”. (Wilber, 2001, pp. 292 – 293).

More specifically, according to the Tibetan Buddhist 'Dzogchen' Master Chogyal Namkhai Norbu, it is the state in which "dualism is overcome, and all phenomena, both relative and absolute, can be said to be 'of one taste' - pure from the very beginning". By 'relative phenomena' he is referring to "the bonds of the (impure) relative dimension" from which we must be freed; and by 'absolute phenomena', he refers to "the awareness of the voidness of all phenomena (the absolute)" (Norbu, 1986, p. 86)

Procrusteanism: *Procrustean* means "seeking to enforce uniformity by violent methods" (Turner, 1987, p. 872)

Samsara is "the cycle of existence in which one is endlessly propelled by negative emotions and the karmic force of one's actions from one state of rebirth to another" (Patrul Rinpoche, 1994, p. 428). "Those who follow a path have the possibility to become free of samsara and discover **nirvana**, freedom from suffering" (Risolo, 2012, p. 17).

Satori (or 'kensho') is "Zen's version of mystical experience, which whenever it appears, brings joy, at-one-ment, and a sense of reality that defies ordinary language ... it is the first important breakthrough [of Enlightenment] ... its preparation may take years, the experience itself coming in a flash, exploding like a rocket deep within the subject and throwing everything into a different perspective ... [although the first important breakthrough] ... there must be further *satoris* as the trainee learns to move with greater freedom in this realm" (Smith, 1991, p. 136).

Self & self: The 'Self' is Divinity, the Absolute, the Divine Ground of Being, the Primordial Reality etc. The 'self' is the ego, that is, the self that is perceived as separate from everything.

Sufi: A Sufi is a person “who belongs to [a] mystical sect of Islam based on love and devotion” (Star, 1996, p. 238). According to the *Beshara* website (<https://beshara.org/past-courses-and-events/ibn-arabi-and-the-journey-within/> accessed March 18, 2020):

The word Sufism, which translates in Arabic as *tasawwuf*, is closely interlinked with the meaning of “the way” or “the path.” A Sufi in this sense is someone who follows an inner path and embarks on a spiritual journey. In his book, *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam*, Eric Geoffroy (2010: 8) explains how the Sufi “aspirant follows an inward journey that must lead him to climb the ladder of the universal hierarchy of Being”.

Syncretism is the “attempted union or reconciliation of diverse or opposite tenets or practices, especially in philosophy or religion” (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002, p. 3153).

Shunyata: According to the Zen Master D.T. Suzuki, “Shunyata, ‘Absolute Emptiness’, is both ‘an ultimate reality’ and a ‘void of inexhaustible contents’ ” (Sawyer, 2014, p. 107). Risoli (2012, p. 10) states that:

[it is the Sanskrit term for] “*emptiness ... the experience of the absence of an I or self in all phenomena. It corresponds to the absolute truth of the Mahayana Sutra. At a relative level, everything manifests, but the true nature of every aspect of the reality of phenomena is emptiness*”.

Spiritual Marriage: Saint Teresa described *Spiritual Marriage* as follows:

“The Lord appears in the centre of the soul, not through an imaginary, but through an intellectual vision (although this is a subtler one than that already mentioned), just as He appeared to the Apostles, without entering through the door, when He said to them: “Pax vobis”. This instantaneous communication of God to the soul is so great a secret and so sublime a favour, and such delight is felt by the soul, that I do not know with what to compare it, beyond saying that the Lord is pleased to manifest

to the soul at that moment the glory that is in Heaven, in a sublimer manner than is possible through any vision or spiritual consolation.

It is impossible to say more than that, as far as one can understand, the soul (I mean the spirit of this soul) is made one with God, Who, being likewise a Spirit, has been pleased to reveal the love that He has for us by showing to certain persons the extent of that love, so that we may praise His greatness. For He has been pleased to unite Himself with His creature in such a way that they have become like two who cannot be separated from one another: even so He will not separate Himself from her.”

Source: Chapter Two of the ‘Seventh Mansion’ in St Teresa’s spiritual classic *Interior Castle* (Accessed on the website *Catholic Treasury* at http://www.catholictreasury.info/books/interior_castle/ic29.php)

Tao “is the central concept of Taoism” and “is a symbolic word from the Chinese that literally means “path,” or “way”. *Tao* is used to designate the one, impersonal, formless absolute, from which the entire universe has evolved and to which it will return”. (Fischer-Schreiber, I., et al, 1989, p. 356; Star, 1996, p. 238)

The Great Way: See entry for ‘Tao’.

The Way: See entry for ‘Tao’.

Theology (see Glossary entry for ‘Metaphysics & Theology’)

Transcendence means beyond, not limited to the individual spiritual seeker or any other manifest form.

Way: See entry for ‘Tao’.

World-centric view: Ken Wilber uses a number of models of human development to explain his theory of the effect of *stage of self-development on an individual's interpretation of mystic experience*. These models include the following four-stage model, which is used in this essay for ease of understanding.

Egocentrism is the stage at which one's focus is exclusively on oneself and is summarised as "**Me**".

Ethnocentrism is the stage at which one's focus extends to other human beings within a defined group, such as the family, tribe, nation or religion, and is summarised as "**Us**".

Worldcentrism extends one's focus to all human beings (i.e. it is Global in its concern) and is summarised by the phrase "**All of Us**"; whereas **Kosmo-centrism** extends one's focus to all sentient beings and is summarised by the phrase "**All Beings**" (see Wilber, 2016). Hence progression through the stages of *Egocentrism*, *Ethnocentrism*, *Worldcentrism* and *Kosmo-centrism* involves a development of moral concern starting with "Me" and then transitioning to "Us" then to "All of us" and finally "All beings".

Zen: On an exoteric level, Zen is the Japanese term for Ch'an Buddhism which is a form of Buddhism based on the Mahayana Sutras and influenced by Taoism. On an esoteric level, it strongly emphasises *Zazen* ("seated meditation") and the contemplation of *Koans* ("problems") as spiritual technologies for dissolving dualistic consciousness. Its focus, as is the case with other forms of mysticism, is nonduality that is both transcendent and immanent. As encapsulated by Huston Smith:

"... Zen values unity, ... it is a unity that is simultaneously empty (because it erases lines that divide) and full (because it replaces those lines with ones that connect). Stated in the form of a Zen algorithm,

'All is one, one is none, none is all' ..."

Sources: (Fischer-Schreiber, I., et al, 1989, p. 441;
Smith, 1991, pp. 128, 133, 135, 137)

(Regarding Zen, also see the entry for 'Satori / Kensho')

Appendix 1: Biographical details of Mystics & Commentators on the Perennial Philosophy (Alphabetical order by last name)

Mystics:

Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240)

According to the website of the *The Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*:

“Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240) [was] a medieval mystic from Andalusia, known as the Sheikh al Akbar (the greatest teacher) in the East, and as Doctor Maximus in the West.

Mystic, philosopher, poet, sage, ... Ibn 'Arabi is one of the world's great spiritual teachers. Known as Muhyiddin (the Revivifier of Religion) and the Shaykh al-Akbar (the Greatest Master), he was born in 1165 AD into the Moorish culture of Andalusian Spain, the centre of an extraordinary flourishing and cross-fertilization of Jewish, Christian and Islamic thought, through which the major scientific and philosophical works of antiquity were transmitted to Northern Europe. Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual attainments were evident from an early age, and he was renowned for his great visionary capacity as well as being a superlative teacher. He travelled extensively in the Islamic world and died in Damascus in 1240 AD.

He wrote over 350 works including the Fusûs al-Hikam, an exposition of the inner meaning of the wisdom of the prophets in the Judaic/ Christian/ Islamic line, and the Futûhât al-Makkiyya, a vast encyclopaedia of spiritual knowledge which unites and distinguishes the three strands of tradition, reason and mystical insight. In his Diwân and Tarjumân al-Ashwâq he also wrote some of the finest poetry in the Arabic language. These extensive writings provide a beautiful exposition of the Unity of Being, the single and indivisible reality which simultaneously transcends and is manifested in all the images of the world. Ibn 'Arabi shows how Man, in perfection, is the complete image of this reality and how those who truly know their essential self, know God.

Firmly rooted in the Quran, his work is universal, accepting that each person has a unique path to the truth, which unites all paths in itself. He has profoundly influenced the development of Islam since his time, as well as significant aspects of the philosophy and literature of the West. His wisdom has much to offer us in the modern world in terms of understanding what it means to be human.”

(Accessed on 19-5-18 at <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/ibnarabi.html>)

St Teresa of Avila (1515 – 1582)

“Teresa of Avila was declared a doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI on 27 September 1970. She was born on 28 March 1515 in Avila into a family which was among the minor nobility of Spain”. Teresa joined the Carmelite Order but desiring to live the contemplative life of poverty, silence and solitude for which the Carmelite Order was originally founded, didn’t find the current practices at her monastery conducive to this end. She therefore eventually “established a completely new branch of the Carmelite Order, the Discalced Carmelite (meaning ‘unshod’ as they wore the rope sandals of the poor in place of shoes). The order was for both nuns and monks. The reform of the friars started when she met with St John of the Cross who would later become famous for his mystical poetry and writings.” Throughout her life she received a series of mystical revelations. Teresa conceived the notion of using the castle as a symbol of the interior life. Her most renowned work “*Interior Castle or Book of Mansions* contains the essence of St Teresa’s doctrine of prayer.” Teresa wrote a number of books about her mystical experiences which were scrutinised by the Spanish Inquisition. She was unschooled in philosophy and theology and admitted that she often didn’t have access to as much as a Bible because it “was the time of the Spanish Inquisition and the Inquisitor General had forbidden many spiritual books as it was thought that they were harmful to the simple people.” It is a testament to the depth and quality of her mystical insights, and her natural ability as a writer, that she was able to express these insights without subsequently being charged with heresy by the Inquisition.

Source: Maguire (2013, p. 29, 34, 36, 37, 39)

Meister Eckhart (1260 – 1329)

In her chapter on Meister Eckhart, Maguire (2013) explains that Eckhart was a most significant figure in the history of Christian Mysticism. Born in Thuringia in Germany in 1260 he is believed to have belonged to a family of the lower aristocracy. Eckhart entered the Dominican Priory at the monastery in Erfurt at the age of fifteen.

Few details of his personal life are known to us. Unlike Christian mystics such as Julian of Norwich, St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross, he did not speak of himself or his own spiritual experiences. What is known of him and his theology is largely gleaned from his sermons. As was the case with other members of the Dominican Order, he stressed the importance of preaching. Consequently, Eckhart's focus was on those to whom he preached and their experiences rather than his own. As his reputation grew large numbers of people came to hear his sermons.

As revealed by the quotations in the *Anthology* included in this essay, the non-duality, transcendence and immanence of *Divinity* was an inherent aspect of his theology. According to Maguire (2013):

“Eckhart makes the point in his sermons that we do not have to gain anything in order to be united with God, all that is necessary is to ‘chip’ away at the things which cover up this unity”. (p. 79)

Maguire also stated:

“One of the recurring themes in Eckhart’s sermons is the need to live in the present, in the now ... the past and future do not in fact exist - all we have is the present moment. If we could live our life in this present moment, detached from the idea of the past and future we would, he tells us, discover that this ‘now’ is always new. Living in the now is the way to experience true detachment according to Eckhart. True detachment he says means ‘a mind so little moved by what befalls it, by joy and sorrow, honour and disgrace, as a broad mountain by a gentle breeze’ ”. (p. 80)

Meister Eckhart was the first medieval theologian to be summoned by the Inquisition on charges of heresy. Although never condemned as a heretic, he was under investigation for many years due to, among other things, his practice of preaching in vernacular German rather than Latin. This was objected to by the Catholic Church which feared that giving the common people spiritual knowledge was likely to result in their adoption of heretical practices. Eckhart died before the Inquisition completed its examination of his writings.

Source: Maguire, Annetta. (2013). Praying with Christian Mystics. County Dublin, The Columba Press.

Fakhruddin 'Iraqi (1213 – 1289)

According to a recent article about Iraqi's greatest work *Lama'at*:

"Fakhruddin Iraqi was contemporary with other giants of Sufism such as Ibn 'Arabi, Jalaluddin Rumi and Sadruddin Qunawi, men whose teachings dominate Sufi spirituality to this day. He himself was a leading light in a period so luminous that its brilliance still dazzles the eye some seven centuries later.

Iraqi was a Gnostic who spoke the language of love. For him, as for Sufism in general, love is not juxtaposed to knowledge. It is realised knowledge. [The best known of his works] Lama'at ('Divine Flashes') is a union of the Western and Eastern Schools of Sufism. The 'Divine Flashes' was inspired by one of Ibn 'Arabi's major works 'The Bezels of Wisdom'. Born in Spain, Ibn 'Arabi is considered by many Sufis to be the greatest of all Masters and his writings are revered as great treasures. Fakhruddin Iraqi was one of the most preeminent figures of the Eastern School, which was especially regarded for its musical and poetic expressions and was enriched by the great spiritual jewels of the East, including both Hinduism and Buddhism. 'Iraqi was at once a metaphysician of the Ibn 'Arabi school of Sufism and an exceptional artist of the Persian school of Sufism (which was to culminate with Jalaluddin Rumi). Hence in the treasure, which is the Divine Flashes, we have the infinite vision of Ibn 'Arabi rendered into the most exquisite Persian poetry, written in the language of love by the master poet of this genre, Iraqi."

Source: Brown & Brown, 2018.

Longchenpa [also known as Longchen Rabjam] (1308 – 1364)

According to the Glossary of a translation of a classic text of Tibetan Buddhism:

“Longchenpa, also called the Omniscient Sovereign or King of Dharma, [was] one of the most extraordinary spiritual masters and scholars of the Nyingmapa school [of Tibetan Buddhism]. The greatest exponent of the Great Perfection [Dzogchen], he wrote more than 250 treatises.”

[Source: Patrul Rinpoche (1994, p. 419)]

He “played a special role in the transmission of Dzogchen, having synthesized the traditions of Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra into a coherent system.” (Fischer-Schreiber, I., et al, 1989, p. 206)

In the introduction to a translation of Longchenpa’s work ‘*The Precious Treasury of the Way of Abiding*’ it is stated that:

Longchen Rabjam became one of the greatest scholars and realized sages of Tibet. Crowds of disciples followed him wherever he went, but he remained a simple hermit with minimal belongings, often dwelling in caves.

He saw solitude in nature as a source of spiritual awakening. For him, nature’s peaceful and clear environment inspired peace and clarity, enabling practitioners to unite with ultimate joy, to attain the one-ness of universal openness and luminous clarity. He avoided building monasteries and lived in solitude, advising his followers to do the same.

[Source: Longchen, Rabjam. (1998, p. xiv)]

Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879 – 1950)

According to the official website dedicated to his legacy and teachings, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi was a “20th century South Indian sage who revealed the direct path of practice of Self-enquiry”. Born in 1879, he lived and taught for most of his life at Tiruvannamalai at the foot of the sacred hill of Arunachala. From the day he arrived, until his

death in April 1950, he never left Arunachala. Ramana never claimed to be a Guru nor to have any disciples. [His tradition of practice] ... “represents the most direct, the most formless and the least ritualistic of paths, the path of Self-enquiry, whose gateway is silent initiation”.

At the age of seventeen Sri Ramana Maharshi “attained a profound experience of his true self (*Atman*) without the guidance of a guru and thereafter remained conscious of his identity with the Absolute (*Brahman*) at all times ... He followed no particular traditional system of teaching, but rather spoke directly from his own experience of nonduality (*Advaita*)” (Fischer-Schreiber, I., et al, 1989, p. 286).

He is regarded by many as the preeminent modern practitioner of Advaita Vedanta. Professor Harry Oldmeadow described him as one of the “most lucent sages of the recent Hindu tradition” (Oldmeadow, 2010, p. 8). Ken Wilber went so far as to say:

“Ramana is arguably the greatest guru who ever lived ... his Self-realization was unsurpassed” (Wilber, 2000, pp. 187 & 208).

Bulent Rauf (1911 – 1987)

Bulent Rauf was a 20th century Sufi mystic and sage. He was instrumental in the foundation of both the *Beshara School for Esoteric Education* and the *Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society*.

According to the Beshara website (Beshara.org):

“Born in Istanbul in 1911, Bulent had received a traditional Ottoman education at home, and gone on to receive the best of Western education at Cornell and Yale [Universities] in the US. His interest in ‘esoteric’ or inner education came from his family on both sides being steeped in the culture of the unity of all existence as propounded by the great mystics of the Middle East, especially Ibn Arabi and Rumi. Arriving in England in the mid 1960’s, Bulent recognised the need for ideas and insights that had been the sole preserve of a few mystics and spiritual masters to become part of an education available to all.

[He was] .. able to read the old Ottoman Turkish and was therefore able to translate the exceptionally difficult commentary on Ibn 'Arabi's 'Fusus al-Hikam' by Ismail Hakki Bursevi – an immense work ... published in five volumes, and which Bulent regarded as the most important contribution to esoteric literature, mapping as it does so comprehensively the Spiritual landscape. He was Life President of the Ibn 'Arabi Society.

It was evident that only by an intimate knowledge of the most profound spiritual stations was he able so clearly to imbue the listener with understanding. His attention was constantly on that highest goal that Man can attain – Union with God, and all questions and actions were transformed towards helping others to appreciate that goal. In the best Socratic tradition, he illuminated with infinite patience the perennial wisdom summarised in the Delphic oracle inscription "Know Thyself".

His varied life and broad interests enabled him to relate his spiritual knowledge to many other fields. An Archaeological scholar, educated at Cornell and Yale Universities, he was an authority on early Civilisations, and his great concern was the dilemma of modern man's lack of spiritual dimension. He was equally secure in great wealth and great poverty. He was married to Princess Faiza of Egypt until 1962. His wide circle of influential friends of many nationalities saw little of him in later years as he became increasingly conscious of the need to devote his time to educating the next generation. He was able to express himself equally clearly in the language of Christian, Moslem, Jew, Zoroastrian, scientist and even apparent atheist, and many looked to him to explain the meaning of their own traditions. He had no time for the religious bigot nor for dogma."

Jelaluddin Rumi (1207 – 1273)

Born in 1207 in what is today Afghanistan, Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi lived most of his life at Konya in Turkey. Like Ibn Arabi, he is regarded as one of the towering figures of Sufi Mysticism. Descriptions of Rumi's legacy are invariably effusive. For example, as explained in the introduction to their book on Rumi's work *Mathnawi*, the translators Helmminski & Helmminski (1999) stated:

“In the last decades of the Twentieth Century the spiritual influence of Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi is being strongly felt by people of diverse beliefs throughout the Western World. He is being recognized here in the West, as he has been for seven centuries in the Middle east and Western Asia, as one of the greatest literary and spiritual figures of all time.” (p. 9)

Similarly, in the introduction to his book *Rumi - The Book of Love* (2003), the translator Coleman Barks noted:

“In the Persian empire from the eleventh to the fourteenth century a brilliant flowering of [mystical] awareness came among the Sufis, and especially the poets. Jelaluddin Rumi (1207 – 1273) was one of those conductors of knowing and being. Sufis call Rumi the “Qutb”, the pole of love. Gilani (d.1166) was the pole of power and Ibn Arabi (1165 – 1249), of knowledge. Through Rumi comes a transmission of the divine to this planet in the regions of love. His poetry is a record of his enduring the experience of living at the core. In each human being there is a meeting with the divine. That intersection is the heart.” (p. xxi)

Adi Shankara (788 – 820)

Adi Shankara was a late 8th century / early 9th century Indian mystic, philosopher and theologian. In his work *The Perennial philosophy* Aldous Huxley stated that:

“The philosophy of the Upanishads was developed and enriched in the Bhagavad-Gita and was finally systematised, in the ninth century ... by Shankara.” (Huxley, 1970, p. 5)

Believed to have only lived a short life of 32 years, Shakara's importance to Hinduism in general, and Advaita (non-dual) Vedanta in particular, cannot be overstated as he consolidated the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta and is credited with unifying and establishing the main currents of thought in Hinduism. The radical non-dual perspective of his teachings is encapsulated by his words:

“Brahman is the only truth, the world is illusion, and there is ultimately no difference between Brahman and individual self.”

Sources: Huxley (1970, p. 5); Wikipedia – Accessed 20-5-18 at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adi_Shankara; *Brahma Jnanavali Mala* quoted in Taft, M. W. (2014). Nondualism: A Brief History of a Timeless Concept. United States, Cephalopod Rex)

Yung-Chai Ta-shih (713 – 665 BC)

Yung-Chai Ta-shih was a Ch'an (Zen) Buddhist Poet and Sage of great renown. Also known as Yung-chia Hsuan-Chueh, Master Chen-chio, Master Yung Chia and Yoka Genkaku, he lived in the Yung Chia region of southern Che Chian Province in China. He was a scholar and a monk and is considered one of the greatest and most gifted teachers of Ch'an.

Seng Ts'an (Late 6th century)

Seng Ts'an was a Chinese Zen (Ch'an) master and the Third Founding Teacher (or Patriarch) of Zen in China (Mitchell, 1989, p. 162). Attributed to him is the work *Hsin-hsin-ming (The Song of Enlightenment)*, a collection of 64 verses from the T'ang Dynasty which presents the basic tenets of Ch'an Buddhism. “In this early Ch'an poem, the fusion, typical for later Ch'an (Zen), of the mutually congenial teachings of Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism appears for the first time” (Fischer-Schreiber, I., et al, 1989, p. 311).

Chang Tzu (4th Century BC)

Born in the 4th Century BC, Chang Tzu like Lao Tzu, is one of the principal sages of Taoism. Taoism is best known through its doctrine of *wu wei* (which literally means “pure

effectiveness”, in that, “action in the mode of *wu wei* is action in which friction – in interpersonal relationships, in intrapsychic conflict, and in relation to nature – is reduced to the minimum”). However, of interest to the current essay is the nondualism (and its inherent immanence and transcendence) that was expressed by Taoist sages such as Chang Tzu. As stated by Aldous Huxley, “In the Taoist formulations of the Perennial Philosophy there is an insistence, no less forcible than in the Upanishads, the Gita and the writings of Shankara, upon the universal immanence of the transcendent spiritual Ground of all existence.”

Sources: Huxley (1970, p. 7); Smith (1991, p. 200)

Vairocana (8th Century)

Vairocana was a renowned 8th Century Tibetan translator who was the disciple of the Tibetan Buddhist Masters Padmasambhava and Humkara. In order to further spread the Dzogchen Teachings in Tibet, Vairocana was sent, at the behest of Padmasambhava, by the Tibetan King Trisong Detson to the land of Oddiyana (in the Swat Valley in northern Pakistan or Afghanistan) “where he received all the Dzogchen teachings at the feet of the master Sri Singha, a disciple of Manjushrimitra, who was in turn a disciple of Garab Dorje, and later introduced these teachings to Tibet”.

Sources: Norbu (1986, p. 92); Norbu (1996a, pp. 14)

Commentators on the Perennial Philosophy & Other leading writers on religious matters

Laurence Freeman (b. 1951)

“Laurence Freeman OSB is a Benedictine monk of Turvey Abbey in the Olivetan Congregation, and Director of the World Community for Christian Meditation. He leads retreats and seminars world-wide, and nurtures interfaith dialogue”. “He is the author of *Jesus the Teacher* and *Light Within*. [Biographical note from Freeman (2007) and Freeman (2014)].

Gerard Hall (b. 1950)

Gerard Hall SM is an Australian priest, theologian and educator. He is an Honorary Associate Professor and former Head of the School of Theology at the Australian Catholic University in Brisbane and has published extensively on the subjects of Interfaith Dialogue, Practical Theology, Christology and Marist Mission. He is also a renowned scholar of the life and work of Raimon Panikkar. Readers are encouraged to explore his writings further at:

<https://gerardhallsm.wordpress.com/>.

Aldous Huxley (1894 –1963)

Today the importance of Aldous Huxley’s work and legacy is often misunderstood.

According to Professor Dana Sawyer:

“Huxley is remembered today primarily as a novelist, often studied in conjunction with his contemporaries Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, but of his fifty books only eleven were novels. For the most part Huxley’s focus, and this is true even in the novels, was on the problems that plagued humankind and discussions of how these problems might be solved. He was, in the final analysis, a moral philosopher and social critic, and in the mid-twentieth century few intellectuals commanded as much public respect (Sawyer, 2014, p. 48).

The depth of Huxley's understanding of philosophy, comparative religion, mysticism, theology and metaphysics is also poorly understood. Huxley was a close friend of Krishnamurti as well as a student of Vedanta Mysticism (Advaita Vedanta) and a practitioner of Vedanta meditation, both of which he studied for some considerable time under the guidance of Swami Prabhavananda. He made a significant and ongoing contribution to Western readers' understanding of comparative religion in general, and the *Perennial Philosophy* in particular, through his book *The Perennial Philosophy*. First published in 1946 it has been regularly in print since and is credited with popularising this philosophy among western readers during the Twentieth century. The work of such figures as Frithjof Schuon, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and other respected 'Traditionalist' perennial philosophers and metaphysicians must be duly acknowledged, but it was Huxley who can justifiably be credited with initially shining a light on their field and enhancing its public profile beyond academia and esoteric religious circles. Huxley was also friend and mentor to Huston Smith who subsequently became one of the most renowned scholars of comparative religion of the Twentieth Century (Saywer, 2002, Ch 7; Sawyer, 2014, pp. 48-49).

Consequently, notwithstanding the fact that Aldous Huxley was nominated seven times for the *Nobel Prize for Literature* and was made a *Companion of Literature* by the Royal Society of Literature, he was in the final analysis, so much more than he has been disparagingly characterised as by some of his critics in the field of religious studies, that is, "just a novelist". Rather, in his day, he was justifiably acknowledged as a highly educated and scholarly independent researcher, and as a public intellectual of towering stature. Professor Dana Dawyer's biography of him is highly recommended to the reader (see Sawyer, 2002).

Kyriacos Markides (b. 1942)

Kyriacos Markides is Professor of Sociology at the University of Maine. For the last twenty years he has researched and written books and research articles on Christian Mysticism within the Eastern Orthodox Church. Widely considered an authority on the topic, he regularly gives lectures and workshops on Christian Mysticism in the United States and Canada as well as other countries worldwide (University of Maine website; Wikipedia).

Thomas Merton (1915 – 1968):

Thomas Merton, who authored the spiritual classics *The Seven Storey Mountain* and *New Seeds of Contemplation*, is arguably the most influential American Catholic author of the twentieth century. Following his conversion to Catholicism in 1941, he entered the Cistercian Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky. By doing so he entered the most ascetic Roman Catholic monastic order, the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance (Trappists). According to the website of the Thomas Merton Centre at Bellarmine University:

“The twenty-seven years he spent in Gethsemani brought about profound changes in his self-understanding. This ongoing conversion impelled him into the political arena, where he became, according to Daniel Berrigan, the conscience of the peace movement of the 1960’s. Referring to race and peace as the two most urgent issues of our time, Merton was a strong supporter of the nonviolent civil rights movement, which he called “certainly the greatest example of Christian faith in action in the social history of the United States.” For his social activism Merton endured severe criticism, from Catholics and non-Catholics alike, who assailed his political writings as unbecoming of a monk.

During his last years, he became deeply interested in Asian religions, particularly Zen Buddhism, and in promoting East-West dialogue. After several meetings with Merton during the American monk’s trip to the Far East in 1968, the Dalai Lama praised him as having a more profound understanding of Buddhism than any other Christian he had known. It was during this trip to a conference on East-West monastic dialogue that Merton died [from accidental causes] ... in Bangkok on December 10, 1968.

His life and work has provided a stimulus for many Christians to consider the importance of Contemplative Christianity, to participate in interfaith dialogue, and to examine the potential relevance of the *Perennial Philosophy*.

Sources: Thomas Merton Centre (University of Bellarmine); Biographical Notes from Merton (2007) and Merton (1998).

Chogyal Namkhai Norbu (1938 - 2018)

“Born in Dege, Eastern Tibet, in 1938, Namkhai Norbu was recognised at the age of three as the reincarnation of a previous great Dzogchen master, Adzom Drugpa. He then received the full traditional education of a ‘Tulku’ or reincarnate Lama. Beyond his academic studies, he received teachings from and practised with several great masters of Tibet, before political events made it necessary for him to leave for India. When he was in India, Professor G. Tucci invited him to [assist] with research at the Oriental Institute in Rome. He subsequently took up [the] post of Professor of Tibetan and Mongolian Language and Literature at the Oriental Institute, University of Naples. In addition to his work at the University [and after his retirement from that post] he travelled extensively in response to many requests ... to give Dzogchen teachings at retreats and seminars all over the world.” To facilitate this teaching, he founded *International Dzogchen Community*. Namkhai Norbu authored “many renowned books on Dzogchen as well as on Tibetan history and culture”. He [was] widely recognised [as] one of the greatest living masters of Dzogchen, and his importance as such was acknowledged by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. “He [was] a lineage holder in a line of masters that goes back to [great Dzogchen master] Garab Dorje.”

Sources: Norbu (1996a, p. 17) and biographical notes from Lawless & Allan (2003, p. 192) and Norbu (1986).

Harry Oldmeadow (b. 1947)

Associate Professor Harry Oldmeadow was Coordinator of Religious Studies in the Department of Arts at La Trobe University in Bendigo, Australia. He is currently an Honorary Associate of the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Commerce at the same University. His principal intellectual interests include the perennialist school of thinkers, on whom he has written extensively during the last two decades, and the mystical and esoteric dimensions of the major religious traditions, especially Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Dr Oldmeadow also has an abiding interest in the primal traditions of the Plains Indians of North America and the Aborigines of Australia. His 2010 book *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy* is held in high esteem by many scholars of the *Perennial Philosophy*.

Dana Sawyer (b. 1951)

Dana Sawyer is an Associate Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Maine College of Arts, a former adjunct professor of Asian Religions at the Bangor Theological Seminary, and a lecturer on world religions for the Chaplaincy Institute of Maine. He has both academic expertise in and personal experience of Hindu and Buddhist religious systems and is the authorised biographer of Aldous Huxley and Huston Smith.

Frithjof Schuon (1907 - 1998)

According to Oldmeadow (2010):

[Schuon] *“is the foremost spokesman for the “Perennialist” or “Traditionalist” school of comparative religious thought” ... [and] ... “as one of the greatest exponents ever of perennial wisdom; his unique feature is that, amongst all of the great sages, he is the only one who is equally at home – and in a masterly fashion – in all of its many and varied historic forms: Vedanta, Taoism, Platonism, Palamism [the Eastern Orthodox Christian practice of Hesychasm], Scholasticism, and Sufism”* (Oldmeadow, 2010, p. vii & back cover).

Huston Smith described Schuon as “the greatest metaphysical and religious thinker of the [Twentieth] century” (Oldmeadow, 2010). Not just a metaphysical and religious thinker, he was in fact an authorized and renowned Sufi teacher. Due to his extraordinary spiritual capacity, Schuon rose to the high rank of a Sufi Shaykh within three years of taking initiation in a Sufi Order (Oldmeadow, 2010, p. 5).

Reza Sha-Kazemi

Dr Reza Sha-Kazemi is an author who specializes in comparative mysticism, Islamic Studies, Sufism and Shi'ism. He is the founding editor of the *Islamic World Report* and currently a Research Associate at the Institute of Ismaili Studies with the Department of Academic Research and Publications in London. He has edited, translated, and written numerous books and articles (Shah-Kazemi, 2006, p. 257; Wikipedia entry, April 16, 2018).

Huston Smith (1919 - 2016)

According to his biographer Professor Dana Sawyer:

“Born in China in 1919, the son of Methodist missionaries, [Huston] Smith followed a life-long spiritual quest that led him around the world many times. He studied the world’s religions and mystical traditions directly with Aldous Huxley, D.T. Suzuki, J. Krishnamurti, Alan Watts, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, the Dalai lama, Joseph Campbell, Ram Dass, and a host of others. Huston, as a renowned philosopher of religion, taught at Washington University, M.I.T., Syracuse University and the University of California at Berkeley and during his career helped shape the contemporary face of comparative religion, interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance. As a seeker, he became a citizen of the world, plunging himself into its various spiritual traditions” ... “Having studied the perennial philosophy with [Aldous] Huxley ... [he] ... became its primary spokesperson during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s” (Sawyer, 2014, p. 15 & back cover).

Professor Sawyer’s biography of him is highly recommended to the reader (see Sawyer, 2014).

Richard Rohr (b. 1943)

As explained on the website of the *Center for Action and Contemplation*:

“Fr. Richard Rohr is a globally recognized ecumenical teacher bearing witness to the universal awakening within Christian mysticism and the Perennial Tradition. He is a Franciscan priest of the New Mexico Province and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Fr. Richard’s teaching is grounded in the Franciscan alternative orthodoxy—practices of contemplation and self-emptying, expressing itself in radical compassion, particularly for the socially marginalized.

Fr. Richard is the author of numerous books, including Everything Belongs, Adam’s Return, The Naked Now, Breathing Under Water, Falling Upward, Immortal

Diamond, and Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi. His newest book is The Universal Christ.

Fr. Richard is academic Dean of the Living School for Action and Contemplation. Drawing upon Christianity's place within the Perennial Tradition, the mission of the Living School is to produce compassionate and powerfully learned individuals who will work for positive change in the world based on awareness of [their] common union with God and all beings."

Source: <https://cac.org/richard-rohr/richard-rohr-ofm/>

Ken Wilber (b. 1949)

Ken Wilber is one of the most widely read and influential American philosophers of our time. According to the biographical note on the *Integral Life* website:

"Ken Wilber is a preeminent scholar of the Integral stage of human development ... [and] ... is one of the most important philosophers in the world today. He is the most widely translated academic writer in America, with 25 books translated into some 30 foreign languages. Ken Wilber currently lives in Denver, Colorado, and is still active as a philosopher, author, and teacher, with all of his major publications still in print. What makes Ken Wilber especially relevant in today's world is that he is the originator of arguably the first truly comprehensive or integrative philosophy, aptly named "Integral Theory". Incorporating cultural studies, anthropology, systems theory, developmental psychology, biology, and spirituality, it has been applied in fields as diverse as ecology, sustainability, psychotherapy, psychiatry, education, business, medicine, politics, sports, and art."

(Accessed at <https://integrallife.com/author/ken-wilber/> 18-5-18)

Although Wilber does not identify as a Buddhist, and says he could have used meditation practices from any of the world's great nondual traditions, in his book *One Taste*, he stated that he had diligently practiced meditation for 25 years making significant use of meditation practices from the Nyingma School of Vajrayana Buddhism and the Dzogchen Teachings of

that school. His primary Dzogchen teacher being Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche (Wilber, 2000, p. 263).

Rowan Williams (b. 1950)

Dr Rowan Williams is a Welsh Anglican bishop, theologian and poet who was the Archbishop of Canterbury from 2002 – 2012. He is currently serving as Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and is a member of the House of Lords. He is a strong advocate for the importance of Contemplative Christianity.

Appendix 2: List of Organisations for Contemplatives

Christian

- World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) – Fr Laurence Freeman (<http://wccm.org/>)
- Contemplative Outreach – Fr Thomas Keating (<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/>)
- Centre for Action and Contemplation - Fr. Richard Rohr, Rev Cynthia Bourgeault & James Finley (<https://cac.org/>)
- Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation - Tilden Edward (<https://shalem.org/>)
- Contemplative training available through the traditional structure of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Sufi

- Beshara (<http://beshara.org/>) – *The Beshara School of Intensive Esoteric Education* was founded in the England and the U.S. by the Turkish mystic, Bulent Rauf (d. 1987), who had a strong interest in Sufism, especially the writings of Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi. Beshara regards itself as a school for realizing esoteric truth, a school that is independent of religion. The non-sectarian nature of this organisation makes it both a useful first point of contact as well as an abiding home for those interested in pursuing Sufi contemplative practice.
- There are a plethora of other Sufi Orders and Organisations in the West some of which have connections to traditional Islam and others that do not (see <http://islam.uga.edu/sufismwest.html>)

Buddhist

- Zen

Many Zen organisations have arisen in the West and practitioners living in the West are advised to seek an organisation with clear authority and legitimacy in terms of the traditional lineages of Japanese Zen Buddhism such as the Soto and Rinzai Schools (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zen_organisation_and_institutions)

Another reliable source of Zen Meditation instruction is the meditation organisation established by the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. (see <https://plumvillage.org/>)

- Theravada

The Insight Mediations Society (IMS) provides spiritual seekers in the West with a reliable and accessible source of information on the Teachings of Theravadin Buddhism and training in Vipassana Meditation (see <https://www.dharma.org/>).

Many Theravadin organisations have arisen in the West and practitioners living in the West are advised to seek an organisation with clear authority and legitimacy in terms of the traditional lineages of Theravadin practice from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

- Dzogchen – a number of Dzogchen organisations have arisen in the West and practitioners living in the West are advised to seek an organisation with clear authority and legitimacy in terms of the traditional lineages of Tibetan Buddhism.

For example see:

- the International Dzogchen Community (<https://dzogchen.net/>)
- Rigpa (<http://www.rigpa.org/>)
- Chagdud Gonpa Foundation (<https://chagdudgonpa.org/>)

- Tibetan Buddhism (Vajrayana Buddhism) – many organisations have arisen in the West and practitioners living in the West are advised to seek an organisation with

clear authority and legitimacy in terms of traditional lineages of Tibetan Buddhism (i.e. the Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakyapa and Gelup Schools.)

Hindu

- Advaita (Non-dual) Vedanta: A useful connection with this contemplative practice is through the teachings Sri Ramana Maharshi (see the Sri Ramanasramam Satsangh Centres - <https://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/centres/directory/>)
- Other Hindu Contemplative Organisations – many such organisations have arisen in the West and practitioners living in the West are advised to seek an organisation with clear authority and legitimacy in terms of traditional Hinduism, especially those whose practices focus on non-duality through the teachings of Vedanta.

Endnotes

- 1 Pew Research Centre (2014); Welby (2016); Wilber (2001, pp. xix -xx).
- 2 Shankara quoted in Huxley (1970, pp. 5-6); Markides (2017, p. 10); Merton (1999, pp. 204 – 205); Merton (2007, p. 153); Rohr (2019, pp. 203-205); Smith (1993, p. xiv); Wilber (2000, pp. 293 & 298); Wilber (2001, Ch 3 & p. 284).
- 3 McGinn (2003, p. 131); Oldmeadow (2010, pp. 112- 113 & 155 – 169); Wilber (2001, pp. 104 – 126)
- 4 Huxley (1970, p. vii-viii)
- 5 Wilber (2001, p. 39)
- 6 Longchenpa (2018, pp. 35 – 36); McGinn (2003, p. 131); Markides (2017, p. 12); Merton (2007, p. 61); Rohr (2014, pp. 31 – 32); Smith (1993, pp. xiii – xiv); Wilber (2017b).
- 7 Stace (1960, pp. 14-15)
- 8 Huxley (2013, p. 15)
- 9 Rohr (2014, p. 49)
- 10 Colless (2017)
- 11 Oldmeadow (2010, p. 107); Wilber (2001, pp. 80 – 83).
- 12 Rohr (2014, pp. 14 & 35); Merton (2007, p. 147); Oldmeadow (2010, pp. 111 – 115); Wilber (2001, p. 84).
- 13 Huxley (1970, p. 2)
- 14 Quoted in Oldmeadow (2010, p. 111)
- 15 BBC World Service (1995)
- 16 Quoted in the BBC World Service (1995) radio program titled *The Life and Times of Ibn Al Arabi*.
- 17 Stace (1960, p. 11)
- 18 Wilber (2001, p. 284)
- 19 Quoted in Huxley (1970, p. 6)

- 20 Cowan (2002, p. 77); Maharshi (2000, Talks 106, 146 & 251); Markides (2008, p. 183); Merton (2007, pp. 15 – 16, 38, 47 – 48); Norbu (1986, p. 12); Rohr (2014, pp. 4 – 5 & 10 – 11); Wilber (2000, pp. 255 – 256); Wilber (2001, pp. 292 – 293).
- 21 Maharshi (2000, Talk 251)
- 22 Chittick & Wilson (1982)
- 23 Norbu (1986, p. 12)
- 24 Sawyer (2014, p. 190)
- 25 Khan (1994, pp. 39 – 40)
- 26 Markides (2008, p. 183)
- 27 Chuang Tzu quoted in Wilber (2000, p. 256); see also - Huxley quoted in Bridgeman (1992, pp. 126 – 127); Maharshi (2000, 'Talk 146'); Merton (1999, pp. 22,23 & 26); Merton (2007, pp. 256 – 257).
- 28 Merton (1999, pp. 26 – 27); Wilber (1998, pp. 135 – 136); Wilber (2000, pp. 255 – 256).
- 29 See for example: Maharshi (2000, 'Talk 146'); Norbu (1996b, pp. 10, 17 - 18, 23, 32 – 36); Norbu (2013, pp. 414 – 416); Wilber (1998, pp. 27 – 30); Wilber (2000, pp. 188 & 255 – 256).
- 30 McGinn (2003, p. 131); Oldmeadow (2010, pp. 155 – 169); Wilber (2001, pp. 104 – 126).
- 31 Oldmeadow (2010, pp. 158 – 159)
- 32 Khan (1994, Ch 3); Wilber (2000, pp. 77 & 85).
- 33 Khan (1994, p. 35)
- 34 Oldmeadow (2010, p. 157)
- 35 See Oldmeadow (2010, Ch 10); Smith (1991, Ch 9).
- 36 Shah-Kazemi (2006, p. xi); Wilber (2000, pp. 146-147); Wilber (2001, pp. 259 – 260 & pp. 280 – 281).
- 37 Maguire (2013, pp. 8 – 9); Markides (2008, pp. 181 – 182 & p. 189); Wilber (2001, p. 259, pp. 290 – 297 & 294-295).
- 38 Wilber (2000, p. 293); Wilber (2001, p. 259); Wilber (2016).
- 39 Maguire (2013, pp. 8 – 9)

- 40 Wilber (2000, pp. 290 – 297); Wilber (2001, Ch 12).
- 41 Wilber (2001, pp. 260 & 264)
- 42 Wilber (2000, p. 127)
- 43 Wilber (2001, pp. 292 – 293)
- 44 Wilber (2001, pp. 39, 57 – 58)
- 45 Huxley (1970, p. vii)
- 46 Sawyer (2014, p. 282)
- 47 see Sawyer (2014, pp. 283)
- 48 Quoted in Oldmeadow (2010, p. 97)
- 49 Rohr (2014, pp. 35 – 36)
- 50 *Merton (1968, pp. 61 – 62)*
- 51 Rohr (2013)
- 52 Freeman (2012)
- 53 Sawyer (2014, pp. 106 - 107)
- 54 Shah-Kasemi (2006, p. 193)
- 55 Wilber (2000, pp. 53 – 54)
- 56 Oldmeadow (2010, pp. 14 – 15); Sawyer (2014, pp. 179 – 182); Smith (1993, pp. ix – xv, xxiii).
- 57 Smith in Schuon (1993, pp. xi - xii)
- 58 Smith in Schuon (1993, pp. xii - xiii)
- 59 Sawyer (2014, p. 180)
- 60 Smith in Schuon (1993, p. xiii)
- 61 Smith in Schuon (1993, p. xv)
- 62 Wilber (2000, pp. 26 - 27)
- 63 Wilber (2000, pp. 27 - 28)
- 64 Oldmeadow (2010, pp. 97 & 118); Sawyer (2014, p. 182); Smith (1993, pp. xv – xvi & xxiv – xxv); Wilber (2000, pp. 125-128).

- 65 Oldmeadow (2010, pp. 97 & 116)
- 66 Oldmeadow (2010, pp. 78 & 95 – 99); Sawyer (2014, pp. 181 – 182 & 213-214); Wilber (2000, p. 28).
- 67 Cited by Oldmeadow (2010, p. 83)
- 68 Smith in Schuon (1993, p. xxvi)
- 69 Oldmeadow (2010, pp. 98 – 99); Sawyer (2014, p. 71).
- 70 Smith in Schuon (1993, pp. xv – xvi)
- 71 Merton (1999, p. 209)
- 72 Merton (1999, p. 209)
- 73 Merton (1999, p. 204)
- 74 Merton (1999, p. 203)
- 75 Sawyer (2002, p. 114)
- 76 Rohr (2013)
- 77 Oldmeadow (2010, pp. 97 – 99 & 119 – 122); Sawyer (2014, p. 181); Wilber (2000, p. 28).
- 78 Sawyer (2002, pp. 188 – 189); Sawyer (2014, pp. 47 – 48, 71).
- 79 Stace (1960, pp. 23 – 26 & 111)
- 80 see Freeman (2007); Main (1990) & Rohr (2014, pp. 63 – 64; 2019 pp 203-205).
- 81 Markides (2008, pp. 178 – 179, 192 – 196)
- 82 Markides (2008); see also Anthony of Sourozh (2008).
- 83 Anthony of Sourozh (2008), pp. 4 - 9; Markides (2017, p. 10).
- 84 Freke in Ford (2004)
- 85 Black et al. (2009); Jones (2013); Waters (2015a); Waters (2015b); Zoogman et al. (2014).
- 86 Huxley (2013, p. 168)
- 87 Williams (2012); Sawyer (2014, p. 48).
- 88 Wilber (2000, p. 293).

- 89 from 'Grey Eminence' (1941) by Aldous Huxley (Quoted in Wilber, 2000, p. 259)
- 90 Williams (2012)
- 91 Oldmeadow (2010)
- 92 Markides (2008, p. 190)
- 93 Markides (2008, p. 190)
- 94 Freeman (2012)
- 95 Quoted in Oldmeadow (2010, p. xvii)
- 96 Wilber (2001, Ch 3 & p. 80)
- 97 Sawyer (2014, p. 181)
- 98 Callimachi (2017)
- 99 Norbu (2011, pp. 2 & 4)
- 100 Khema (1987, pp. 46-47)
- 101 Oldmeadow (2010, Ch 12); Wilber (2000, pp. 111-112); Wilber (2001, Ch 2).
- 102 Smith in Schuon (1993, p. xv); Wilber (2000, p. 26).
- 103 Rohr (2014, pp. 68 - 69)
- 104 Rohr (2014, p. 68)
- 105 Sawyer (2014, p. 181)
- 106 Sawyer (2002, p. 125)
- 107 Oldmeadow (2010, Ch 1); Sawyer (2014, p. 283).
- 108 Quoted in Oldmeadow (2010, p. xiii)
- 109 Chittick & Wilson (1982)
- 110 Hall (2004, pp. 6 – 7); Hall (2009).
- 111 Hall (2014)
- 112 Hall (2014)

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