

Institute for the Study of Mystical Literature & Thought

A proposal by Vincent Carver Gilliam, RelM, PhD

I wish to propose an **Institute for the Study of Mystical Literature & Thought**.

Throughout both recorded and unrecorded time, some of the most profound ideas and most beautiful remnants of human endeavor in history have come down to us from those whose pursuit of the divine have left us works that inspire in us a deep sense of wonder & awe and convey a love of the sublime that their pursuit realized and their subsequent works portray, regardless of the time and place of their origin. They are so often associated with mystery that their creators are frequently called mystics or prophets, since the product of such pursuits is invariably identified with the supra-sensory character of their subject as a reality beyond all barriers of life & death, time & space. Notwithstanding, what unites them in reflecting their love of the sublime is the spiritual and mystical element portrayed, which is often mistaken for the discursive characteristics of the object of their belief; and is thereby rejected and truncated by those with a disinclination toward systems of religious belief, or confused by those whose sole motivation is to proselytize or proclaim the cause of their doctrine or dogma alone. *Nowhere are such works explored within a context where their commonality and unity is appreciated, where their aesthetic and conceptual harmony is recognized uniformly by the scholars who study and discuss such works.* They may be works of literature or art, philosophy or science, mathematics or music, religion or architecture, but they are customarily identified only with the inherited linguistic, cultural, historical, or spiritual traditions of their creators; and thus the beauty and intrinsic content essential and common to them is studied in universities from the superficial characteristics of their accidents and form, rather than viewed together in light of their shared value and treasured thus as the most exalted and civilizing products of our human experience. Although it was the same pursuit and love that produced the poetry of Dante, Rumi, and Tagore, the art of the Sistine Chapel, Islamic calligraphy, a Tibetan Buddhist Mandala, or the many multi-faceted architectural wonders of the temples of India, the mosques of Arabia, and the cathedrals of Europe, the thinkers and creators who expressed the creativity which culminated in the production of what W.B. Yeats called “monuments of un-aging intellect” are evaluated in isolation from each other. Thus, I am proposing that you consider an institute to be formed which will bring together in consort a special group of rotating fellows from and funded by an array of backgrounds that will lead the way to rectifying the distortions, confusions, and ethnocentrisms which result from this longstanding, global, and pedagogic approach to culture, values, and the history of civilization.

In whatever direction we turn to gaze upon the world, we see strife engendered by the misunderstandings that arise from divisiveness and the inability of but a few to perceive the fundamental unity innate in every living thing; and the most disconcerting failure is that of the most learned of every society and of each discipline of thought in their inability to find a way to communicate in an environment of commonality and thereby guide the world. If the barriers between the disciplines were removed for a group of individuals to spend their lives immersed creatively in a trans-disciplinary environment of genuine appreciation and apprehension of those sublime, civilizing products of disparate cultures, the work and teaching that should issue forth would be unlike any other. And the Institute could become a micro-cosmic model of societal harmony where the knowledge and experience of disparate works of sublime beauty are realized together as parts of a whole—as a singular vision of a "house of many mansions."

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Abrahamic West

Judaic – Christian – Muslim

Vedic East

Hindu – Buddhist – Shaman

3 year tenure as an Endowed Chair in alternating disciplines		3 year tenure as an Endowed Chair in alternating disciplines	
1. Poetry		1. Philosophy	
2. Languages		2. History	
3. Philosophy		3. Poetry	
4. History		4. Languages	
5. Art		5. Science	
6. Science		6. Art	
Following tenure as Chair in the Institute Each one is retained as a Senior Fellow		Following tenure as Chair in the Institute Each one is retained as a Senior Fellow	

- A. Purpose of the Institute: to eliminate the false dichotomy between religious & academic (i.e., belief vs. objectivity) study of religious traditions and the expression of their relative and respective insights and experiences.
- B. Objective of the Institute: to integrate the entire intellectual community in an appreciation and pursuit of the sublime fruits of the spirit and explored in the academic arts and disciplines.
- C. Within a few short years: there would be an ever increasing resource of senior fellows for teaching and publishing as no religious institution, college, or university at presents provides, with the opportunity of a library and publication series dedicated to the literature & thought of mystical traditions perceived together in what unites rather than separates them.
- D. Ideally 12 Endowed Chairs: as well as Senior Fellows, and Junior Fellows, the latter are a liaison to the student body and campus organizations for student involved events, the Institute Newsletter, and a Fellow's book series.