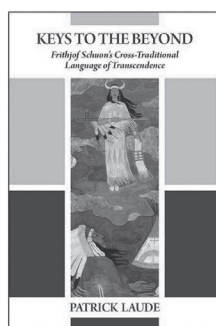


Keys to the Beyond: Frithjof Schuon's Cross-Traditional Language of Transcendence

by Patrick Laude (SUNY, 2021)

Reviewed by Charles Upton



K*keys to the Beyond* is perhaps the most exhaustive study we possess of several of Frithjof Schuon's major themes, an important resource for anyone wishing to evaluate both the strengths and the weaknesses of his teachings. The context in which Patrick Laude places those teachings in his Introduction is concerning, however, at least to this reviewer.

Most of us who have been attracted to the Traditionalist perspective via the writings of Frithjof Schuon since the late 20th century have accepted the position expressed by René Guénon in his chapter 'The Necessity for a Traditional Exoterism' from *Initiation and Spiritual Realization*, which—as long as we do not make the error of limiting the revealed religions to their exoteric dimension—is entirely in line with the following characterization of the Traditionalist way by Titus Burckhardt:

There is no spiritual method without these two basic elements: discernment between the real and the unreal, and concentration upon the real. The first of

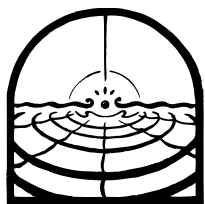
these two elements...does not depend on any special religious form; it only presupposes metaphysical understanding. The second element, however, requires support of a sacred character, and this means that it can only be achieved within the framework of a normal tradition... To be precise: there is no spiritual path outside the following traditions or religions; Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism; but Hinduism is closed for those who have not been born inside a Hindu caste, and Taoism is inaccessible. [*Mirror of the Intellect*, 1987, p. 251]

These criteria drew a firm and liberating line for us between the world of occultism, heterodox cults and New Age spirituality and the Traditionalism of René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon—but with the publication of *Keys to the Beyond*, this distinction has largely been erased.

“The very notions of *sophia perennis* and *religio perennis*,” the author says, “could not but be reformulated in the context of an increasingly globalized world,” and goes on to define the *philosophia perennis* as “a philosophical and theological *lingua franca*” that “takes the fact of intellectual globalization as a starting-point and a motivating factor for the elaboration of a philosophical metalanguage.” This represents a 180 degree turn from the original principle of Schuonian Traditionalism according to which Tradition is superior to *zeitgeist* because time is subordinate to Eternity. But now Tradition is no longer opposed to the spirit of the (post-) modern world, therefore it *must* be reformulated to conform to that spirit. This is nothing less than a “Vatican II” for Traditionalism. Since I cannot believe that Laude would simply drift along with the prevailing socio-political trends, such an extreme reversal in worldview must have been the fruit of either an exhaustive re-thinking of the Traditionalist position, or a period of personal spiritual upheaval, or both. Yet we hear nothing at all of the process by which this radically revisionist position was reached.

Traditionalism as I have known it was intended to provide a specific type of intellectual support for the contemplative life to those few who needed it, which is why Schuon’s Maryamiyya Tariqa was sometimes characterized as a “tariqa of solitaires.” Maybe there is now a good reason to reformulate Schuon’s doctrines to appeal to the globalist intellectuals; on the other hand, this might be spiritually disastrous. At the very least, Laude’s change of course should be recognized so as to make the greater Traditionalist/Perennialist world aware of the choice that now confronts it.

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