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Titus Burckhardt

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An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine

Translated by D.M. Matheson

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(Traduction of Introduction aux doctrines extérieures)

### III

#### SUFISM AND PANTHEISM

ALL the metaphysical doctrines of the East and some of those of the West have frequently been labelled as pantheistic, but in truth pantheism is only to be found in the case of certain European philosophers and in some orientals who were influenced by Western thought of the nineteenth century. Pantheism arose from the same mental tendency which produced, first, naturalism and then materialism. Pantheism only conceives of the relationship between the Divine Principle and things from the one point of view of substantial or existential continuity, and this is an error explicitly rejected by every traditional doctrine.<sup>1</sup> If there were such a continuity by virtue of which God and the manifested universe could

1. "... pantheism really consists in admitting a continuity between the Infinite and the finite; but this continuity can only be conceived if it is first admitted that there is a substantial identity between the ontological Principle—which is in question in all forms of theism—and the manifested order, a conception which presupposes a substantial, and therefore false, idea of Being, or the confusing of the essential identity of manifestation and Being, with a substantial identity. Pantheism is this and nothing else; it seems, however, that some minds are incurably obstinate when faced with so simple a truth, unless it be that they are impelled by some passion or interest not to let go of such a convenient polemical instrument as the term 'pantheism,' the use of which allows them to cast a general suspicion over certain doctrines which are considered embarrassing without involving them in the trouble of examining them for themselves. . . . If God is conceived as primordial Unity, that is, as pure Essence, nothing could be substantially identical with Him; to qualify essential identity as pantheistic is both to deny the relativity of things and to attribute an autonomous reality to them in relation to Being or Existence, as if there could be two realities essentially distinct or two Unities or Unicities. . . ." Frithjof Schuon, in *The Transcendent Unity of Religion* (Faber & Faber, London, 1954), Chapter 3: Transcendence and Universality of Esotericism.

be compared as a branch can be compared with the trunk from which it sprang, then this continuity, or (what amounts to the same thing) the substance common to the two terms, would either be determined by some superior principle which differentiated it or would itself be superior to the two terms which it bound together and, in a sense, included: God would then not be God. Now it might be said that God is himself this continuity, or this Unity, but in that case it would not be conceived of as outside Him, so that He is in reality beyond compare and therefore distinct from everything manifested, but without the possibility of anything being "outside" or "beside" Him. Now, as Muḥyī-d-Dīn ibn 'Arabī says in his "Epistle on Unity," the *Risālat al Aḥadiyah*: ". . . None grasps Him save He Himself. None knows Him but He Himself. . . . He knows Himself by Himself. . . . Other-than-He cannot grasp Him. His impenetrable veil is His own Oneness. Other-than-He does not cloak Him. His veil is His very existence. He is veiled by His Oneness in a manner that cannot be explained. Other-than-He does not see Him; whether prophet, envoy, or perfected saint or angel near unto Him. His prophet is He Himself. His envoy is He. His message is He. His word is He. He has sent word of His ipseity by Himself, from Himself to Himself, without intermediary or causality other than Himself. . . . Other-than-He has no existence and so cannot bring itself to naught. . . ."

Now, if it happens that masters of esotericism make use of the picture of a material continuity in order to