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Should you write a reaction in or at another medium, please let me know.

About 10 years ago I got acquainted with Traditionalism, mostly the author René Guénon (1886-1951). I started reading English translations of his books (which are well available) and later on read other authors from the so-called "Traditionalist school". Guénon remained my most-read and most-appreciated author. After a while I had the idea that I kept reading the same all the time, but in different words and I started to read less Traditionalistic literature.

Either or not because of my teenage involvement with the -in Traditionalistic circles- dreaded "Theosophism" the ideas of the Traditionalistic school felt like homecoming. I also thought that there was a single Source for all religions. Other ideas that I found within the literature felt familiar too, but of course, a lot was new. Yet, the overall 'structure' of way of thinking comes to me as completely logical, but at some points this 'system' is limiting to say the least. I am afraid that this is a price I have to pay. I will come to this later. At the time I had a Traditionalistic teacher, who did not teach me and my fellow students Traditionalism, but he taught from a Traditionalistic background. Him and me were usually in surprising accordance, but the big difference was that he is a "realised" initiate, a stage that I will probably never reach myself, *because* of my limiting Traditionalistic ideas...

After several years without the teacher I did continue studying Traditionalism along with my many other interests, but after a while it seemed as if nobody, not even the former fellow students, had any interest in the subject. I started to look around for other Traditionalists, not books, but people to exchange ideas with and ask questions to. Fortunately with the world wide web it is easy to communicate with people from all over the world, find out about smaller or larger initiatives and order them from anywhere in the world. I found out that there are many shades of Traditionalists and that is what I want to say a few things about in this short text.

### **Music scene Traditionalism**

Mark Sedgwick (1960-) is a British/Irish scholar with an interest in Traditionalism. His book "Against The Modern World" (2004) gives a history of Traditionalism that is not received with applause in the entire Traditionalistic 'community'. Sedgwick also has a website (traditionalists.org) with a "blog". On 20 May 2007 Sedgwick mentioned on this "blog" that he discovered a new kind of Traditionalism: "music scene Traditionalism".\* <sup>1</sup> Now since the music scene that Sedgwick describes is the one where I mostly find my own material to listen to, I am quite familiar with what Sedgwick describes, only, I hardly agree with the man. It is true that some sort of Traditionalism receives a rising attention since a decade or so, but to me, this is at best a very thin form of Traditionalism. What we see in music (sub)scenes that we can refer to as "neofolk" and some parts of the "metal" scene can hardly be described as Traditionalism. Instead of Guénon, the inspiration is usually Julius Evola (1898-1974) which you probably know was an Italian author who was in contact with Guénon and who agreed with Guénon on some points, but the two disagreed on many other. From what I find in the writings of Evola, I do not regard him as a Traditionalist 'pur sang', but actually this is not what I want to talk about here. Where Sedgwick sees Traditionalism in the music scene, to me seems more anti-modernity and some rightish politics based on authors such as Evola and Oswald Spengler (1880-1936).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://traditionalistblog.blogspot.nl/2007/05/music-scene-traditionalism.html> accessed 6/10/2012

That the West is in decline is clear. That our community 'desacralises' with the day is clear too. Some bands like to sing about that and combine these notions with more or less politically inspired elements. Some call for a return to native spirituality. However some themes and inspiration certainly resemble those of Traditionalism, I would hardly call this Traditionalism.

### **Radical Traditionalism**

Perhaps not entirely unexpected, but within and 'around' this music scene, some more serious things happen. There are a growing number of publications and websites that either or not combine music with philosophy or even focus mostly on the latter. The best example is the American *Tyr Journal*. In 2002 the first volume of this well-printed journal appeared. However in a way a magazine, it had the size of a book. Topics included went from anti-modernism, European heathenry to more controversial topics and references to the second world war. Controversial as it is, the publication was groundbreaking, interesting and thought-provoking. The authors called themselves "radical Traditionalists". To quote the back cover:

[ 'Radical Traditionalism' ] means to reject the modern, materialist reign of 'quantity over quality,' the absence of any meaningful spiritual values, environmental devastation, the mechanization and over-specialization of urban life, and the imperialism of corporate mono-culture, with its vulgar 'values' of progress and efficiency. It means to yearn for the small, homogeneous tribal societies that flourished before Christianity — societies in which every aspect of life was integrated into a holistic system.

Like I said, hardly Traditionalistic, but certainly an initiative to applaud. *Tyr* was supposed to be an annual publication, but with only three volumes (2002, 2004, 2006) so far, this was perhaps a bit over-ambitious.

*Tyr Journal* is available through 'regular' channels such as Amazon, but also through many of the mailorders from the music scene that Sedgewick referred to (especially because volume 2 came with a cd). There are other more or less similar publications which are either available or recommended within that music scene. *The Initiate*, a journal that now has two issues available (2008, 2010) is quite a Traditionalistic publication, but leans much on the political side. It is nowadays made available by Arktos, a publisher of both books and music. *Primordial Traditions Compendium*, the start of the series you have the latest issue in your hands right now was published in 2009. The title certainly refers to ideas from the Traditionalistic school. There are other magazines and journals, but *if* there is a Traditionalistic touch, it is certainly much softer than the two titles I just mentioned.

### **'Real' Traditionalists**

For a few years I had been looking for 'real' Traditionalists, since in my eyes all the above is 'Traditionalism light' or at least 'lighter' than how I look at things myself. I was, of course, aware of Traditionalistic publishers with obvious names such as Sophia Perennis (the publisher of Guénon in English) or World Wisdom (home of many living Traditionalists), but do these authors and their readers 'meet'? Where can I found out about authors that I do *not* know and if some

book is any good? Is there not something of a Traditionalistic discussion board, some virtual group, a Facebook group, a mailing list, anything. When I found nothing of my liking, I started my own group<sup>1</sup>. Soon after I ran into the Traditional Studies forum<sup>2</sup>. Now there we have living and breathing Traditionalists! It seems mostly a relatively small group of intellectuals with an interpretation of the same books that I read myself.

## Hardliners

To an outsider like myself, this 'group' seems to consist of scholars and their followers. Publications that I heard of, but never read come from this angle. The Sophia Journal<sup>3</sup>, Sacred Web<sup>4</sup>, the relatively new Luvah online journal<sup>5</sup>, they are often written by the Traditionalists of our own day. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933-), Charles Upton (1948-), Huston Smith (1919-) and many others that I never heard of. However often professors, each of them practises a world religion and tries to find a balance between credibility in their professional community and in the Traditionalistic or religious community. Needless to say that as a religious scholar in a desacralised world, this is an almost impossible task.

What I soon noticed when I started reading and conversing with these to me new Traditionalists was that we have a rather fundamentally different view on some key subjects with the 'field', inspite of mostly reading the same literature. I have jokingly called 'them' "hardliners" and "theologians" and this is where I will proceed to some more substantive discussions instead of just telling you stories. I hope you are familiar with some of the basics of the Traditionalistic worldview, but even if you are not, you will get a little wiser from what follows. Quite certainly, the below will give you a few things to think about.

## The basics of Traditionalism

In basis the ideas behind Traditionalism are as simple as they are far-reaching. There is one Source for everything. This Source has many names, God, Allah, Brahma, make your pick. This Source is not a creator, God is not an entity separate from creation, but everything is *emanated* from It. This of course does not only concern the material, which is hardly interesting, but more importantly religion. There are many religions and philosophies which all can be seen as paths on a mountain going upwards to the same peak. That peak is (depending on how you describe it) not necessarily the Source, but the 'first emanation of wisdom' that in Traditionalistic literature is also described with different terms. A popular term is "philosophia perennis" or in English "perennial philosophy" ("perennialism" is an other term sometimes used for Traditionalism). I prefer "sophia perennis" over the first term since it does not refer to the *love for* wisdom, but to eternal wisdom itself. Some authors use "religio perennis" or its Muslim counterpart "al-din al-hanif". René Guénon simply used the term "Tradition".

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<sup>1</sup> Traditionalism Discussion Group, to be found at monas.nl, nothing much happens there.

<sup>2</sup> traditionalstudies.freeforums.org/

<sup>3</sup> sophiajournal.com

<sup>4</sup> sacredweb.com

<sup>5</sup> mimes.is

The benefit of Guénon's term, in my eyes, is that the term does not only refer to a starting point, but also to its 'connection' to the present and this is where we come to another crucial point of Traditionalism. However many religions, philosophies, etc. there may be, there are not all that many *valid* ones. This is where the term "orthodoxy" emerges and this very term will prove to be the very reason that there seems to be differences between Traditionalists.

Let me first continue with the basics. According to Guénon there is a 'something' coming from the "sophia perennis", something which he describes as a "spiritual influence"<sup>1</sup>. In Muslim terms often is spoken of "Grace"<sup>2</sup>. It is this influence that is transferred and which thus guarantees an unbroken link, or "filiation" with the Source. The way that this "filiation" is created is another point of discussion. The basic idea is, a religion is only valid when it has an unbroken link to the Perennial Wisdom and an individual is only connected to that Source when (s)he 'received' the "spiritual influence". Consequently, only a "filiated" individual can continue the chain.

## Orthodoxy

In what follows some more Traditionalistic ideas may appear, but here you have the basis in the simplest explanation. Now let us have a look what Traditionalists call "orthodox".

For a religion to be considered intrinsically orthodox [...] it must be founded on a doctrine of the Absolute which, taken as a whole, is adequate; this religion must then advocate and achieve a spirituality that is proportioned to this doctrine, which is to say that it must comprise sanctity both in notion and in fact. Therefore, the religion must be of divine and not of philosophical origin, and consequently it must be the vessel for a sacramental or theurgic presence made manifest notably in miracles and also—though this may be surprising to some—in sacred art. Specific formal elements, such as apostolic personages and sacred events, are subordinated inasmuch as they are forms to the principal elements just mentioned; their meaning or value can therefore change from one religion to another—human diversity making such fluctuations inevitable—without this constituting any contradiction with regard to the essential criteriology that concerns both metaphysical truth and salvific efficacy, and secondarily—and on that basis—human stability.<sup>3</sup>

Or another quote:

It may be said that religion essentially entails the conjunction of three elements belonging to different orders, a dogma, a moral law and a cult or form of worship ; wherever one or other of these elements happens to be wanting, there can no longer be any question of religion in the proper sense of the word. We will add forthwith that the

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<sup>1</sup> For example in "Perspectives On Initiation" pages 23 and 27.

<sup>2</sup> For example Frithjof Schuon in "The Essential Frithjof Schuon" p. 158.

<sup>3</sup> Frithjof Schuon "Form and Substance in the Religions" p. 13

first element forms the intellectual part of religion, the second its social portion, while the third, which is the ritual element, participates in both these functions.<sup>1</sup>

You can see that the whole idea of orthodoxy goes quite far. A religion has to be based on revelation *and* has an unbroken tradition to the present in order to be valid. For how many religions of today will this be true? Christianity? There are many forms of Christianity. Which of them can be really traced back to Christ himself? Are the forms of Christianity as we know them today “orthodox” with all the forms of Protestantism that emerged only a few hundred years ago? I, with other Traditionalists, think that some can, but I still differ in opinion on some details.

What about other religions? Is Buddhism an orthodox religion? Hinduism? I do not plan to go into details, but let me take a very clear example of an orthodox and living religion: Islam. As you know, Islam is the last of the revealed religions and it emerged in the seventh century. I do not suppose you will think that since that time Islam has died and relived again, hence, Islam is the ultimate example of an orthodox religion? All forms? Just as with Christianity this is a question, but not a question for the current essay. A fact is, that a great many of the Traditionalists were and are Muslim. René Guénon died as Abdel Wahid Yahia in Cairo. Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) was a Muslim by birth. The most famous contemporary Traditionalist, the earlier mentioned Nasr is a Muslim, as is for example the late Martin Lings (1909-2005). They all wanted to be part of an orthodox religion. In spite of this and in spite of the fact that Islam itself has a strong notion of the *Sophia Perennis*, including respect for other orthodox religions (which is a natural result when you realise that all religions are paths up the same mountain), there is not all that much attention for Islam in Traditionalistic literature. *Was* I should actually say, because in the ‘more serious’ Traditionalistic circles of today, Islam seems to start to surface big time.

When you visit the Traditional Studies forum, you might first think that you are stranded on a Muslim discussion board. The design on top, the “avatars” of many users *and* the subjects under discussion often bear a Muslim stamp. Also when you read journals such as “Sacred Web”, “Sophia” or “Luvah” you can see this ‘trend’. A very nice article of Zachary Markwith<sup>2</sup> in Sophia tells us why. Islam (among its other faces that we usually see on the news) appears to be the keeper of the “sophia perennis”.

I want to quote Markwith from that article to make a jump to the next subject.

### **How to connect**

For one cannot realize the One who transcends forms, except by adhering to a form that the One has revealed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> René Guénon “Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines” p. 65

<sup>2</sup> Zachary Markwith *Muslim Intellectuals and the Perennial Philosophy* in Sophia volume 13, issue 2, winter 2007/2008 (this lengthy essay is both a nice introduction to Traditionalism as of the subject under discussion.)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 89

This is an often-heard and logical conclusion for a Traditionalist. A bit further Markwith even states that: “[...] realized knowledge, [...] requires a living tradition, as well as the guidance of a spiritual master.”<sup>1</sup>

There we go, being a Traditionalist you have to either be lucky enough to have been raised in an orthodox religion (and with more luck you even have ‘access’ to a realised master), or you have to connect yourself to one. That may not be what many people within occultic, heathen or new-age circles want to hear. It is a logical conclusion of the Traditionalistic way of thinking though.

And how does that work then exactly? I do not know for sure, since I have led myself in a blind alley. I am a baptised Roman Catholic, but stopped attending church in my teen-years. As such I am a perfect example of a Western man. As I understand some people look at it, during mass in an orthodox congregation, the priest ‘radiates’ what I earlier called the “spiritual influence” and those receptive and ready could thus be initiated. On the other hand, we saw Markwith saying that “[...] realized knowledge, [...] requires a living tradition, as well as the guidance of a spiritual master.” This seems to imply that is it the spiritual master who makes you part of the chain, perhaps even in a one-on-one situation. That sounds like “initiation” does it not?

## **Esotericism**

René Guénon spent an entire book about this subject. “Perspectives On Initiation” was the first book that I read of the man and I can tell you, it is not an easy work. By now I think that you can guess that Guénon states that an initiation is only valid when the ‘initiator’ ‘possesses’ the ‘spiritual influence’. In this book Guénon does not write about religions, but about mystery schools and perhaps this is why in my head there is somewhat of a split between esotericism and exotericism. When we take a step back to Islam, you see that it has an ‘esoteric branch’ in the form of Sufism. In the West the schism is even clearer (this is not strange, because the West is of course the most degraded of all) where you have Freemasonry<sup>2</sup> This is an organisation that you can join regardless if you are Christian, from another religion or have no religion at all. You only have to believe in ‘something higher’. You can take your oath on the Bible, but also on another holy book. Comparably I have heard of Sufi organisations inviting non-Muslims to join. Does that mean that ‘filiation is possible’ for people outside an orthodox religion?

Similar questions bug me with my Traditionalistic outlook that I, inspite of all, combine with an unorthodox religion, at least, in the eyes of some. Let me shake the tree a bit more.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid. p. 104

<sup>2</sup> According to Guénon (“Perspectives On Initiation” p. 96) there are two valid forms of esotericism left in the West, but both in decline, Freemasonry and the Compagnonnage. Later in his life he even denied the filiation to both according to Harry Oldmeadow (1947-) quoted in the biography of Guénon on the website of World Wisdom (<http://www.worldwisdom.com/public/authors/Rene-Guenon.aspx> accessed 8/10/12)

## Revelation

What is revelation? Markwith writes in his earlier quoted article:

The greatest masterpieces of traditional art and architecture are clear signs of a living intellectual tradition, even if religious or philosophical manuscripts are absent. In addition, many esoteric traditions continue to be transmitted orally.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly I would not say that “revelation” requires a prophet and a book. Actually I would argue that the primordial tradition should *not* be put to paper, since it is a universal truth, but appearing in a specific time and place. How people described the primordial tradition 1500 years ago is not necessarily the way an initiate would talk about it nowadays. Scripture would be a degradation of the primordial tradition since it became static. I do not mean to say that there is no value in religions of the book, just that it is not the book that is the transmitter of Tradition. It is the master who transmits It to his student.

Does revelation only happen once every few centuries with the start of a new religion, or does revelation occur more often? Are there ‘levels’ in revelation? Did the “avatars” Christ, Buddha or Mohammed get a bigger portion of the truth than a Jacob Böhme<sup>2</sup>? Would the latter have ‘received enough’ to start a new tradition? Most interestingly, does revelation still happen today?

## Tradition

The quotes of Nasr and Guénon that I gave earlier, and an argument of some contemporary Traditionalists, is that an orthodox tradition requires *tradition*. Some forms of Christianity and Islam are orthodox because they have a liturgy that has not changed since the revelation. An orthodox religion requires a ‘complete package’, in the words of Guénon “a dogma, a moral law and a cult or form of worship ; wherever one or other of these elements happens to be wanting, there can no longer be any question of religion in the proper sense of the word.” (see quote above).

For this reason scorn befalls Traditionalists outside the world religions, sending them off as “reconstructionists” or “neo-”somethings. I wonder, though, does the continuation of the burning flame really require the ‘whole pack’ or can that flame become small but remain alive in just a few people, in habits and beliefs of the ‘common folk’ and relive after a period of slumbering? Also, can not, as with real fire, the flame be (re)lit from another fire? Or to stay more in Traditionalistic lines of thinking, is there actually not *one flame* and as long as we do not let it die all over the world, there is still hope for people who live in the dark?

Then there is this other point. *Can* the transmission only be performed within an orthodox religion? In spite of what some Traditionalists think and say about Freemasonry, I am personally

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<sup>1</sup> Sophia 13/2 p. 90

<sup>2</sup> Jacob Böhme (1575-1624), was a German mystic and has been regarded an authority on esotericism since he lived.

convinced that there are fractions within it that can still 'do the trick' whether everybody realises this or not. I do not intend to discuss "regularity" versus "irregularity" within Freemasonry, nor the state of either "regular" or "irregular" Freemasonry. Also I am no mason myself, I am just quite convinced that this is the situation.

The point is just that the way I see it, only religion is not enough. What we need is a religion that is somehow connected to the primordial tradition along with an 'esoteric connection' with that same Source. Now I personally have no doubt about this in my own situation<sup>1</sup> (woe on me), but I do have serious concerns about the second. I do not think that we have genuine Western esotericism left in my country and I have not decided if it is an option to look for valid non-Western esotericism. It would be a bit weird, a Sufi Asatruar, would it not?

### **No conclusion**

An open question remains if a person without "filiation" can rightly be a Traditionalist. Perhaps not, but does it matter? In that case I am not a Traditionalist with regard to the essentialist, I just think along the lines. The only thing I want to show you with the above is that Traditionalism is more than just a critical view on modernity and atheism and that the Traditionalistic worldview can lead to some unwelcome conclusions that I personally chose not to deny. Also there are different shades in Traditionalism. I do not wish to start a right/wrong discussion, just to present yet another shade.

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<sup>1</sup> See my article "Traditionalistic Asatru, esoteric heathenry" in "Mimir" volume 1, earlier in this series.