

RELIGIOUS HARMONY BASED ON SPIRITUAL AND INTELLECTUAL JOURNEY OF RENÉ GUÉNON

Yulafa Hinggis

Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Email: yulafa.hinggis.psc22@mail.umy.ac.id

Aris Fauzan

Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Email: mas_arisfauzan@umy.ac.id

Norhayati binti Haji Abdul Karim

Universiti Sultan Sharif Ali, Brunei Darussalam

Email: norhayati.abdkarim@unissa.edu.bn

ABSTRACT

This article explores the intellectual and spiritual journey of René Guénon, who traversed the spiritual experiences of various religions in the world such as Catholicism, Hinduism, Taoism, and ended up in Islam. It seems that Guénon did not see the conversion of religion as a contradictory process, but rather as a continuous stage that enriched his search for the true truth. The position of this research is one of the testimonies of René Guénon's important role in developing religious harmony. Although many writings talk about religious harmony, the presence of René Guénon emphasizes ideas and works about the life of religious harmony. This article seeks to answer the question of the urgency of René Guénon's spiritual and intellectual journey in crossing and upholding the essential values of the religion studied. This type of qualitative research focuses on library research, with a biographical approach. Furthermore, the sources in this study refer to direct works written by René Guénon and other authors who discuss René Guénon. The results of this study show that the essential values of each religion supported by spiritual and intellectual maturity are an important foundation for living a harmonious life between religious people.

Keywords: Religious Harmony; Spiritual and Intellectual Journey; René Guénon

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual journeys are often triggered by dissatisfaction with worldly problems that drive people to seek answers to fundamental questions about their existence and purpose in life. Religious conversion is often part of this

process. However, in the social context, religious conversion has always been seen as a contradictory act that causes pros and cons debate among religious believers. René Guénon, as one of the figures and undergoing conversion from one religion to another, displays an attractive charm to be used as a model in the process of peaceful religious conversion. In fact, the René Guénon phenomenon gives the impression that every meeting of one religion to another becomes stages in building the maturity of the spiritual journey. So far, the essence of human spiritual journey is understood to contain a deep meaning about the existence of life in the spirit of religion (Mustaqim, 2023). The spiritual journey will go through the process of finding answers to the big questions about the nature of life's meaning. This process will lead individuals to conduct a deep exploration of various traditions in order to find new spiritual paths that suit their inner search and understanding (Bagir, 2017).

René Guénon, hereinafter called Guénon, is one of the figures who took a spiritual journey that crossed various religions, namely: born as a Catholic, then deepened Hinduism, and finally established Islam as its estuary (Taj, 2023). Dickson explained that Guénon's presence as an important figure in the revival of Islamic spirituality in the modern world is still not widely known (Dickson, 2021). Guénon's spiritual and intellectual travels made important contributions to modern religious thought and shaped the idea of interreligious harmony. This is revealed in his works such as *The Crisis of the Modern World* (Guénon, 2001d), *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines* (Guénon, 2001a), *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* (Guénon, 2001e), and *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta* (Guénon, 2001b). Through this series of works, Guénon conveyed profound ideas about the universal spiritual tradition. These works provide a keen and critical view of the relationship between modernity and spirituality, and emphasize the importance of understanding the essence of tradition as a path to religious harmony (Guénon, 2009).

Guénon did not treat conversion as a process of “ascension” or “descent”, but rather as a continuous journey in a whole. This phenomenon is interesting to study because Guénon shows a unique pattern of religious transition, which is not to contradict the religious teachings that were previously adhered to, but to consider them as steps that enrich his spiritual journey. In fact, in a social context, religious conversion is often colored by a critical view of the religious teachings that are abandoned or even the justification of the religion they embrace (Abidin, 2005; Bielefeldt & Wiener, 2022). However, Guénon took a different approach by still glorifying these religions as part of his spiritual journey.

Articles and writings related to spiritual journeys, especially Guénon, have not been revealed much in the study of Islamic thought in Indonesia. In fact, studying the spiritual journey and thoughts of great figures in Islam, especially from Muslim intellectuals, is an important task for a Muslim (Fauzan, 2019). This understanding is inseparable from the lives of Muslims from time to time. In addition, other sources explain that Islam explicitly encourages its followers to study spiritual and historical journeys as key in understanding the future. By studying the spiritual and historical journeys of previous figures precisely and deeply, we can take valuable lessons and lessons from the values of goodness left behind, which can be a guideline in achieving glory both in this world and in the hereafter (Amiruddin et al., 2021; As-Sirjani, 2011; Belhaj, 2023; Laude, 2020). It is therefore crucial to uncover Guénon's spiritual and intellectual journey as the cornerstone of his thought on religious harmony, which connects the world's great traditions to build a deeper understanding of universal truth. This is qualitative research focuses on library research, with a biographical approach (Khilmiyah, 2016; Saefullah, 2024) which focuses on Guénon's personal life. The steps in this research are to explore the background of life, the spiritual transformation he experienced through his encounters with various religions such as Catholicism, Hinduism, and Islam.

RENÉ GUÉNON'S EARLY LIFE: CATHOLIC TRADITION

René Jean Marie Joseph Guénon, better known as René Guénon, was born in Blois, France, on November 15, 1886. Guénon grew up in a very strict Catholic family environment and Guénon received his early education under the guidance of the Jesuits. This traditional Catholic education provided a solid intellectual and spiritual foundation, which later became the foundation for Guénon's future thought. Growing up, Guénon moved to Paris to pursue his undergraduate studies in philosophy and mathematics at Collège Rollin (Chacornac, 2005; Karimov & Bekbaev, 2022). However, in 1905 Guénon decided to abandon his studies and began exploring the world of occultism that was then thriving in Paris. During this time Guénon was also an active member of a number of secret organizations, including theosophists, spiritualists, Freemasonry, and gnostics. In June 1909, Guénon founded a journal called *La Gnose*, which became the main forum for most of his writings during that period. This journal has been operating for approximately two years. However, in the later days Guénon criticized the occult movement that he had studied (Arnold, 2018, p. 279; Hatina, 2022).

Born and raised in the Catholic tradition, Guénon did not only delve into the teachings of the Catholic tradition, but also expanded his journey to

various Eastern traditions, including Hindu philosophy, Taoism, and Islam (Guénon, 2009). This trip led Guénon to view Western and Eastern traditions as complementary elements in his quest to seek and reveal universal truth. This view is reflected in his life and works, which build bridges between the two worlds and make him a key figure in cross-cultural and religious dialogue (Guénon, 2004). In the end, this shaped Guénon's identity as a global, traditionalist figure.

As a traditionalist, Guénon had emphasized in his early writings the need for the restoration of the Roman Catholic-based intellectual tradition in the Western world. Despite embarking on his spiritual journey in a disciplined Catholic tradition, Guénon nonetheless criticized some aspects of modern Catholicism, such as rationalism and the loss of esoteric elements. Even Guénon envisioned a form of Catholic religion that could be renewed, enriched, and strengthened through the restoration of its esoteric tradition (Oldmeadow, 2024). However, in the midst of his criticism, Guénon still respected the symbolic and spiritual dimensions of the Catholic tradition, which Guénon saw as part of the core of primordial truth (Belhaj, 2023).

Guénon launched his criticism because he considered that the philosophical and historical foundations used by certain teachings were wrong. Guénon called these teachings false spirituality and compared them to true traditional esotericism. In addition, Guénon strongly opposed the direction of the development of European civilization in his time, because according to him, the civilization had lost its deep spiritual values, more oriented towards materialism and rationalism (Quisay, 2023). Guénon believed that these two aspects not only damaged the human soul but also disturbed the balance of the order of the universe. Based on this view, Guénon consistently opposed the development of European civilization. This rejection was likely influenced by his experience of receiving initiation in the tradition of Taoism, Islam, or even both. Whitall Perry in his writings argues that Guénon's critical attitude can also be attributed to his contact with the representatives of the Advaita tradition in Vedānta philosophy (Guénon, 2009: 275; Oldmeadow, 2024; Perry, 1991: 7–8).

It should be underlined that for Guénon the great traditions of the world, including Catholicism, share the same spiritual core that connects them on a transcendental level. The Catholic education that Guénon received not only built his spirituality but also formed the basis of his universal thinking. The Catholic tradition prepared him to explore the esoteric teachings of various traditions, including Hinduism, Taoism, and Islam. Guénon's reverence for Catholic symbolism and esoteric elements remained an integral part of his

thinking, even after Guénon converted and devoted his life to the Islamic tradition.

HINDU TRADITION: STRUGGLING WITH VEDĀNTA IDEAS

With his critical thinking, Guénon finally began to take a break in the Hindu tradition. Guénon's interest in the Hindu tradition emerged when Guénon began to explore more universal metaphysical teachings. In his book *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, Guénon explores the Vedānta philosophy and the principles of Hindu metaphysics, which he says is one of the most complete systems of thought (Dickson, 2021; Waterfield, 2005). Guénon considers Hinduism as a tradition that has managed to maintain spiritual continuity despite the challenges of modern times. The teachings of absolute unity (Brahman) and symbolism in Hindu rituals became an inspiration for him to understand the esoteric core of the spiritual tradition. Guénon used the concept of cosmic cycles from the Hindu tradition to interpret the course of human history. Guénon describes the transition from the Golden Age, which symbolizes spiritual splendor to the Dark Age (Kali Yuga), a period marked by moral and spiritual degradation (Guénon, 2001a; Laude, 2020). For Guénon, the modern idea of historical evolution that has always led to progress is an illusion of a materialistic nature.

In his work *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, Guénon argued that the Hindu tradition is one of the most authentic sources of eternal wisdom historically. Guénon viewed the Hindu tradition as something more comprehensive and pure than other traditions, and sought to restore civilization to traditional values (Guénon, 2001a). Guénon believed that this tradition was indispensable to the West, which he thought had suffered significant deviations. This book also shows Guénon's skill as a sharp critic of modern civilization (Arnold, 2018; Taj, 2023).

Guénon also views modernity as a phase of decline from the true spiritual essence of man (Piraino, 2021). Guénon in some of his works shows the complexity and complexity of defining religion, especially when trying to find a single universal definition that covers all religious traditions. Guénon acknowledged that the commonly accepted definition of religion in the Western world is more suitable for Abrahamic religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which have relatively uniform belief structures, ritual practices, and institutions. However, this approach faces major challenges when applied to traditions such as Hinduism, which has tremendous diversity in both its doctrines, rituals, and social structures, including its strong links to the caste system (Taj, 2023).

In René Guénon's book *The Essential: Metaphysics, Tradition, and the Crisis of Modernity*, it is explained that after his brief interaction with the Hindu community, who most likely returned to India, René Guénon did not continue further contact with them. On the other hand, Guénon had been initiated into the Sufi Order, which became his spiritual path throughout his life. Guénon was very concerned about the phenomena that occurred around him, especially the anti-religious prejudice that was growing rapidly among French intellectuals at the time. Guénon believed that despite this attitude becoming more widespread, most intellectuals still had the ability to accept the truth (Guénon, 2009). According to Guénon, this anti-religious prejudice arose because many religious leaders, especially in the Catholic tradition, increasingly lost intellectual intelligence and focused more on a sentimental approach.

RENÉ GUÉNON'S WORKS BEFORE CONVERTING TO ISLAM

Guénon's efforts to unravel the principles of the primordial tradition occurred in his early writings, namely in 1909. Guénon focused his work on uncovering and applying the timeless principles that underlie all traditional doctrines. Guénon explores various traditions such as Vedānta, Taoist tradition, Christianity, Islam, gnosticism, and Kabbalah. Guénon sought to excavate and reveal the fundamental principles of these traditions, which he said were formal manifestations of a primordial tradition (Dickson, 2021). In his work, Guénon puts forward consistent key themes, such as the view of metaphysics as a principle that transcends all doctrines. Guénon also made a sharp distinction between exoterism as the external dimension of religious tradition and esoterism as the inner dimension, emphasizing that esotericism is the path to a deep understanding of spiritual truth (Guénon, 2009).

René Guénon emphasized the importance of intellectual knowledge rooted in metaphysical principles as a way to understand deeper realities. In his criticism of modern civilization, especially Europe, Guénon stated that the Western world has suffered a spiritual decline due to the loss of connection with traditional values. He saw the dominance of materialism as the main feature of modern civilization, which was in sharp contrast to the traditional Eastern civilization which, according to him, still maintained primordial wisdom (Guénon, 2009).

EARLY CONTRIBUTIONS AT LA GNOSE

In the early period of his career (1909–1912), Guénon founded and edited the journal *La Gnose*, which became the medium for his articles on esoterism,

symbolism, and metaphysical philosophy (Arnold, 2018, p. 9; Sedgwick, 2020). As early as 1909 before embracing Islam, Guénon had written about the concept of primordial tradition. According to Guénon, primordial tradition is relevant to all humans. Guénon believes that primordial tradition can be continued and applied by mankind from the present to the future. Guénon is not focused on the specific details of a particular tradition or a particular historical event, but rather on the core of the tradition itself, that is, the sacred and eternal knowledge that can be accessed by man through the channels still available in traditional doctrines (Eaton, 1995: 188–189; Sedgwick, 2021a, 2023).

The articles that Guénon wrote in *La Gnose* reflected his early interest in various esoteric traditions before eventually directing his thinking entirely to traditional doctrine (Dickson, 2021). Some important articles published in *La Gnose* such as *Symbolism and Esoteric Tradition*. Guénon's articles in the *La Gnose* era deal extensively with the universal symbolism found in various esoteric traditions (Sedgwick, 2020), including the Kabbalah and the esoteric Christian tradition. Related to the relationship between freemasonry and gnostic tradition. René Guénon's writings in *La Gnose* became an important foundation in the formation of his intellectual and spiritual thought. In the journal, Guénon began to develop his early ideas that later became the basis for his later works (Guénon, 2009).

Through *La Gnose*, he explores symbolism, metaphysics, and criticism of modernity, which are central themes in books such as *The Symbolism of the Cross* and *The Crisis of the Modern World*. In *The Symbolism of the Cross*, Guénon deepens the idea of universal symbolism, while in *The Crisis of the Modern World*, he criticizes the shift in spiritual values in the modern era. Both works reflect the profound influence of the early ideas he formulated in *La Gnose*, demonstrating Guénon's consistency in exploring the metaphysical tradition and universal symbolism. Through his writings in *La Gnose*, Guénon laid down the philosophical framework that became the basis of his intellectual journey later (Guénon, 2009).

RENÉ GUÉNON'S MEETING WITH SUFI FIGURES

After experiencing a struggle of thought related to his spiritual quest, René Guénon met Ivan Aguéli in 1912. René Guénon's meeting with Ivan Aguéli was a pivotal moment in Guénon's spiritual and intellectual journey. Ivan Aguéli was an artist, philosopher, and central figure in the world of Western Sufism, known as Sufi ‘Abdul Hādī al-Maghribī. Aguéli became one of the main intermediaries who introduced the esoteric tradition of Islam to Guénon.

Aguéli was born in Sweden in 1869 and showed a deep interest in Eastern art, philosophy, and spirituality (Beglerović & Sedgwick, 2020; Efendi et al., 2022). Aguéli also had a spiritual journey to the Middle East, in Egypt, and began to join the Syadziliyah Sufi Order under the guidance of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahmān ‘Illaysh al-Kabīr, a great scholar and leader of the Syadziliyah Order in Egypt. Aguéli played an important role in introducing Sufism doctrines, especially the metaphysical teachings of Ibn ‘Arabī (1165-1240) to Europe through his writings (Hatina, 2022; Hulya, 2008: 298).

As an artist, Aguéli creates works inspired by Eastern and Western mystical traditions. However, its main focus is on the study of philosophy, religion, and mysticism. Ivan Aguéli is known to be critical of modernity and colonialism, as well as calling for the importance of spiritual liberation through the esoteric tradition. His articles on Sufism, art, and Eastern culture emphasize the need to restore human connection with authentic spirituality (Efendi et al., 2022).

Ivan Aguéli became a great inspiration for René Guénon, especially through Aguéli's role as a spiritual teacher and guide. Through their discussions and interactions, Aguéli introduced the idea that Sufism is an esoteric form of Islam that is in harmony with other metaphysical traditions, such as Hinduism and Taoism. After going through a long intellectual and spiritual journey, Guénon decided to embrace Islam in 1912 and took the name ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Yahyā. His decision to become a Muslim was not because Guénon considered Islam superior to other religions, but because Islam, through Sufism, offered a spiritual and metaphysical framework that included many elements of other traditions that Guénon had studied (Efendi, 2020, p. 168).

Guénon further explored Sufism by joining the Syadziliyyah Order and spending his time writing down his ideas and thoughts. One result of his critical thinking is to criticize modernity and offer Islam as a solution to the spiritual crisis of humanity. According to him, Islam provides a perfect synthesis between the esoteric and exoteric dimensions, allowing one to live an authentic spiritual life in the context of the real world. This view reinforces Guénon's belief in the importance of tradition as a path to metaphysical truth. After Aguéli's death in 1917, René Guénon continued his work in introducing Sufism in the West (Efendi et al., 2022: 167–168).

Guénon not only expanded his understanding of Sufism in European countries such as France, Spain, Belgium, and Italy, but also deepened his spiritual knowledge through his involvement in the Syadziliyyah Order. Through his works and contributions, René Guénon became a central figure in the traditionalism movement (Dickson, 2021: 593). Guénon introduced many people in Europe to the Sufism tradition, expanded the reach of Islamic

esoteric teachings, and encouraged cross-cultural and religious dialogue rooted in primordial wisdom. His influence extended beyond the Western esoteric community, encompassing intellectuals and spirituals from a wide range of backgrounds, making Guénon one of the most important figures in the bridge between East and West (Efendi et al., 2022; Marino, 2022). Guénon was also an important figure in introducing Sufism to the Western world, especially through its relationship with traditional Muslim communities, namely the Tarekah Syadziliyyah Order in various parts of the world.

RENÉ GUÉNON'S CONVERSION PEAK

The process of René Guénon's conversion to Islam is inseparable from the influence of Ivan Aguéli (Abdul Hādī al-Maghribī), an artist, philosopher, and important figure in the world of Western Sufism. This choice is not just a personal decision but the culmination of a long spiritual quest through an in-depth study of various religious traditions. For him, Islam, especially through Sufism, offers a perfect balance between esoterism and exoterism, which Guénon did not find in its entirety in other religions or traditions. For Guénon, Islam is not only a religion but also a traditional framework for understanding and actualizing the principles of universal metaphysics. Guénon views Sufism as an esoteric path that can be applied universally, although it is still rooted in the Islamic tradition. In Guénon's view, Islam uniquely unites metaphysical doctrines, spirituality, and divine law coherently (Efendi, 2020: 168).

Guénon's initiation into the Syadziliyyah Order provided a spiritual foundation that strengthened his beliefs. In this institute, Guénon found a practice that was not only spiritually profound but also emphasized the critique of modernity, which was considered a deviation from the traditional principles that had long been the spiritual foundation of mankind. In his work, Guénon asserts that modernity has forgotten the esoteric dimension, thus creating a spiritual void that can only be filled by returning to its traditional roots, as offered by Islam. Although Guénon acknowledged the metaphysical superiority of the Hindu tradition, especially Advaita Vedānta, Guénon argued that Hinduism was difficult for Westerners to access due to the limitations of the caste system and cultural distance. In contrast, Guénon sees Islam as the last form of the primordial tradition that has doctrinal completeness and flexibility to be applied in the modern world (Taj, 2023).

Through his works, Guénon became one of the main figures in the Traditionalism movement, which carried the idea that all the world's major religions originated from the same metaphysical source. His critique of modernity and materialism became an important foundation for his followers,

such as Frithjof Schuon (Behvand et al., 2022; Schuon, 1985; Sedgwick, 2021b), Martin Lings (Fitzgerald, 2005; Nisok & Resa, 2023), and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Fauhatun, 2020; Hidayatullah, 2023; Nasr, 2002), who then expanded the teachings of Sufism to the Western world (Bano & Ahmed, 2020). Guénon's influence was also seen in the establishment of Sufi branches in Europe and North America. His students succeeded in introducing the teachings of Sufism in the Western context, making it a relevant and profound spiritual path for modern society.

The period of 1927-1930 was an important transitional period in Guénon's life, marked by his move to Cairo in 1930 and his deepening dedication to openness to Islam (Oldmeadow, 2024). In January 1928, Guénon experienced deep grief due to the sudden death of his wife. In 1930, he decided to move to Cairo, where he was accepted as a member of the Syadziliyyah Order and adopted a new name, Abdul Wahid Yahya, as a form of his spiritual identity. According to Ibrahim Kalin in his article entitled "René Guénon," published on the website of the Center for Islam and Science, after settling in Cairo, Guénon remarried in 1934 to Fatima, the daughter of Sheikh Muhammad Ibrahim, a prominent Sufi (Kalin, n.d., : 8).

Guénon lived in a house located near Al-Azhar University, where he was often associated with 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud, the great cleric and president of Al-Azhar who was also known as a Sufi figure. After settling in Cairo, Guénon began to receive visits from several prominent intellectuals, such as Titus Burckhardt, Frithjof Schuon (Bano & Ahmed, 2020; Schuon, 1984; Sedgwick, 2005), and Martin Lings (Ghanbariahmadabad, 2024; Hakiki & Idrus, 2018; Minnaar, 2007). During his stay in Cairo, he spent much of his time in solitude, which he used to write major works in the form of books and articles. However, towards the end of his life, Guénon's health condition deteriorated until he finally died on January 7, 1951 (Arnold, 2018, p. 9; Kalin, n.d.; Nasr, 2002, p. 8).

One important aspect of Guénon's thought was his inclusive view of various religious traditions. Guénon never disparaged the religions he had left behind, such as Catholicism or Hinduism, but saw them as an important stage on the road to universal truth. For him, every religion has an esoteric dimension that connects humans with metaphysical reality. Guénon emphasized that differences between religions are more exoterial, while the esoteric core of each tradition shows the same unity. Thus, he proposed the concept of perennialism (Sotillos, 2020), the idea that all the world's major religions have the same spiritual core, although they differ in their formal form (Astutik & Khojir, 2023; Olyaei, 2021).

Mark Sedgwick writes that Guénon developed a traditional approach to perennialism with distinctive characteristics, namely through the combination of perennial thinking with a sharp criticism of modernity. In Guénon's view, the concept of primordial tradition is the root of all religious traditions of humankind as well as the key to understanding metaphysics and metahistory. On the one hand, this primordial tradition serves to formulate the universal principles that exist in each religion, while on the other hand, this concept is also the basis for tracing the process of spiritual decline in the modern world (Sedgwick, 2021c: 3).

René Guénon's conversion to Islam marked the culmination of his spiritual and intellectual journey, in which he found the path that best suited his belief in the importance of tradition and esoterism. Islam, particularly in the form of Sufism, gave Guénon a framework that not only answered his spiritual needs but also became a means of critiquing modernity and reviving traditional principles in the Western world. Through the thought of perennialism and traditionalism (Karimov & Bekbaev, 2022), Guénon offered a critique of modernity and proposed a harmonious model for understanding the relationship between religious traditions, making him one of the most influential thinkers in modern spiritual discourse.

RENÉ GUÉNON'S POST-CONVERSION WORKS

René Guénon was a very prolific writer, with seventeen works published throughout his life and eight others published posthumously. His works are centered on the concept of "tradition," which is at the heart of his thought and reflects the results of his spiritual journey. All of his works are intertwined, forming a deep framework of thought about traditionalism and metaphysics (Oldmeadow, 2024). Here are some of René Guénon's works:

Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines

In the *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, Guénon presents an in-depth analysis of the Hindu tradition as one of the purest and most comprehensive systems of metaphysics. Guénon identified the Vedas as divine revelation and the supreme source of knowledge, as well as the Vedānta, particularly the Advaita Vedānta, as the apex expression of non-dualistic metaphysics. According to Guénon, Hinduism goes beyond the categories of modern religion, philosophy, or science, with the core of its teachings resting on the principle of absolute unity (Brahman). Guénon's main goal in writing this book is to introduce readers in the Western world to the concepts of Eastern

metaphysics and spirituality as understood and experienced by Eastern peoples themselves. In addition, he also tries to correct various misconceptions that he thinks often appear in the study of Western Orientalism (Guénon, 2001a).

The Symbolism of the Cross

In his work *The Symbolism of the Cross*, Guénon expresses a deep appreciation for the symbolism of the cross. Guénon interpreted the cross not only as a symbol of a particular religion but also as a metaphysical representation of the cosmos and the principle of transcendence. For Guénon, the cross reflects the relationship between the horizontal (the material world) and the vertical (the divine dimension). This approach makes the cross a universal idea that reflects the unity, duality, and relationship between the divine and the earthly. As one of the most universal symbols, the cross is found in various spiritual traditions around the world, transcending the boundaries of Christianity. In this work, Guénon uses the symbol of the cross to explain metaphysical concepts such as unity, cosmic structure, and the principle of transcendence. This symbolism is a tool for a deep understanding of the universal metaphysical doctrine (Guénon, 2001f).

The Crisis of the Modern World

In *The Crisis of the Modern World* by René Guénon, he discusses how the modern world has experienced a serious spiritual crisis due to a shift in values. Guénon highlighted that modern civilization focuses too much on the material aspect to forget the spiritual dimension on which human life is based. Guénon criticized the contemporary view that tended to reject tradition and replace it with individualism and superficial rationalism. In his view, modernity has brought humans to a spiritual void, which leads to an imbalance in life (Guénon, 2001d). Guénon offers a solution by inviting humanity back to the values of the universal tradition, which respects metaphysical wisdom and esoterism as an essential part of life. Guénon presented a sharp analysis of the causes of the spiritual crisis facing the modern world, namely the shift of attention of the Western world to materialism and rationalism. The spiritual wisdom underlying the great tradition has been marginalized.

According to him, this crisis affects not only individuals but also the entire social and cultural order. Therefore, Guénon called for the importance of returning to traditional teachings derived from eternal metaphysical knowledge to overcome this crisis. In his view, a tradition that maintains deep esoteric teachings is the answer to overcoming the spiritual and intellectual

problems the world is facing. This book provides an in-depth perspective on how modernity needs to be balanced with spirituality to create harmony in human life.

Insights into Islamic Esoterism and Taoism

In his work, Guénon produced several important works that dealt with Islam, particularly through its esoteric dimension, namely Sufism (Sufism), as well as his criticism of modernity. In *Insights into Islamic Esoterism and Taoism*, Guénon describes the relationship between Islamic Esoterism and Taoism, two traditions that he sees as having spiritual harmony. Guénon described the idea of Tawhid (the oneness of God) as the core of the Sufi spiritual journey, which reflects the universal path to understanding metaphysical truth (Markwith, n.d.,).

The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times

In *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, Guénon outlines the decline of modernity through an esoteric view of various traditions, including Islam. Guénon identified the dominance of materialism as the main cause of the spiritual crisis, which reduced traditional values to mere quantity. Guénon views Sufism as an esoteric path of Islam that is relevant to answering the challenges of modernity, offering an alternative rooted in spiritual wisdom to address the existential void in the modern world (Guénon, 2001e).

East and West

In his book, Guénon criticizes the rational and materialistic Western way of thinking, which he considers to have neglected life's spiritual and metaphysical dimensions. Guénon explained the fundamental difference between the Western approach, which adheres to rationalism and materialism and the Eastern approach, which prioritizes spiritual unity and esoteric principles. For Guénon, Western civilization has been cut off from its spiritual source, and this is the root of the existential crisis that has plagued the modern world. Meanwhile, the East, with its rich traditions, such as Hinduism, Taoism, and Islam, maintained a closer relationship with deeper metaphysical principles, which Guénon said could help the Western world to overcome spiritual decline (Guénon, 2004).

Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta

In his work, Guénon used Advaita Vedānta to describe a metaphysical view of the origins and purpose of man. In this view, man is essentially part of a larger unity, which is Brahman (absolute power or principle). The concept of Atman (true self) in Vedānta is a reflection of Brahman, which shows that each individual has the potential to achieve unity with higher principles. Through deep spiritual knowledge, humans can understand that everything that appears as an individual is a mere illusion (Maya), and the attainment of this wisdom allows one to break free from the cycle of birth and death. This book shows how the teachings of Vedānta, although derived from the Hindu tradition, contain universal truths that are relevant to understanding the human condition as a whole (Guénon, 2001b).

The Esoterism of Dante

Guénon discusses the work *The Esoterism of Dante* from an esoteric point of view. Guénon interprets Dante's journey through Inferno (hell), Purgatorio (purgatory), and Paradiso (heaven) as a symbol of man's inner journey to oneness with God. Here, Guénon sees that this work is more than just a religious journey; it is a metaphysical quest that describes the stages of spiritual transformation. Using initiatic symbolism, Dante describes the process of soul purification, self-purification, and spiritual enlightenment. Guénon argues that the symbolism in this work reflects the traditional principles that exist in various spiritual traditions, such as Sufism and Hinduism, that connect humans with the divine dimension (Guénon et al., 2005).

Studies in Hinduism

In this work, *Studies in Hinduism*, Guénon presents his view of Hinduism as one of the purest and most profound spiritual traditions. He criticized the misconceptions that often arise in the West about Hinduism, which is often seen as a polytheistic religion without metaphysical depth. In contrast, Guénon points out that the essence of Hinduism lies in the doctrine of Vedānta and other esoteric teachings, which contain profound metaphysical insights. Through this book, Guénon also emphasizes the relevance of Hinduism as a source of spiritual wisdom that can provide enlightenment to a world that is being hit by a crisis of modernity (Guénon, 2001c). Overall, René Guénon's works make a major contribution to highlighting the spiritual crisis of the modern world by offering solutions rooted in more profound and universal traditional teachings. Guénon invites us to return to authentic metaphysical

knowledge, which exists in various spiritual traditions, in order to address increasingly complex existential and social problems.

THE MEANING OF RENÉ GUÉNON'S DECISION TO CROSS VARIOUS RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

René Guénon's decision to cross the various religious traditions reflects a profound and unique spiritual journey in which each religion he studied became an important stage in the search for truth. Guénon did not treat conversion as an act of rejection of his previous beliefs but as a process that enriched his spiritual understanding. This approach shows that for Guénon, the essence of every religion lies in essential values that transcend formal differences.

Through his exploration of Catholicism, Hinduism, Taoism, and ultimately Islam, Guénon highlights the metaphysical unity that underlies all spiritual traditions. His choice to switch from one religion to another was not a sign of dissatisfaction with his previous religion but rather an expression of his desire to dive into the deepest essence of universal spirituality. It also expresses its commitment to perennial philosophy, which asserts that true truth is one, even though it is expressed through various forms of religious tradition. In addition, René Guénon did not give an assessment of the shortcomings and humility of the religions he previously adhered to but instead used them as a foothold in maximizing his spiritual experience. Although René Guénon has set his heart on Islam, not a few academics in the world from various religious backgrounds make René Guénon an inspiration and reference for their work on the themes of perennial philosophy and religious harmony.

Based on the description above, it is known that Guénon's peaceful approach to his spiritual journey provides an important lesson about interreligious harmony. He does not see religious differences as a source of conflict but as a window to understanding the greater truth. This attitude is especially relevant in the modern era, where interreligious tensions often arise due to a lack of deep understanding of the core of religious teachings. Guénon pointed out that respecting and studying other traditions allows coexistence and enriches one's spiritual experience.

In a social and intellectual context, Guénon's travels are an example of how individuals can bridge Eastern and Western spiritual traditions. His decision to embrace Islam was ultimately not just a religious change but the culmination of his long spiritual exploration. This choice affirms Guénon's commitment to teaching, which he believes can answer his spiritual needs while harmonizing the world's great traditions into one overarching spiritual framework.

CONCLUSION

Guénon's spiritual journey shows that he sees each religion as part of a complementary whole, not as a contradictory entity. Guénon's spiritual and intellectual unrest did not cause him to denounce or denigrate the religions he had professed. Instead, Guénon placed the values of kindness and wisdom of each religion in a deep perspective and respected the spiritual path it offered. Guénon understood that every religion contains an esoteric dimension, a spiritual depth that goes beyond formal or ritualistic aspects. Therefore, he does not only look at religion from an external point of view but also seeks to explore the deepest essence of each tradition. This is what prompted him to delve into symbolism, metaphysical doctrine, and esotericism in the various religions he studied. His works reflect Guénon's respect for the spiritual path of the great religions, and his views on religious diversity become so inclusive, even transcendent, that they transcend formal differences.

By finally choosing Islam, Guénon realized that he had found the spiritual integrity he had been looking for. Islam, with its concept of monotheism (the oneness of God) and the teachings of Sufism, provides answers to its spiritual anxieties and unites its search in a system that he considers the most comprehensive. However, the choice of Islam does not make his claim that other religions are less correct or irrelevant; Rather, he considers that every religion he adheres to is part of a long journey toward an understanding of universal truth. Guénon's attitude can be a lesson for today's spiritual seekers who may experience indecision or anxiety in their search. Through Guénon's approach, we learn that a spiritual journey can be a way to understand religious plurality more deeply and appreciate each tradition as a valid path to God. It provides a new perspective on interreligious tolerance and respect, as well as how religious differences can enrich one's spiritual pursuit without having to favor or demean one path over another.

Research on René Guénon, particularly regarding his spiritual journey and relevance in the Indonesian context, still faces a number of limitations. One of the main obstacles is the lack of primary sources in Indonesian, which causes the understanding of his thought to tend to rely on secondary interpretations or limited translations. In addition, the focus of research is often only on the intellectual aspects without exploring the spiritual dimension in depth. With these recommendations, it is hoped that future research related to René Guénon can develop further, broadening intellectual horizons and encouraging harmony across cultures and religions. Guenon's involvement in the Syadziliyyah Order is an opportunity for researchers to explore more broadly the relationship between the development of the Syadziliyyah Order

in Egypt, Europe and Indonesia in the Classical and Modern Eras.

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