

FROM HEIDEGGER TO SUHRAVARDI: AN INTERVIEW WITH PHILIPPE NEMO

Biographical Post-Scriptum to a Philosophical Interview Henry Corbin

PN: Henry Corbin, you were the first to translate Heidegger in France and then the first to introduce Iranian Islamic philosophy. How can these two tasks be reconciled as properly belonging to one and the same person, especially given that Martin Heidegger claims the West as his homeland. His philosophy is typically German, and one might imagine a certain disparity between the business of translating Heidegger and that of translating Suhravardî.

H.C.: I have often been asked that question, and I've sometimes noticed, with amusement, a certain astonishment overtake my interlocutors upon discovering that the translator of Heidegger and the man who has introduced Iranian Islamic philosophy to the West are one and the same. And then they ask themselves, how has he passed from the one to the other? I tried to tell you a while back, in an interview we had shortly after Heidegger's death, that this astonishment is the symptom of a type of compartmentalizing, of an a-priori labeling of our disciplines. We tell ourselves: there are the Germanists and there are the Orientalists. Among the Orientalists there are the Islamists and there are the Iranianists, etc. But how could one go from Germanism to Iranianism? If those who asked this question had only a little idea of what the philosopher is, and of the philosophical Quest, if they would imagine for a moment that linguistic incidents are no more for a philosopher than signs along the way, and that they announce little more than topographical variants of secondary importance, then perhaps they would be less astonished.

I seize the opportunity to say these things because I have, in the past, run into altogether fantastical accounts of my spiritual biography. I had the privilege and pleasure of passing several unforgettable moments with Heidegger, in Freiburg, in April of 1934 and July 1936, which is to say during the period in which I was working through a translation of the collection of texts published under the title *Qu'est ce que la Métaphysique?* ["What is Metaphysics?"] I was subsequently to learn, much to my amazement, that if I had turned towards Sufism, it was because I had been disappointed by Heidegger's philosophy. This version of things is utterly false. My first publications on Suhravardî go back to 1933 and 1935 (My diploma from the "*Ecole des Langues Orientales*" [Oriental Language School] dates from 1929); my translation of Heidegger appears in 1938. A philosopher's campaign must be led simultaneously on many fronts, so to speak, especially if the philosophy in question is not limited to the narrow rationalist definition that certain thinkers of our days have inherited from the philosophers of the "enlightenment". Far from it! The philosopher's investigations should encompass a wide enough field that the visionary philosophies of a Jacob Boehme, of an Ibn 'Arabi, of a Swedenborg etc. can be set there together, in short that scriptural and visionary (imaginal) works may be accommodated as so many sources offered up to philosophical contemplation. Otherwise *philosophia* no longer has anything to do with *Sophia*. My education is originally philosophical, which is why, to all intents and purposes, I am neither a Germanist nor an Orientalist, but a Philosopher pursuing his Quest wherever the Spirit guides him. If it has guided me towards

Freiburg, towards Teheran, towards Ispahan, for me the latter remain essentially “emblematic cities”, the symbols of a permanent voyage.

What I wish I could bring people to understand, as hopeless as it seems to imagine it happening in the space of the next minute’s conversation –for I would have to write a whole book on the subject- is the following. What I was looking for in Heidegger and that which I understood thanks to Heidegger, is precisely that which I was looking for and found in the metaphysics of Islamic Iran. I will recall the names of several among the greatest personalities in this domain a little later on. With these figures, however, everything was shifted onto a different level, transposed into a register whose secret explains why, ultimately, it is not by mere chance if my destiny has, on the morrow of the second world war, sent me off to Iran, where, for over 30 years now, I have not ceased to make contact with and to deepen that which is the spiritual culture and spiritual mission of this country.

But I find it agreeable, and moreover necessary to add some further precisions - so as to facilitate understanding of just what has been my work and my quest - to the question of what I owe to Heidegger and what I have kept with me during a lifetime of investigations.

First and foremost, I would say, there is the idea of *hermeneutics*, which appears among the very first pages of “*Sein und Zeit*” [“Being and Time”]. Heidegger’s great merit will remain in his having centered the act of philosophizing in hermeneutics itself. Forty years ago, when one employed this word, “hermeneutic”, among philosophers, it had a strange almost barbaric ring. And yet, it’s a term borrowed directly from the Greek and one that has its common usage among biblical specialists. We owe the technical definition to Aristotle: the title of his treatise *peri hermenêias* was translated into latin as *De interpretatione*. We can go one better too, for in contemporary philosophical parlance hermeneutics is that which, in German, is called *das verstehen*, le “*Comprendre*,” “Understanding”. It is the art or technique of “Understanding”, as this was understood by Dilthey. An old friend, Bernard Groethuysen, who was once a student of Dilthey’s, always came back to this in the course of our discussions. There is, in fact, a direct link between the “Verstehen” as hermeneutic in Dilthey’s “Comprehensive Philosophy” and the “Analytic”, the idea of hermeneutics that we find in Heidegger.

That said, Dilthey’s concept is derived from Schleiermacher, the great theologian of the German Romantic period, upon whom Dilthey had consecrated an enormous and unfinished work. Precisely there, we relocate the theological origins, namely protestant, of the concept of hermeneutics that we use in philosophical circles today. Unfortunately, I have the impression that our young Heideggerians have somewhat lost sight of this link between hermeneutics and theology. To find it again, one would obviously have to restore an idea of theology altogether different from that which holds sway today, in France as elsewhere, I mean that definition that has become subservient to sociology when it is not handmaiden to “sociological-politics”. This restoration could only come about through the concurrence of the hermeneutics practiced within the Religions of the Book: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, for it is therein that hermeneutics has developed as a spontaneous exegesis, and therein lie reserved its future palingenesis.

Why? Because therein one is in possession of a Book upon which all depends. It is indeed a question of *understanding* the meaning, but of understanding the *true meaning*. Three things to consider: there is the act of *understanding*, there is the phenomenon of the *meaning*, and there is the unveiling or revelation of the *truth* of this meaning. Now, are we to understand by this “true” meaning that which we currently call the historical meaning, or rather a meaning that refers us to an altogether other level than that of History as the word is commonly understood. From the very outset, the hermeneutics practiced in the Religions of the Book put into play the same themes and vocabulary familiar to phenomenology. What I was enchanted to rediscover in Heidegger, was essentially the filiation of hermeneutics itself passing through the theologian Schleiermacher, and if I lay claim to phenomenology, it is because philosophical hermeneutics is essentially the key that opens the hidden meaning (etymologically the *esoteric*) underlying the exoteric statement. I have as such done nothing more than attempt to deepen this understanding, firstly in the vast unexplored domain of Shiite Islamic gnosis, and then in the neighboring domains of Christian and Judaic gnosis. Inevitably, because on the one hand the concept of hermeneutics had a Heideggerian flavour, and because on the other hand my first publications concerned the great Iranian philosopher Suhrawardî, certain historians stubbornly maintained their “virtuous insinuations” that I had “mixed up” (sic) Heidegger with Suhrawardî. But to make use of a key to open a lock is not at all the same thing as to confuse the key with the lock. It wasn’t even a question of using Heidegger as a key, but rather of making use of the same key that he had himself made use of, and which was at everyone’s disposition. Thank God, there are some insinuations whose sheer ineptitude reduces them to nothing... that said, the phenomenologist would have a great deal to say about the “false keys” of historicism.

And specifically with regards to this last point, there is a book within the ensemble of Heidegger’s work about which, perhaps, we no longer speak of enough. It is true that it is an old book... it was one of the first that Heidegger wrote, for it was his “habilitation thesis.” I am referring to his book on Duns Scot. This book contains pages that have been particularly illuminating for me, concerning as they do what our medieval philosophers called *grammatica speculativa*. I was to make immediate use of it upon being called to stand in for my dear departed friend Alexandre Koyré at the Section of Religious Sciences in the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes*, [a French University, the “School of Higher Studies”] during the years 1937 through 39. Having to discourse upon Lutheran hermeneutics, I was able to put into practice that which I had learned [from its pages] of the *grammatica speculativa*.

In fact, there is one notion in particular which dominates the hermeneutics of the young Luther, and it is that of the *significatio passiva*, precisely the type of question with which speculative grammar is concerned. Confronting the psalm verse “*In justitia tua libera me*” the young Luther asks: How can divine justice, the aspect of Righteousness opposed to that of Mercy, be the instrument of deliverance? There is no way out of this quandary so long as we consider this justice as an attribute that we confer upon God Himself. Everything changes, however, as soon as we consider it in its *significatio passiva*. By this we mean that justice by which we are made to be just. And so it is for the other divine attributes as well, which cannot be understood (*modus intelligendi*) except through their relation with us (our *modus essendi*), and as such these should always be expressed with the

adjunction of a suffix along the lines of “*icent*” (beneficent [Corbin here suggests the suffix “*fique*” which has a much more widespread applicability in French than “*icent*” in English, as such the following French examples he cites do not all admit of an adequate translation: “l’unifique, le bénéfique, le vérifique, le sanctifique”. These terms translated into English - the unifying, the beneficent, the veridical, the sanctifying - fail to illustrate the philosophical idea that Corbin is here concerned with: that the divine quality is only manifest to the extent that it is invested in the person.] It is this discovery that made of the young Luther the great interpreter of Saint Paul, and this when he had almost been his victim. I have run across this same hermeneutic situation in many of the great tracts of mystical philosophy in Islam. It’s specificity might well have remained obscure to me had I not already possessed the key of the *significatio passiva*. A simple example: the advent of Being in this theosophy consists in putting Being in the imperative: *KN, Esto* (in the second person, and not *fiat*). That which is primary is neither the *ens* nor the *esse*, but the *esto*.

“Be!” This imperative inaugurator of “Being”, this is the divine imperative in its active aspect (*amr fi’lî*); but considered in the “being” that it makes “to be”, the “being” that we are, none other than this same imperative, but in its *significatio passiva* (*amr maf’ûli*).

I believe we can claim, therein, the triumph of hermeneutics as *Verstehen*, meaning that that which we truly understand, is never other than that by which we are tried, that which we undergo, which we suffer and toil with in our very being. Hermeneutics does not consist in deliberating upon concepts, it is essentially the unveiling or revelation of that which is happening within us, the unveiling of that which causes us to emit such or such concept, vision, projection, when our passion becomes action, it is an active undergoing, a prophetic-poietic undertaking

The phenomenon of meaning, that is fundamental in the metaphysics of “Being and Time”, is the link between the signifier and the signified. But what makes this link, without which signifier and signified would simply remain objects for theoretical consideration?

This link is the subject, and this subject is the *presence*, presence of the mode of being *to* the mode of understanding. Pre-sence, *Da-sein*. I do not want to return here to a discussion of the reasons that, back in the day, led us, in agreement with our friends, to translate *Dasein* by *réalité-humaine* [human-reality]. I am aware of the particular weaknesses of this translation, especially when by an all too frequent negligence, we omit the hyphen, whose necessity we have explained elsewhere. *Da-sein*: being-there, this is understood. But being-there, is essentially to be enacting a presence, enactment of that presence *by* which and *for* which meaning is revealed in the present. The modality of this human presence is thus to be revelatory, but in such a way that, in revealing the meaning, it reveals itself, and is that which is revealed. And here again we are witness to the concomitance of *passion-action*.

In short, the link to which phenomenology draws our attention, is the indissoluble link between *modi intelligendi* and *modi essendi*, between modes of understanding and modes of being. The modes of understanding are essentially in accordance with the modes of being. Any change in the mode of understanding is necessarily concomitant with a change in the mode of being. The modes of being are the ontological, existential [Corbin here

draws a distinction between the two possible French spellings: *existential* and *existentielle*, and makes clear that he is using the French word “*existential*” in the sense of existentiating and not “*existential*” as a simple attribute among others.] conditions of the act of “Understanding”, of the “*Verstehen*”, which is to say of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the definitive task set before the phenomenologist.

2. Let us now move on to the strange vocabulary that Heidegger puts before us, and which made a rude trial of his first French translator. I am thinking of words such as *Erschliessen*, *Erschlossenheit*; of all those terms designating the acts by which the modalities of the human-presence are revealed; of terms such as *Entdecken*, to dis-cover, to unveil the hidden, the *Verborgen*. Well, what I found out rather quickly, was that we find the equivalent of these words in the classical Arabic of the great visionary theosophers of Islam [“theosophers” as distinct from the “theosophists” belonging to the somewhat notorious European “theosophical” movement].

Nor is the bridge [between Heidegger and Islamic theosophy] difficult to find. A while ago I mentioned Heidegger’s book on Duns Scot. We know, as Etienne Gilson has shown us, that Avicenna is a starting point for Duns Scot’s thinking. Furthermore, thanks to the historians of the Toledo school in the 12th century we have a common Arabo-Latin philosophical vocabulary. Just recently Denis de Rougemont humorously reminded me, that when we were schoolmates he had noticed that my copy of “Being and Time” contained numerous Arabic glosses in the margins. Indeed, I believe it would have been much more difficult to translate the vocabulary of a Suhrawardî, an Ibn ‘Arabi, or a Mollâ Sadrâ Shîrâzî, etc... had I not already undergone a training in the acrobatics required to translate the extraordinary German vocabulary that one encounters in reading Heidegger. I am thinking of Arabic terms such as “*zahîr*” which means the exterior, the apparent, the exoteric, and “*bâtin*” designating the interior, the hidden, the esoteric. An entire family of words organizes itself around these two terms.

There is a “*zohûr*”, the manifestation, the act of a thing revealing itself, appearing; “*izhâr*”, the act of making something appear, of making it manifest itself; “*mozhir*”, that which causes such a thing to manifest itself, “*mazhar*”, the form of manifestation, the form of epiphany; “*marharîya*”, the epiphanic function of a *mazhar*. In Persian, there are terms such as *hast-kardan* “make-to-be”; *has-konandeh* “that which makes-to-be”, *hast-kardeh*, *hast-gardêdeh*, “that which is makes-to-be, in itself”. There is, of course, no need for me to sketch out the preliminaries of a dictionary here... It is sufficient to note that with these few terms we may already feel the entire phenomenological vocabulary entering into play. Such being the case, do I really need to insist upon the mutual benefit, for these two domains, that resides in knowledge of both the Islamic theosophical vocabulary and that of phenomenology? And this, despite the disparity, that I mentioned earlier, between the intended level or horizon with which their investigations are concerned.

There exist, in fact, what we may call “hermeneutic levels”. The term has become commonplace today; back in the day it was much less so. It is a question of course, in all cases, of considering the hermeneutic levels (the *modi intelligendi*) with regard to the different modes of being (*modi essendi*), which are their respective supports or mediums. It is precisely these modes of being which it is important for us to differentiate, in order to

avoid any over-zealous confusion between different modes of understanding, misunderstandings against which I have never ceased warning my students, in Paris just as in Teheran.

To this end, it is necessary to have well defined concepts of phenomenology and hermeneutics at one's disposal. It is perfectly natural to have returned again and again to asking ourselves how we might faithfully translate the idea of phenomenology, into both Arabic and Persian. One solution, which is not really a solution at all, consists simply in translating the word into Arabic writing. Nor is it any better - as I have often observed my students and the authors of reviews doing - if we arm ourselves with dictionaries and stubbornly search for an equivalent. It was best to begin by asking ourselves if the Arabo-Persian vocabulary of mystical theosophy did not already offer us a term for a corresponding process. Indeed, there is such a term circulating within the sphere of mystical theosophy (*'erfân*), a term so common in fact that it serves as title for more than one book. I am speaking of the term *Kashf al-mahjûb*, which signifies precisely "the unveiling of that which is hidden". Is that not precisely the activity of the phenomenologist, an activity which - in unveiling and in bringing the hidden meaning, occulted beneath the outward appearance, beneath the phenomenal, out into manifestation - fulfills in its own way the program of the Greek science: *sôzein ta phainomena* (to save the phenomena)? *Kashf*, is the unveiling (*Enthulling, Entdecken*) which causes the true meaning itself, initially occulted by that which is the apparent, to emerge into manifestation, the *phainomenon* (here we might do well to call to mind that which Heidegger has said about the concept of *alêtheia*, or truth). We are ourselves the veil so long as we abstain from the "act of presence", so long as we are not being-there (*da-sein*), at the hermeneutic level in question. And so, is it not clear that we are traveling a self-same route, even if we keep in mind the eventual difference between the levels of the destinations sought by the seekers, a difference heralded by the fact that our "theosophers" understand this unveiling to be of the *esoteric* hidden beneath the *exoteric* appearance. Upon this very point, their hermeneutic remains faithful to that which is simultaneously its source and springboard: "the phenomenon of the Revelation of a Holy Book", to which I had called our attention at the beginning of this discussion.

And this is precisely the meaning suggested by the Arabic term that corresponds most closely to the term "hermeneutics": I am speaking of the term *ta'wîl*. Etymologically, the word *ta'wîl* means to re-conduct something to its source, to its archetype". It is the technique of "Understanding" in which the Shiite "theosophers", both Duodeciman and Ismaili have excelled in their esoteric Koranic hermeneutics. It consists of "the occultation of the apparent and the manifestation of the occulted"; nor did the alchemists themselves conceive otherwise their own great work. On this path there is a multitude of hermeneutical levels, each one corresponding to a respective level of Being. This is why an authentic *ta'wîl* has nothing to do with inoffensive "allegory". The ascension through these hermeneutical levels might well create the impression that we are leaving our occidental phenomenologist companion behind. But since we are engaged upon one and the same hermeneutical path why mightn't he come and join us? And this is indeed the question of our relations to come, the very question we encountered earlier on in relation to the *significatio passiva*. While altogether necessary, it sufficed to prolong what we had learned, in terms of *grammatica speculativa*, to follow the admirable developments of the

great theosopher Ibn 'Arabi concerning the *meaning* of the divine Names. A simple exercise, permitting me nonetheless to affirm that if one is not already somewhat acquainted with the secret of the *significatio passiva*, one risks making a mess of the question and overlooking the essential. I hope, of course, that it is no breach of etiquette for me to refer to my work on Ibn 'Arabi, here. This then, in as brief a synopsis as was permissible, constitutes the governing idea in my books and in my life's work as a researcher in the philosophical and religious sciences.

3. It is thus easy for you to understand my dear Philippe Nemo, why I couldn't be, and why I wouldn't wish to be, a historian in the common sense of the word, an intellectual authority who establishes the course of events of the past, without feeling him or herself responsible for the latter, not even responsible for the meaning which he or she attributes to it. And it is indeed he or she who confers upon this past one meaning or another and who sets in motion the cogwheels of "historical causality" in conformity with the meaning upon which he or she has already decided. For the historian the events have come and gone, they have past by, without the historian having been there. And it is convenient that the historian should not have been there, where and when the events took place. In fact, it is necessary that he or she not be there, nor ever engage in an "act of presence" with regards to this past, for this would compromise the historian's ability to speak with "historical objectivity". And even if they make conspicuous use of such terms as the "living past", or the "presence of the past", such presence is no more than an inoffensive metaphor for their personal alibi. In striking contrast hermeneutical phenomenologists must always be "Being-there" (*da-sein*), for them there can never be anything that is irrevocably past. It is by their own "act of presence", that they cause that which is occulted by the phenomenal appearance to manifest itself. This "act of presence" consists in opening or ushering in the future that all so-called bygone events of the past conceal within themselves. It is to see the past before one, and this is something entirely different from the inoffensive and metaphorical literary "presence" of the "living past". Because at one and the same time, it is to feel oneself "responsible for the past", in that one makes oneself answerable for its future. This implies, of course, a certain mode of Being, but precisely that mode of Being which conditions this hermeneutical level. (There can be no question of dialectically contesting the modes of Being. One can understand them, one can refuse them, but they are not such that one can refute them.) This is why I have always remained the phenomenologist that I was in my youth. I am well aware that this may have misguided several of my Orientalist colleagues, more or less well informed of the exigencies proper to the philosopher. Nevertheless, as the state of the research in this field necessitated that I take upon myself the critical edition of many volumes of Arabic and Persian texts, I was able to prove in so doing that the duties intrinsic to philological erudition and the exigencies of philosophical understanding were indeed such as could be combined by the philosopher. At the same time I was much better understood in philosophical circles where the nature of the questions involved were immediately recognized. But this is where one feels the poverty of our official [academic] programs. One must begin by making known the names of distant philosophers, the discontinuity between possible chronologies, the catalogue of technical terms, etc., all things that ought to be common currency, and which will perhaps one day come to be so, when Occidental and Oriental philosophers will have once more come together to assume responsibility for the tradition they hold in common.

Is it even necessary for me to say that the direction my research has taken had as its starting point the incomparable analysis we owe to Heidegger showing the ontological roots of the Historical sciences, showing effectively that there is a more original, more primitive historicism than that which we call the “universal History”; the History of external events, the *Weltgeschichte*, or simply History in the ordinary everyday sense of the word. To signify this idea I forged the term *historiality*, and I believe it is a term worth holding on to. The same relation exists between the terms *historiality* and historicism as between existential as “existentiating” and existential conceived as a simple attribute [*existential* and *existentielle* in the French]. It was a decisive moment. This very *historiality* appeared to me as motivation for and legitimization of the refusal to allow oneself to be inserted into the historicism of History, into the weave of historical causality, as effectively calling us to tear ourselves from the historicism of History. For if there is a “meaning to History”, it is not by any means in the historicism of historical events; it is in this “*historiality*”, in these secret, esoteric, existentiating roots of History and of the historical.

If the moment was decisive it is because it was also without any doubt, the moment in which, while following the example of the Heideggerian Analytic, I was drawn to explore hermeneutical levels that his program had not yet envisioned. I am speaking of that which I have since designated by the term “hierophantic-history”, a sacred history that is not in the least bit concerned with the outward facts of a “history of the saints”, or of a “history of salvation”, but is rather concerned with something much more original: the esoteric hidden beneath the phenomenon of the literal appearance of the [spiritual] tales and accounts related in Holy Books. I have just indicated the contrast between *historiality* and historicism. Now, this contrast is already perfectly well known - albeit expressed in different terms - to the Gnostics and Cabalists of the Religions of the Book. Our Jewish Cabalistic friends, for example, speak of the mysteries of the primordial Torah, of the Torah-Sophia, containing the archetypes of Creation that the Saint-blessed-be-he contemplated over the course of millennia before creating the worlds. But it was not the story of the first man, the story of Core, that of the she-mule of Balaam, in their literal appearance that occupied his meditation; it was not with these that he created the worlds. That which he contemplated was the *neshama*, the most intimate spiritual center of both the Torah and of Man, of the Torah as it exists at the level of the supreme world, the world of *Atsilut*. And that is what spiritual hermeneutics teaches us to read in the Bible. Similarly, for the Shiite Gnostics - Duodeciman as well as Ismaili - that which we profanely call historicity and historical meaning is for them but the outward figure and metaphor (*majâz*) of the true Reality (*haqîqat*) of events and of metaphysical persons, prior to the creation of our world. And that is what spiritual hermeneutics, the *ta'wîl*, teaches us to read in the Koran. Indeed, if there had not been *that*, -and here we are dealing with a matter that has been formulated in a most decisive manner by the fifth Shiite Imam, Imam Mohammed Baqir (VIIIth century)- if there was nought but the literal appearance relative to the circumstances surrounding the revelation of the Koranic verses, that is to say if there were no more than the merely historical, the Koran would have long since become a dead book. Yet, to the contrary this book shall live till the day of Resurrection, and if it lives, it is by virtue of the spiritual hermeneutics that is forever unveiling its hidden meanings. -And herein we have a perfect example of our phenomenological hermeneutics being called back to its theological origins.

And so, what tremendous irony! That which the profane, the “exotericists”, consider to be the metaphorical meaning is precisely what the Gnostics consider to be the real or true meaning, and this because they never degrade spiritual meaning to the rank of metaphor or of allegory. And that which the profane take to be the real meaning, which is to say the visible historical meaning, is nothing more for the Gnostics than the metaphorical meaning, the metaphor of the True Reality. Within such a perspective, our historical science and our historians are themselves reduced to metaphors and to a metaphorical state of Being. What then must we say of those contemporary exegetical theologians who intentionally ignore any other meaning than the so-called “historical” meaning, and who destroy hierophantic-history by inserting it at all costs into the historicity of History, because, for them, there is no other “reality”. At the very limit they may concede a [spiritual] typology every bit as inoffensive as it is unconvincing. I may not have had many precursors in making these links, but they seem indispensable to me, for they allow one to judge, all the more accurately, whether or not the Heideggerian Analytic has not come to a premature halt, immobilizing itself at a false impasse.

Because the historicity of hierophantic history tears us away from the historicism of History, it allows us to see, and with a good deal of irony, the furor for the historical and for historicity which is so dominant today. There are “historical keys” and “historical conferences”, propositions are made for historical laws, for historical trends, etc. Hierophantic history teaches us that there are filial connections more essential and more true to reality than historical affiliations. These connections are in fact so essential that the privilege which those, who are “blind to the invisible”, concede to the historical appears derisory. It is not by any “historical” tie that we are connected to the other worlds which give this world its “meaning”. The Heideggerian Analytic has, among others, the interesting virtue of bringing us to an understanding of the underlying motives that have lead the humanity of today to cling frantically to the historical as though it were the only “Reality”. It all gives one the impression of a laicising of the idea of Incarnation, in the wake of which even the theologians have been dragged into a generalized and omnipresent sociology. On the contrary, the Analytic of the “act of presence”, of the *da-sein* - within which the future of the past emerges, for it “actualizes” that which in the past was still to come - ought to have the virtue of liberating us from the mirage of this passion for historicity, the passion for making by-gone history to which we will have the glory of belonging, and this precisely because it dissipates the mirage of the very idea of the past through its transfiguration.

Let us recall once again the extraordinary vocabulary before which Heidegger places us in asking the question: do the acts of human-presence come to pass purely and simply in the past? Or do they not remain in the present in the sense that they “are” “having been”? But if they are, it is that that presence which “enacts the act of presence is always yet to come, a future yet to come which will not cease to constitute itself in the present (*Gegenwartiges-Zukunftiges*). The “having-been” cannot presently *be*-having been (*Gewesenheit*) except as born endlessly out of the future. There would be no present if it were not for the “future yet-to-come” endlessly becoming “having-been” (*Gewesend*). The present is that: it is the yet-to-come having-been-yet-to-come, but because the future *is* having-been, it retains all its virtualities and possibilities in the present. Everything depends upon the act of “being-there” (*da-sein*) by which the having-been *is* there (*da-*

gewesen). And this process is the very “temporalizing” of time. But of course one would do well to compare this with the profound intuitions of the Iranian theosophers concerning this process. It begins with pre-Islamic Iran and with all that is connected to Zervanism. In Islamic Iran, a certain Semnani (XIVth century) distinguishes between the *zamân âfâqî*, the temporality of the “horizons” - that is to say the time of the macrocosm, of the physical universe - the *zamân anfosî*, the temporality of the souls - that is to say psycho-spiritual time. A certain Qâzî Sa’îd Qommî (XVIIth century) would later distinguish between an opaque and dense temporality (*zamân kathîf*), an already subtle temporality (*latîf*), and an absolutely subtle temporality (*altaf*). I have dealt with this subject in my books.

What I have been trying to evoke permits me to explain how the grand project undertaken by the young philosopher Suhravardî, in the 12th century - very intentionally proposing, and this right in the middle of an Islamicized Iran, to “resuscitate the Light of the ancient Persian Sages” - might not have appeared to me as it were invested with its fulgurating aura, had I not been exposed to and instructed in this phenomenology. From the perspective of the historian as such, the Suhravardian project could appear as a “piece of idle fancy” to use a common expression, an arbitrary project without historical foundation. But Suhravardi himself neither thought nor acted in the manner of a “historian”. He does not deliberate upon concepts, upon influences, upon discernable or contestable historical remnants and vestiges of the past. He is quite simply *there*: he engages himself in an “act of presence” [of being-there]. He takes the past of the old Zoroastrian Iran in charge, thereby rendering it present. It is no longer a by-gone irretrievable past, the material lineage having been interrupted. To this past, he restores the future yet-to-come, a future that begins with himself because he feels himself to be responsible for this past. The spiritual tie defies all historical rupture for it is strong enough in itself to constitute a legitimate filial connection. Henceforth, the ancient Persian Sages, the *Khosrovaniyun*, are in truth the precursors to the *Ishraqiyun* (the Platonists) of Islamic Iran. “In this I have had no precursor”, wrote our *Ishraqi* Sheikh. The intrepidity, no doubt, of a young thinker of thirty five years whose “act of presence” (the *da-sein*) provokes and legitimates the reversal of past into future, because it is all the future yet-to-come of this past which is constituting itself anew as present, in the present of his act of “being-there”. And it is this that is the *historially true*

The young *Ishraqi* Sheikh, Suhravardi, has long since been, in my eyes, the exemplary hero of philosophy. Following his example, I have attempted to understand the whole spiritual culture of Iran in such a way as to give it the fullness of that dimension which is still yet-to-come. I have, perhaps, helped more than one Iranian friend, known or unknown, to “find himself”. I have, at any rate, heard testimonies to this effect on more than one occasion, and have always found them staggering. But I am persuaded that such an “act of presence” must be accomplished by anyone wishing to transmit a message such as that of the Iranian spirituals to the West. Nor do I think that any more direct testimony [than this act of transmission] can be brought forward in support of what I was saying earlier about that which I owe to Heidegger and have subsequently conserved throughout an entire career of research and philosophical investigation. And that ought to be enough to dissipate the serious misunderstanding [by which Corbin was considered to have renounced Heidegger’s philosophy] that we have already dealt with here, at least to the extent that this misunderstanding has come about in good faith.

It has long since been observed that the “Analytic” - which is the application of the Heideggerian Hermeneutic - already tacitly posits a fundamental philosophical choice, a conception of the world, a *Weltanschauung*. This choice announces itself at the horizon within which the “Analytic” of the *Da* of the *Dasein* is deployed. But it is not at all necessary to adhere to this tacit *Weltanschauung* to make use of all the resources of an “Analytic” of this *Da-sein* which I translated earlier as to “engage an act of presence”. If one’s *Weltanschauung* does not coincide with that of Heidegger, this will translate into the fact that you give the *Da* of the *Dasein* another *situs*, another dimension, than that given it in *Sein und Zeit*. A while ago I drew a comparison [between the Hermeneutic] and the key that one is handed in order to open a lock. This key is indeed the hermeneutic, and it is up to you to give to this key the form adapted to the lock you have to open. The examples I recalled a few moments ago show us how, when adapted in this way, the *clavis hermeneutica* opens all the locks that close access to the veiled, to the occulted, to the esoteric. It is with the *clavis hermeneutica* that Swedenborg opens the locks of the Bible’s *Arcana caelestia*.

This key is, if I may say so, the principal tool with which the phenomenologist’s mental laboratory is equipped. But to make use of this *clavis hermeneutica* - Heidegger having shown one how it might be used and adapted - does not in any way demand, nor in any way mean, that one therefore shares the same world view, the same *Weltanschauung* as Heidegger. In fact, when it was insinuated that I had “mixed” up Heidegger with Suhravardi it was not with reference to this *clavis hermeneutica* - of whose very existence such detractors were ignorant - the intention was to insinuate that I had operated some type of syncretic conjunction between Heidegger’s *Weltanschauung* and that of the Iranian philosophers. The insinuation is so inept that I have questioned its being made in good faith. I have made use of the *clavis hermeneutica* in particular and I have written reams of pages to show the differences between the possible “doors” it might open. But to what end? The feeble minded critics don’t read them and persevere in their ineptitude.

As an example of my efforts to illustrate these differences and prevent confusion, I will refer to the work of one of the greatest Iranian philosophers, Mollâ Sadrâ Shîrâzî (XVIIth century), himself one of the great hermeneutic interpreters of Suhravardi’s *Ishrâq*. I have dealt with Mollâ Sadrâ in many of my books; have published and translated one of his treatises in its entirety, and given several courses on his works, as often in Paris as in Teheran. Mollâ Sadrâ is the author of a veritable metaphysical revolution in traditional Islamic philosophy. He was the first to shake the venerable metaphysics of the Essence from its moorings, replacing it by a metaphysics according priority and primacy to the act of Being: to Existence over Essence. Nothing more was needed for me to hear students and researchers in Teheran proclaiming with conviction that Mollâ Sadrâ was the true founder of Existentialism! Others, impressed by Mollâ Sadrâ’s cosmogony and grandiose psychology proudly found in his works that which they had more or less successfully assimilated of evolutionism. Of course, the Johannine element which one finds in the works of Mollâ Sadrâ and so many other Iranian philosophers - “Nothing returns to Heaven save that which has from it descended” - is completely alien to evolutionism. Mollâ Sadrâ’s philosophy of the active imagination as a purely spiritual power might well authorize certain comparisons with developments in Bergson’s *Matter, Memory and Spiritual*

Energy. But the eschatological horizon of our Iranian philosophers is not a Bergsonian horizon.

So, in each instance I have had to go to great lengths, to double back and take up the charge again and again to avoid such confusions as ruin all serious attempts at comparative philosophy. And I have done so with the use of the *clavis hermeneutica*, which is to say by showing that, certain consonances notwithstanding, there subsisted fundamental differences in that we were dealing with modes of understanding (*modi intelligendi*) proceeding from entirely different modes of being (*modi essendi*). It was necessary to show that the respective ambition in each case corresponded to hermeneutical levels of differing degrees. Moreover, in translating and publishing Mollâ Sadrâ's work, the "Book of Metaphysical Penetrations", I had had the opportunity to insist at great length upon the particularities of the vocabulary of Being in Greek and in Latin, in Arabic and in Persian, in French and in German. There is no question, the translators of Toledo in the XIIth century, to whom I was referring a little earlier, have given us the elements of an Arabo-Latin philosophical vocabulary in which we find such words as *mâhîya* (*quidditas, essentia*), *wojûd* (*esse, existere*), *mawjûd* (*ens*), etc. One needs hardly refer to such consonances to understand that, with Mollâ Sadrâ, there is no trace of what has called itself "Existentialism" in France. I mean, nothing of that particular philosophy of existence, which has taken over the name. The fact is that the modes of being which are considered to be the supports of the primacy conferred upon "existence" are in both cases radically different. And they are so even without the added prejudice of the judgement past by Heidegger himself upon "existentialism" a word which the early Heideggerians would never have pronounced.

We are now touching upon the fundamental difference that underlies the passage -"my passage"- from Heidegger to Suhrawardî, a difference upon which I would like to conclude. I have just indicated how the use of the *clavis hermeneutica* which Heidegger has handed to us in no way implies an adherence to his *Weltanschauung*. The hermeneutic proceeds from the "act of presence" signified in the *Da* of the *Dasein*; its task is therefore to illuminate how, in understanding itself, the human *Being-there* situates itself, circumscribes the *Da*, the *situs* of its presence and unveils the horizon which had up until then remained hidden. The metaphysics of the *Ishrâqîyûn*, and par excellence that of a Mollâ Sadrâ culminates in a metaphysics of Presence (*hozûr*). Around this *situs* Heidegger arranges all the ambiguity of human finitude characterized as a "Being-toward-Death" (*Sein zum Tode*). With a Mollâ Sadrâ, or an Ibn 'Arabi the Presence as they experience it in this world - as it is unveiled by the "phenomenon of the world" lived by them - is not that Presence whose finality is death, a Being-towards-Death, but a "Being-towards-Beyond-Death", let us say: *Sein zum Jenseits des Todes*. One may see quite clearly that the conception of the world, the pre-existential philosophical choice, whether it be that of Heidegger, or that of our Iranian "theosophers", is itself constitutive of the *Da* of the *Dasein*, of the act of Being-there present to the world and its variants. From hereon in, all that remains to be done is to hold and press this notion of Presence, as closely and as intently as possible. To what is this human presence, this Being-there, present?

The investigation will begin, as well it ought to, with the gnoseology of the *Ishrâqîyûn*. They distinguish the following: there is a formal knowledge (*'ilm sûrî*) that is the common form of knowledge; it is produced through the intermediary of a *re-presentation*, of a

species, actualized in the soul. And there is a knowledge which they designate as a *presential* knowledge (*ilm hozuri*) which does not pass through the intermediary of a *representation*, of a *species*, but is immediate presence, that by which the soul's "act of presence" itself gives rise to the presence of things and renders present to itself, no longer objects but presences. It is this same knowledge that they typify as "Oriental" knowledge (*ilm ishrâqî*), which is at one and the same time the dawning of the Orient of Being upon the soul and the dawning of the matutinal illumination of the soul upon the things which it reveals and which it reveals to itself as co-presences. It is important that we always conserve the original signification of the word *Ishrâq*, that of the dawn and Orient of the Heavenly body, the rising sun. But here we are dealing with an Orient that one should not try to locate on our geographical maps, it is the dawning Light, a Light prior to all revealed things, to all presence, for it is that which reveals them, that by which the Presence *is*.

And so it will make all the difference, when we pose the question as follows: which presences does the human presence, render present to itself, in enacting its own presence? In other words, with which constellations of presences does the *Da* of the *Dasein* surround itself when it reveals itself to itself? To which worlds is it being present in its being *there*. Should I limit myself to the phenomenon of the world analyzed in *Sein und Zeit*? Or should I intuit, accept and amplify my presence to all the worlds and "inter-worlds", as they are discovered and revealed to me by the "Oriental" Presence of our Islamic Iranian "theosophers"? In posing this question, I am merely illustrating the difference that I posited earlier. If Heidegger teaches us to analyze the *Da* of the *Dasein*, the "act of presence", you can see that this in no way implies that the limits of the Heideggerian horizon impose themselves upon this "act of presence", nor that it must immobilize itself in premature fashion. This is why, sometime earlier, I was evoking the decisive moment in which I was drawn towards hermeneutical levels that had not been foreseen by the Heideggerian Analytic that I had at my disposal. I am speaking of a dimension of the "act of presence" in which we feel ourselves to be in the company of the divine hierarchies of Proclus, the great neoplatonist, as well as those of Jewish gnosis, of Valentinian gnosis, of Islamic gnosis. Thenceforth it is the future yet-to-come, and the dimension of the future, which are being decided. If the "act of presence" is in fact the future ceaselessly constituting itself in the present, if the process of the yet-to-come constituting itself as my being-present is dependent upon my act of presence, then what is this yet-to-come future to be? The choice cannot be avoided – the philosophical option is there even before the hermeneutical process - for this choice is decisive: the hermeneutic merely discloses it.

On the one hand, we are made to hear the pathos-laden adage of the Heideggerian Analytic: to be *free for one's death*. On the other hand we have the firm invitation to a *freedom for the beyond of one's death*. Let us hold onto the word *Entschlossenheit*: the resolute-decision [*la decision résolue*]. Today this term is translated by decision without withdrawal [*decision sans retrait*]. This is even better. For it is a question of knowing whether and in what measure this resolution is not a movement of withdrawal, of retreat, before death, an impotent inability to be free for that which is beyond one's death, to render oneself present to and for that which is beyond death. I'm afraid that, having become the victims of widespread agnosticism, the humanity of today falters before the *freedom for that which is beyond death*. We have invested such a great measure of genius in building up all possible defenses: psychoanalysis, sociology and dialectical materialism, linguistics,

historicism, etc., everything has been put in place to prohibit all perspective on, concern for, and signification of *the beyond*. Even an infinitely evolved humanity, after the hundreds of millennia imagined by Franz Werfel, in his immense and moving novel “The Star of the Unborn” (“*Stern der Ungeborenen*”), does not cease -with the exception of those few initiates of all eras, the “chronosophers”- in its too great fragility and age, to fall short of assuming the weight of its future in *the beyond*. And that is, after all, the metaphysical meaning of the word “Occident”: the decline, the setting, a meaning that Suhrawardī typified in his “Tale of the Occidental Exile”. One day, perhaps, I will tell how this “Tale of the Occidental Exile” presented itself as the decisive moment in which I cast off the weight of finitudes that weigh beneath the overcast sky of Heideggerian freedom. I could not avoid perceiving that, beneath that somber sky, the *Da* of the *Dasein* was an isle of perdition, was precisely the isle of “*Occidental exile*”.

People tranquilize themselves by repeating: “ death is a part of life”. This is not true, unless one means to limit life to its biological expression. But biological life is itself derived from another life which is its independent source, and which is Life in its very essence. So long as the “resolute-decision” remains simply “freedom for one’s death”, death presents itself as a closure and not as an *exitus*. And so we will never take leave of this world. To be free *for that which is beyond death*, is to foresee and to bring about one’s death as an *exitus*, a leave-taking of this world towards other worlds. But it is the living, and not the dead, which leave this world.

I hope I have succeeded, in the course of these brief comments, in communicating how one and the same philosopher can be the first French translator of Heidegger and the hermeneute of the Iranian *res religiosa*. By this I mean, to have made understood all that I owe to the armament with which Heidegger’s hermeneutic has equipped me, and how and why I have used it to attain other heights. I believe that it has been an experiment of a different order than the more or less successful attempts that have been made to link Heidegger’s philosophy with theology. One must also understand, you see, how after my long years of Oriental pilgrimage, far from Europe, it was difficult for me to renew my ties with both Heidegger himself and his philosophy.

P.N. Now, Henry Corbin, you’ve just been speaking of the Heidegger whom you translated in 1938. You’ve underlined the contrast between the Heideggerian hermeneutic of the *Dasein* and that which you were led to discover by the mystics and philosophers of Iran. You have illustrated the extent of this contrast by referring to the meaning of the words “Orient” and “Oriental” as they are employed by these same philosophers. But are we to understand that Heidegger’s works subsequent to 1938 bear witness to a full stop and fixation upon positions already acquired? Are we to understand that the second half of Heidegger’s works, after the period of “*Sein und Zeit*” and of “What is Metaphysics?”, has changed nothing with regards to the closure that you experienced in the first part of his work?

H.C. Careful now! I certainly don’t want to employ the term “closure” in reference to a philosopher who, in his interrogation of Being, has on the contrary taught us to open so much that was hitherto locked shut. But the question which you posed concerned my own personal experience: what have the works and thought of Heidegger meant to one who was

known at the same time, or has come to be known since, for his inquiries into and interpretations of an Iranian Islamic philosophy that had until then remained *Terra incognita* in the West. I have done my best to answer your question, and it should be understood that I have been referring to the works of Heidegger such as were at my disposition in 1938, and already of considerable weight. The question that you are now asking me, is in relation to the entirety of Heidegger's work. To answer this question one would have to undertake a comparative study of the whole of Heidegger's works and those of Iranian Islamic philosophy. Such a task may one day be conceivable, but I must admit that for the moment it exceeds my ambitions. There is still so very much for me to do on behalf of our Iranian philosophers, precisely in order that such a project of comparative philosophy may one day be possible. This task will concern our young philosopher colleagues, on the one hand those who will have maintained contact with Heidegger's later work, a contact which I have inevitably lost over my many years spent in the East, and on the other hand the young philosophers, my own students and others, who for their part I have encouraged to study Arabic and Persian, in order that they may work - as philosophers - to tear Islamic philosophy and theosophy out of the ghetto of what has come to be called "Orientalism".

As you well know, Heidegger's work achieved considerable proportions. Is there not talk of a complete edition, which, with seminar transcripts included, will count some seventy volumes? This is, in fact on the same scale of the in-folio productions of our Oriental philosophers. There are thus great possibilities, vast works to envisage, unlimited "potentialities" to understand. It is time to repeat the call: Philosophers, to your stations! In any case, I believe it may be relevant here to offer a somewhat personal account in view of an eventual answer to an often-posed question, one that will perhaps remain an enigma. The question concerns the fate of what would have been the second part of "*Sein und Zeit*", second part without which the first is nought but an arch deprived of its spring, and which, there can be no doubt, would have completed the ontological edifice of what we have referred to as the "historial". Indeed, I saw the manuscript of this second part, with my own eyes, on Heidegger's work desk in Freiburg in July 1936. It was contained in a large sheath. Heidegger even amused himself by putting it in my hands that I might weigh it, and it was heavy. What has since come of this manuscript? There have been some contradictory answers to this question: as for myself, I have none to offer.

Returning to your question. Just as I cannot speak of a definitive "closure" in Heidegger's philosophical proceeding, the sheer extent of his work will not permit us to speak of a halting or of a fixation. In fact, the question does not lie therein. The real question is whether or not the Heideggerian Analytic, in the multiple aspects of its distinct applications and throughout its far-reaching proceedings, has not maintained the tacit presuppositions underlying a distinct *Weltanschauung* in evidence from the very beginning. To analyze the being-for-death as anticipating the very possibility of a human-being's forming a completed whole, does this or does it not already imply a philosophy of life and of death? I believe that for the "Oriental" philosophers to whom I've been referring, the idea of such a *completion*, proclaims on the contrary an acceptance of the *incompletion* of a being condemned to fall *behind*, to fall short of himself. This is why I preferred to speak of a hermeneutic of human existence immobilizing itself prematurely upon an achievement

which is in fact forever unattainable without a leap forward (*vorlaufen*), a leap into the *beyond*.

Henry Corbin, I would like to ask you one last question. You have clearly distinguished between the horizon of Heidegger's Analytic and the "Oriental" horizon. Nonetheless, if it is true that in Heidegger's work there is no place for the notion of God, since for him God may be assimilated to a metaphysical concept - that of the supreme existent Being - Heidegger still reserves a place in his thought for the dimension of the "sacred", for a difference which he calls the ontological difference between Existence and the existent, which is to say the difference between two worlds, the eternal world above and the provisional world below. Is there not, therein, the means of bringing about a convergence between religious thought and Heidegger's own thinking?

H.C. I'm under the impression, my dear Philippe Némo, that the question as you have posed it would tend to make of Heidegger a great Platonist. It would thus place you on a scabrous path where you would have to watch every step you made. I am not sure that I am able to follow you in this direction. Let us first recall that Heidegger did indeed have a presentiment of the "Oriental" dimension, even if not entirely the "Orient" as understood by the *Ishrâqîyân*, "Persian Platonists". You yourself must certainly have heard some echo of the striking declarations made by Heidegger concerning the *Upanishads*, declarations that leave one with the feeling that it was ultimately something along those lines that he was in search of. That said, we must recognize that the relation between Existence and the existent is not at all equivalent to the relation between the world above and the world below. It does not suffice to establish an opposition between a world of Existence and a world of existents, to gain access to the sacred. The world of existents does not signify *eo ipso* a provisional world of decay, for each and every universe of the gods and of the angels is an eternal universe of the existent. At the same time, you have put your finger upon an essential point by recalling that for Heidegger the concept of God is the metaphysical concept of the supreme existent Being (*Ens Supremum*, *Summum Ens*) and he was aware of the difficulty, among others, which arises when one questions the relation between the *Summum Ens* and the *non-ens*, the *nihil*, the nothingness, when we say that the *ens creatum* is created *ex nihilo*, from nothingness, by the *Ens increatum*. Here we are touching upon a fundamental difficulty, so radical in fact, that it throws in question the very meaning of monotheism. I believe that this difficulty has been observed best and above all by the Islamic "theosophers" whose unparalleled vigilance stems, I believe, from the fact that the horizon of Islamic thought and spirituality is dominated by the *tawhîd*, the affirmation of the Unique. And what is the nature of this "Unique"?

A catastrophic confusion is prone to arise, and one that has been denounced with lucidity by our Iranian mystic "theosophers". The confusion in question has been committed by many Sufis and, following these, by many an Orientalist. This is the confusion between the *Esse* or Existence/Being (*wojûd* in the Arabic) and the *ens* or the existent (*mawjûd* in the Arabic). Here, no question, we have not left Heidegger's company. In Islamic theosophy, Ibn 'Arabi (XIIIth century) firmly established the difference between the theological *tawhîd* (*olûhî*) and the ontological *tawhîd* (*wojûdî*). The exoteric theological *tawhîd* effectively affirms the "Unicity" or Oneness of God as *Ens Supremum*, as the Existent which dominates all other existents. The esoteric ontological *tawhîd* affirms the transcendental

“Unicity” or Oneness of Existence/Being. Existence/Being or the *esse*, is essentially one and unique. The beings (existents) which Existence actualizes in their very act of being are essentially multiple. The one and unique Existence, and the one and unique Divine Existent, ineffable in the depths of its mystery, is the *Absconditum* and can only be addressed from afar by an apophatic or negative theology. It cannot be positively known except in its theophanies: the Theophany itself is therefore essential for an affirmative theology to be possible. And that is precisely why, if the Divinity is one and unique, the Gods - which is to say the Divine Names, the Divine Figures, the theophanic Figures - are multiple. No one of their number needs to fulfill the function of the supreme Cause. To confound one of these necessary Figures with the one and unique Divinity is to instate a unique idol in the place of the others, and monotheism thus perishes in its victory. To affirm the unity of the *Esse*, the unique *Esse* being the divinity itself, is to affirm the very essence, but that is in no way equivalent to affirming the unity of all that is existent. It would be monstrous to say that there is only one existent being. It would be an instance of metaphysical nihilism which reality would take upon itself to disprove. If we make of God a *Summun Ens*, the *Ens unicum*, the unique existent being, all the other existent beings fall into abysmal indifferentiation and nothingness, and the entire order of Existence in the hierarchy of beings disappears. It is perhaps this illusion which has intoxicated many pseudo-mystics, and which certain Occidental interpreters have designated as “existential monism”, without realizing that the very term itself involves a *contradictio in adjecto*, the existential being essentially multiple. As for the relation between the *Esse unicum* and the *entia* (this *Unicum* in fact transcending the *Esse* which it makes to-be in the existents themselves), this has been best formulated by our great philosopher Proclus: it is the relation between the Henad of Henads and the hierarchy of beings that he monadises in bringing them into being. There is in fact no existent-being in any other form than that of one being (whether it is a question of *one* God, of *one* Angel, of *one* human, of *one* species, of *one* constellation, etc.). *Ens et unum convertuntur*. This is the reason our great speculative theosophers (“speculative” in the sense of the word *speculum*, mirror) have always posited that the active Subject of the *tawhîd*, is the One itself. It is the Uni-fier. It is That which makes each being, each one of us, *one* being, a unique *one* in relation to which the One is the Source of its singularity. This is what the mystic Hallâj was formulating when he said: “the simple economy of the Unique is to be made unique by the Unique”.

We are perhaps now relatively far a-field from the Existence and the existents as they concerned Heidegger. But this is only a question of appearance, since it is your question which had led us to bring up this theosophical aspect of the metaphysics of Being for which Ibn ‘Arabi remains our greatest teacher. You see, I have just said that the Theophany (*tajallî ilâhî*) is essential, and is so in multiple Figures corresponding to each of those for whom and to whom they theophanise. But the personal theophanic God does not have to assume the functions of the supreme Cause or *Absconditum*. Monotheism can only save itself from this confusion, with its underlying political dimensions, through the esoteric paradox of the “multiple-One”. Existentially, we might say that it is the human being who reveals to him or herself something (or someone) like God. Theologically it is God who reveals himself to the human being. Mystical speculative theosophy rises above this dilemma by making these two simultaneous truths inseparable. In revealing Himself to the human being, the personalized God of the personal theophany reveals the human being to

itself, and in revealing the human being to itself, He reveals it to Himself and reveals Himself to Himself. In each instance, the eye that sees is simultaneously the eye that is seen. Every theophany (from the lowest initial degree of mental vision onwards) accomplishes itself simultaneously in these two aspects. We may be witness here to something like a superceded neo-Platonism, but the surpassing is the work of Ibn ‘Arabî rather than of Heidegger. There remains, of course, much important research to be carried out along this path. But in the meantime, the impression I am left with - one that was formulated by a colleague, I believe it was Pierre Trotignon – is as follows: the Heideggerian hermeneutic gives the impression of a theology without theophany.

P.N. It is indeed necessary to push ahead with such research, for there is also the thematic of the Word which was ultimately inaugurated – in the modern era - by Heidegger, and which is nevertheless in such close accord with the Tradition, notably the biblical Tradition of the Word of God, and there, clearly, we are in the tradition of the sacred. Whether this sacred takes the name of God or simply takes the name of Existence, what is most fundamentally important is the ontological difference taken in itself, the difference between Existence and existents, just as in the various religions there is a difference between the world above and the world below. If we take this difference in and of itself do we not then find that a self-same inspiration exists between Heidegger and what is left of the Religious world?

H.C. I fully understand your concern. Your query brings us to question ourselves upon the relation between the Logos of Heidegger’s onto-logy and the Logos of theo-logy or better yet: the Logos of all the theologies of the Book. Firstly, I recalled some time ago that adage which is common among our mystical “theosophers” and which is nothing other than a reminiscence of the Gospel of John (3/13): “Nothing returns to Heaven, save that which has from it descended.” Has the Logos of the Heideggerian Analytic come down from Heaven to be capable of re-ascending? Because I think that your search for a common inspiration between Heidegger and the rest of the Religious world can be symbolized in this way. If it has been shown that we may, without too great difficulty, study the laicising processes that have profaned the sacred, we have not seen testimony of any re-sacralisation of the laical. We are certainly witness to a frequent promotion of the laical, according the latter those privileges and prerogatives that once belonged to the sacred. This is however, nothing more than a demoniacal caricature. Metaphysical laicising merely takes care of the death of the Gods, and not of their resurrection. As such, we need to concentrate all our efforts on this word “resurrection”. All the meanings that it comports imply the rupture of the well-ordered system of things: a tearing away, a leave-taking of the tomb. The resurrection is announced to us after the fact: by the mystery of the empty tomb. On the contrary the laicising of our day, in its caricature of the sacred, contents itself with the pseudo-cult of the inhabited tomb. And I believe that the herald of any resurrection is par excellence the Verb – the Verb that sounds with divine sovereignty.

Your question also brings us back, and that most pertinently, to the theme of the Word, to the biblical Tradition of the divine Verb. There is no question that we find a thematic of the Word in Heidegger’s works. But let us not forget that, in this domain our Jewish Cabalist friends, as well as our Cabalists in Christendom and in Islam, have been our best teachers and guides for centuries now, and they remain so today. They have admirably

analyzed the phenomenon of the Word: how the Word became Book, how the written Word is resuscitated as living Verb. By comparison, the thematic of the Word as dealt with by Heidegger seems fraught with ambiguity: is it a twilight, - a twilight consisting in the laicising of the Verb? Or is it a dawn, announcing the palingenesis, the resurrection of the biblical Tradition's Verb? The answer will depend upon those asking themselves the question, and the choices underlying these answers make me think that if the philosophy of Hegel has given birth to a Hegelian right and a Hegelian left the question which you are asking is among those that may bring Heidegger's philosophy, *volens nolens*, to give birth to a Heideggerian right and a Heideggerianism left.

But the essential thing, as it appears to me for the moment, and one which attests to the coherence of this interview, is that your question brings us back to our starting point. I began by recalling the theological origins of the idea of hermeneutics that we find in Heidegger's works. And now your question concerning the Verb, which is central to hermeneutics, brings us back to these same origins. We have thus come full circle within the hermeneutic circuit, and that's a good sign.

I believe that my own experience, as I have tried to retrace it, is in accordance with the concern your question expresses, in the very measure in which the Heideggerian hermeneutic, a distant offspring of Schleiermacher, was for me the threshold of an integral hermeneutics. Let us recall its characteristics. I do not believe that the inoffensive "fourfold meaning" to which common medieval exegesis was attached has the virtue of leading us to an unforeseen level of being, into a hermeneutic adventure admitting of neither "withdrawal" nor return. Quite to the contrary, there is a hermeneutic of the Verb - imparted to the religions of the Book - that has always had as its very essence the virtue of producing a heightening, an exit, an *ek-stasis* towards those other invisible worlds which give its "real meaning" to our "phenomenon of the world". I am thinking, in Christianity, of the great Gnostic Valentine, of Joachim de Flore, of Sebastian Franck, of Jacob Boehme, of Swedenborg, of F.C. Oetinger, and many many others. So many witnesses testifying together with their esotericist Jewish and Islamic brethren, that the phenomenon of the Sacred Book, far from immobilizing the initiative and development of thought is in fact its most lively stimulant. Only, just as others have spoken of the need for a "permanent revolution" I would suggest the need for a "permanent hermeneutic". Nor do I mean thereby, an accommodation of historical and archeological discoveries - the latter leading most often to the reduction of the "historical recital" of the Holy Book to the banal dimensions of a cross-section of diverse facts for which we have a ready made sociological explanation at hand, at the same time eliminating the occasional superfluous word of a slightly embarrassing "sacred" nature - but quite to the contrary, the "permanent hermeneutic" does not alter even a single word within the Tradition, each word is to be conserved, for each word participates in a new fulgurating encounter between the Image and the Idea.

Only, would Heidegger, have followed our lead in this operation that would tend to convert the Logos of his ontology into a theological Logos? When the occasion arose for him to stage the confrontation between philosophy and theology (one of his articles carries the same title) in which direction did he operate the conversion? And firstly, who must the Theos be? I have tried to express it. But our uncertainty as to his possible response is

merely secondary. A Heideggerian “orthodoxy” is out of the question, and we simply have to pursue our task as we understand it. Perhaps one day we will find - within the mass of his unpublished work, or in some recorded interview - the indication of an answer. But it is also possible that he has taken his secret with him forever.

That is why, today, I prefer simply to say, as we do in Arabic: *Rahmat Allâh ‘alay-hi*: May the divine Mercy be with him.

(This interview was recorded for *Radio France-Culture*, on Wednesday, the second of June 1976. The text was revised and completed with the use of notes taken on this occasion, both before and after the interview).

Henry Corbin.

Biographical Post-Scriptum to a Philosophical Interview **Henry Corbin**

Rereading the text of my interview with Philippe Nemo, I have the impression that it has addressed, or at least alluded to, the majority of essential questions that have kept me occupied over the course of a lifetime’s research. That said, there are indeed gaps into which many a prolongation and worthwhile explanation might have been inserted. This being the case, perhaps the interview may be extended...

These gaps included certain more or less essential precisions that could have --or should have-- been added to the presentation of the stages of my spiritual itinerary, the phases of which have been drawn out over the « arc of a life-time ». I alluded to my original education as a philosopher. That a young philosophy student should encounter German philosophy is nothing unusual. That he embark upon the path of Islamic philosophy, in Arabic and in Persian, on the other hand, is much less to be expected. That he should combine these two paths, this is a rare case indeed. But how did these encounters and convergences come about?

It should come as no surprise to anyone that a philosophy student, having conscientiously made the rounds of the authors included in the undergraduate curriculum, might be eager to explore new continents, ones that do not appear on the charts of an undergraduate philosophy program. Among these was the little explored continent of medieval philosophy, the study of which was to be completely renewed by the research and publications of Etienne Gilson. A bright new dawn was lifting upon this forgotten continent the mere glow of which sufficed to draw the attention of a student eager to further his philosophical adventures. It was in the year 1923-1924, if memory serves, that Etienne Gilson began his incomparable teaching in the Religious Science Section of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. In any case, it was in that year that I began attending his classes.

I would like to capture, once and for all, the dazzling impression made upon me by the classes I followed for several years with Etienne Gilson. It was not his way to begin by having several lines of text translated by a student, then to ask the opinion of the others, before giving one or another run of the mill commentary. Far from it! This was an era when the students came to listen to the Professor, and not to their classmates. For indeed, they didn't question the likelihood that the Professor knew a little more on the subject than they themselves. Gilson read the Latin texts, translated them himself and then brought out their contents, both latent and explicit, in a magisterial commentary that penetrated to the very heart of things. My admiration was such that I resolved to take him as my model, and much later I attempted to give classes, for Islamic philosophy and theology, that I would have wished to hear in that same era, but which no-one was then giving. Among the texts taken up by Etienne Gilson, during those most fecund years, there were translations (from Arabic into Latin) produced by the Toledo School in the 12th century. First among these texts, perhaps, was the famous book by Avicenna: *Liber sextus Naturalium*, the remarkable depth of which was brought out by Gilson's commentary. That was my first contact with Islamic philosophy. I detected therein a certain connivance between cosmology and angelology, (I believe that this interest in and consideration for angelology is something that has stayed with me ever since) which led me to wonder whether it would not be possible to explore this correspondence at greater length and from other angles.

In the meantime however, if I was to proceed in this direction, there was one task in particular that could not be avoided. To go further meant to delve into the texts themselves, and see for myself firsthand. I had, therefore, to learn Arabic. I was, for that matter, encouraged to do so by Gilson himself. That is why, beginning in the fall semester of the year 1926-1927, turning my back upon the *agrégation* [a year of general study in one's field followed by competitive exams to determine one's eligibility to teach in French Secondary Schools and Universities], I chose to enter the *Ecole Nationale des Langues Orientales* [the National Oriental Language School]. Back then it was not the immense "machine" that it has now become. The dimensions of the little building on the Rue de Lille were a perfect illustration of the intimate conditions of the school. It was in fact, still much the same as it had been upon the departure of Silvestre de Sacy. For each language we were only a handful of students, and with my colleague and friend Georges Vajda we were pretty much the only errant philosophers in that venerable establishment. It was this entrance into the Oriental Language School that prepared me for my subsequent entry into the National Library, where I was assigned to work with the Oriental collections from November 1928 onwards. Paradoxically, it was this passage via the [French] National Library that led to my definitive escape Eastwards.

In that very same time period, however, there was yet another teaching capable of diverting a young and ardent philosopher from the common run of programs he had known thus far. This was the teaching of Emile Bréhier. Even now, fifty years later, I have the impression that merely attempting to bring the names of those two masters into proximity is enough to produce sparks. As far as Emile Bréhier was concerned, there was no such thing as Christian philosophy. On this point he was more or less heir to the philosophical conceptions of the *Aufklärung*. And yet all of Etienne Gilson's work went counter to this position. Indeed, it was difficult coming out of a class on Duns Scot, *Doctor subtilis*, to accept that there was no such thing as Christian philosophy. But how can you convert a

perfect rationalist to the idea that the contents of the Holy Books could be the basis and medium for philosophical meditation and investigations? To refuse this concession is to deny both Jewish and Islamic philosophy. Nor can one be sure, having once denied this possibility, that Meister Eckhart and Jacob Boehme could continue to be considered as belonging to the German philosophical tradition. The paradox is somewhat exaggerated, but it merely translates one of those intractable “modes of being” which, as we said in the previous interview, no external human force can hope to alter.

In any event, Emile Bréhier was at that time ensconced in translating and establishing the critical edition of Plotinus’ *Enneads*. In 1922-1923 he had given a lecture series on Plotinus and the *Upanishads*, the windfalls of which continued to be enjoyed by classes in the years that followed. Let us repeat the question: how could a young philosopher, eager for metaphysical adventure, resist the call to investigate the influence and trace elements of Indian philosophy to be found in the works of the founder of Neo-Platonism? Only, to do that, I had to “do” Sanskrit. But I had already decided to “do” Arabic. How to reconcile the two? A choice had to be made. It absolutely had to be one or the other, or at least that was the advice of every philologist and linguist whom I consulted. The philosopher, however, has his own particular rhyme and reason that the philologist does not always understand. Philosopher that I was, it was necessary to opt, in secrecy of course, for the heroic solution. In other words, I began studying both Arabic and Sanskrit. I assure you, it was a great period of mental asceticism, but it was a course of studies that was not to extend beyond two years time. I still draw profit from this period in that, if I happen to read a book of Indian or Buddhist philosophy, the technical Sanskrit terms interpolated within the text are not entirely unfamiliar. Ultimately, however, at the end of the second year of Oriental language study I was to come to a “significant milestone” that would indicate to me a decisive direction from which there was to be no return: from then on, my path was to go by way of Arabic and Persian texts.

I must admit, being the philosopher that I was; become a student of the Arabic language astray among the linguists; I thought I might surely perish for lack of nourishment having nothing but grammar books and dictionaries with which to sustain myself. More than once, at the thought of the substantial nourishment to be had from philosophy, I asked myself: what am I doing here? What have I gotten myself into? There was, however, one final and remarkable refuge left to me. That refuge was Louis Massignon whose teachings made available the very finest substance of Islamic Spirituality. From 1928 onwards Massignon combined his teaching at the Collège de France with the direction of Islamic studies in the Religious Science Section of our *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes*. Little did I then know that I would one day be called upon to succeed him in this office. But the contrast between the methodical and rigorous classes given by an Etienne Gilson and those of a Louis Massignon was “extraordinary” to say the least. Of course, at the beginning of the year the Professor distributed a program with an overview of the general theme of the class in question divided up into a certain number of lessons. But of what use such programs! On occasion lessons took as their starting point a number of the fulgurating intuitions that -- great mystic that he was-- Massignon was especially prodigious in. Then a parenthesis would open up, and then another, and then another... Finally the listener would find him or herself exhausted and lost smack in the middle of the Professor’s grappling with the problems of British politics in Palestine...

But one had to recognize, and not everyone did, that this was simply a necessary aspect of the passion burning inside of Massignon. It was, ultimately, impossible to escape his influence. His fiery soul, his intrepid penetration into the arcane regions of mystical life in Islam, into hitherto unexplored regions and depths, the nobility of his indignations before the shortcomings of this world, all of this inevitably left its impression upon the spirit of his young auditors. It is true that over the course of the years it was impossible not to perceive certain vulnerable sides to his thinking, certain breaches. Indeed, towards the end he was disappointed when his friends were unable to share his political views. But that in no way alters the veneration with which I evoke the memory of Massignon. One thing is certain: he held many surprises in store for the philosopher, for his original education had nothing philosophical about it. Hence the occasional wavering in his vocabulary and even on occasion in his formally stated positions. I have known, on certain occasions, an ultra-Shiite Massignon and I have been greatly indebted to him for it. His studies of Salmân Pâk, of the Mobâhala, of Fâtima, are still veritable mines of intuitions. What remains is to explore and compare and integrate them with the results that have been turned up by the research that has been carried out since then. On other days, however, I found him vituperating Shiism and the Shiites, the great texts of which were still foreign to him. I took their defense, contesting that their conception of the Imamate was in no way “carnal” but that the earthly familial link between the Imams was only an image of their eternal pleromatic connection. It was then Massignon’s turn to be astonished by “my” ultra-Shiism. Was I not undertaking a vast study of Ismaili Gnostic texts? Nevertheless, to his credit he did courageously affirm that Iranian Islam had precisely delivered Islam from any and all racial, ethnic or national attachment, even if, he confessed to me, he had never felt himself quite “at home” therein. Another difficulty: when I did little more than take into consideration the stated intention guiding the project and life’s work of Suhrawardi, “resurrector of the Illuminationist Theosophy of the ancient Persian sages”, there again Massignon was alarmed. Not to “over Mazdeanize” was his recommendation. What to do? Firstly one had to be sure not to choose the wrong day when it came to a subject one wished to discuss. Next, one had better not forget why one had come to see him, but keep a firm hold upon the reigns of the discussion. Having once met these prerequisite conditions, however, one was altogether likely to emerge fully satisfied.

Thus it was that one day, and I believe it was in the course of the 1927-1928 year, I spoke with Massignon of the reasons that had drawn me, as a philosopher, to the study of Arabic, and the questions I had with regards to the connections between the philosophy and mysticism of a certain Suhrawardi (or at least of what I then knew of him by way of a rather meagre German resume)... That day Massignon received an inspiration from the Heavens. He had brought back with him, following a voyage in Iran, a lithographed edition of the principal work of Suhrawardi, *Hikmat al-Ishrâq*: “The Oriental Theosophy”. With the commentaries it was a large volume of more than five hundred pages. “Here, he said to me, I believe that there is something in this book for you”. That “something” was the presence and company of the young Shaykh al-Ishraq and it is something that has not left me over the course of my lifetime. I have always been a Platonist (in the broadest sense of the term, of course). I believe one is born a Platonist, just as one can be born an atheist, a materialist, etc. It is a question of the impenetrable mystery of pre-existential choices. In any case, the young Platonist that I was could not help but burn at the very contact of he who had been the “Imam of the Persian Platonists”. I have spoken so often of him in my books, or in

publishing and translating his works, that I shall add nothing here, except as need be to bring out the essential character.

By my encounter with Suhravardi, my spiritual destiny in my passage through this world was sealed. This Platonism of his expressed itself in terms belonging to the Zoroastrian angelology of Ancient Persia and in so doing illuminated the path I had been searching for. Having made this discovery there was no more need to remain torn between Sanskrit and Arabic. Persia was right there in the centre, as median and mediating world. For Persia, the old Iran, is not only a nation or an empire, it is an entire spiritual universe, a hearth and meeting place in the history of religions. Moreover this world was ready to receive and welcome me. Henceforth the philosopher that I was passed into the rank and file of the Orientalists. Later on, after a long period of instructive experience, I was to explain why it seemed to me that in future it would be the Philosophers and not the Orientalists who would be the only ones capable of assuming responsibility for the “oriental philosophy”.

The great adventure was beginning. Normally, after the License [the French undergraduate diploma] and the graduate diploma in philosophy one registered in classes for the agrégation. It was the wise path, well travelled and with no surprises. It was a path so normal and self evident that a venerable Sorbonne professor (whom I would meet from time to time at friends' gatherings), when once I informed him of my decisions, asked me paternally: “Are you in possession of a personal fortune, or do you simply have time to waste?” I had, thank God, neither one nor the other. But how could one suffer through the classes and the perspectives of the agrégation with this great project in mind: to do for this Iranian philosophical tradition (the great names of which could already be gleaned from the writings of the commentators of Suhravardi) that which Etienne Gilson had done to “resuscitate” Western medieval philosophy? It was perhaps, a wager against the very hazards of Destiny. But I believe that in the long run the Heavens above have granted me their favour and have allowed me to hold true and win that wager.

That then is a brief overview of the « career » of the Orientalist Philosopher, and his decisive encounter with that Iranian land said to be the « color of sky », and « homeland to philosophers and poets ». The interview with Philippe Némo dealt foremost with the coincidence in one and the same person of an Iranologist-Philosopher and a translator of Heidegger. This post-scriptum has as its task to describe another encounter; this time with the old Germany that was also once “homeland to philosophers and poets”. The two encounters are essentially complementary. Now just how did the latter come about?

There are perhaps only a few of us left from among the friends of the astonishing and inimitable Baruzi brothers. The elder brother, Joseph, author of *La Volonté de métamorphose* [The Will or Drive to Metamorphosis], and of *Rêve d'un siècle* [Dream of a Century], was a musicologist whose articles, bearing the fruit of a profound musical thinking, appeared regularly in the review *Le Ménestrel* [The Minstrel]. Jean, the youngest, took twenty years to produce his enormous thesis on Saint John of the Cross --a work that had both its admirers and detractors—and assisted Alfred Loisy at the Collège de France, before becoming chair of Religious History there. There were a pleiad of students who followed his classes with fidelity and fervour, and among them a good number of students from the Faculty of Protestant Theology of the day. It was Jean Baruzi who revealed to us

the theology of the young Luther; a fashionable subject within the world of theological research in Germany at that time. Following upon the young Luther, his classes went on to the great protestant spirituals: Sebastian Franck, Caspar Schwenkfeld, Valentin Weigel, Johann Arndt, etc. Nor did the professor dissimulate any of the difficulties he encountered first hand in his investigations as well as in his presentation of this material, but a veritable surge of spiritual life bore them on. It was all new and captivating. I began to perceive a certain consonance, like the pealing call of far off bells, inviting me to explore the regions of what I was later to call the “phenomenon of the Holy Book”. It was none other than the hermeneutic path already unfurling in the morning fog. If I had resolved, upon hearing the interpretation of Avicenna given by Etienne Gilson, to apply myself to the study of Arabic so that I might go to the original texts and see for myself, it was equally impossible to hear the call of the Spirituals interpreted by Jean Baruzi without taking the decision to enter into that world as well. It was Jean Baruzi who revealed to me and set me upon the path towards a Germany that was home to the philosophers and the “great individuals” of mystical spirituality. My first step was Marburg.

Iran and Germany were thus the geographical reference points of a Quest that, in point of fact, pursued its course in spiritual regions that do not appear upon our maps. I recall them here, to stress what I said at the beginning of my interview with Philippe Némó. The philosopher pursues his Quest –in perfect liberty-- in answer to and following upon the inspiration of the Spirit. My Iranian friends are well aware that I am unable to isolate my friendship for Suhrawardi and his followers from my friendship for a Jacob Boehme and his School. I believe it is this convergence, the very union of what they symbolize, that has made me what I am today.

The circle of friends that had formed around the inseparable Baruzi brothers was already in itself an invitation to dare the adventures of the Spirit. Immensely cultivated, with their sense of the most delicate and subtle values of art and of life, the two brothers were like testaments of another century, eminently representative of a Europe and of a European society that had disappeared with the first and second world wars. I am speaking of a world that we have not succeeded in rebuilding, nor even come close, so obstinate and profound is the grip that the very same demons and possessed individuals prophesied by Dostoïevsky have upon the present era. There were frequent meetings at the Baruzi home on the Place Victor Hugo, meetings and « seminary » sessions led by Jean Baruzi himself that went on late into the evening. One met among the participants all kinds of unexpected European personalities, and there was always among our companions a strong German contingent. Jean Baruzi gave the discussions an air they might have had had they been conducted in the Weimar of Goethe. He was one of those professors who abolished all official distance between teacher and student. Of that initial formal relationship only a deferential friendship subsisted, and it was a friendship that grew year after year. Those who, like myself, have had the privilege of experiencing this type of relationship –one that allows the professor to communicate his or her knowledge infinitely better than in any classroom-- are stupefied these days when they hear students complaining of the inaccessibility of their professors. It is, perhaps, yet another indication of the sad mutation of time.

Marburg an der Lahn! Jean Baruzi was well aware of what he was doing in guiding me to this great place. Indeed, he had himself preceded me there and at which time he had

established bonds of friendship with Rudolf Otto and Friedrich Heiler. How can I describe the overwhelming impression made upon the young philosopher that I was arriving in Marburg at the beginning of July 1930 ? The enchantment of the place, of that “inspired hill” living by and for the University, the magnificent forests surrounding it... I stayed there for over a month. My first visit was with Rudolf Otto, already at that time professor emeritus. Otto was such an important figure in the Liberal Protestant Germany of the day that [despite his semi-retired status] he was engaged in a constant hum of activity. His books on “the Sacred” on “Oriental and Occidental Mysticism”, his profound knowledge of the philosophical and religious schools of India were all so impressive, and more impressive still was the simplicity with which this eminent savant conversed in an admirably classical French. He spoke with me --novice that I was-- as with a young colleague, and this precisely due to my study of Arabic.

Two coincidences worth noting: the first being that, during my stay in Marburg, Rabindranath Tagore happened to arrive as well. I will never forget the diaphanous beauty of the venerable faces of those two Ancients, Rabindranath Tagore and Rudolf Otto, sitting side by side upon the dais of the Aula Magna of the University of Marburg. The second coincidence being that it was exactly in this period that Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn came to Marburg where she held lengthy discussions with Rudolf Otto regarding a project she was considering and to which ultimately Rudolf Otto would lend both the definitive form and meaning. This project having once taken its rightful shape the Ascona Eranos circle was born (I will return to dwell upon this circle and the role it was to have in my life as a researcher a little later). On more than one occasion Olga and I have recalled our respective emotions pressing the buzzer at the entrance of Rudolf Otto’s home.

The students I knew back in those days in Marburg led a remarkably intense theological and philosophical life. There are certain particulars that I do not wish to go into but I should mention the agitation that Rudolf Bultmann’s theology was then beginning to provoke. Additionally, however, there was Friedrich Heiler, (whom we have already mentioned) then Professor in the Faculty of Theology. He was a painful figure, the author of an important book on prayer, aspiring towards the development of a Christianity freed of confessional attachment. There was also my dear departed friend Ambert-Marie Schmidt, who was then working as a French lecturer. Strangely enough, it was he who presented me with my first copy of one of Swedenborg’s works: an edition of the French translation *Du Ciel et de l’Enfer* (Of Heaven and Hell). Ultimately Swedenborg somewhat frightened my pious Calvinist friend, and he no doubt considered that the book was better off in my hands than his own. One way or another, it was at Marburg that I began the marvellous reading of Swedenborg’s work. Having once taken the plunge, his immense oeuvre was to accompany me my entire life. Moreover, this first encounter with and growing interest in Swedenborg was the starting point and basis for my later friendship with Ernst Benz, an eminent specialist in Swedenborgian studies. Benz was later to become Professor at the Faculty of Theology of Marburg, but it was at Eranos, and not Marburg, that we came to know each other, some twenty-eight years ago. Indeed, it is almost as though there existed a permanent path leading from Marburg to Eranos.

Yet another paradox. It was through Professor Theodor Siegfried, who had passed his habilitation with Rudolf Otto, that I first came to hear of Karl Barth. Professor Siegfried

even gave me a copy of Barth's dense commentary upon the Epistle to the Romans. Although Siegfried had alerted me as to the pure formalism to which dialectical theology condemned itself, I nevertheless plunged with passion into the reading of this book; a book that was to impart to me a first presentiment of a great number of things that I had yet to formulate for myself. Indeed, the consequences continued to play themselves out over several years. Heidegger had already left the University of Marburg for that of Freiburg, but there were still two eminent privatdozent in the philosophy department there: Karl Lowith, with whom I had wonderful conversations on the subject of Hamann and the currents connected to his work, and Gerhard Kruger, an expert phenomenologist, at whose seminars I was given a taste of all the problems then fashionable in Germany. When I left Marburg (on pilgrimage to Weimar, and then Eisenach and then Wartburg) I had the impression that I would have to begin my philosophical education all over again. It was at one and the same time an enthusing and a crushing revelation.

This first contact with German philosophy led me to repeated stays in Germany between the years 1931 and 1936. I would like to recall, and not without emotion as I think of all those who have since disappeared (among whom Landsberg and so many others), my stay in Bonn in the springtime of 1932. Karl Barth was there at that time of course, along with the powerful cohort of his students and adepts. The theological discussions went ahead full steam, all the more so as we shared a presentiment of the approaching catastrophe. It was in this era that I translated one of Karl Barth's opuscles: *Die Not der evangelischen Kirche* which translates as *La détresse de l'Eglise protestante* [The Distress of the Protestant Church], although, following the advice of Pierre Maury we finally gave it the title: *Misère et Grandeur de l'Eglise évangélique* [Grandeur and Misery of the Evangelical Church]. Among Karl Barth's colleagues, there was Fritz Lieb, a touching figure by dint of his mystical love for Orthodox Russia, a love so unlimited that he seemed never to have noticed that the Holy Orthodox Russia had for the moment... passed on Heavenwards. Our connection lay in our common friendship with Nicolas Berdiaev, and I have spoken of the spiritual debt I owe to him elsewhere. I remember we found ourselves together, Fritz Lieb and myself and Nicolas Berdiaev, at the latter's home, discussing eschatology one rather dramatic evening in the spring of 1939. I have cited Fritz Lieb here as a representative case: he was at one and the same time an adept of Karl Barth, in love with Weigel, with Paracelsus, and with the Sophiology of P. Serge Boulgakov. More than once I asked him: "My dear Lieb, how can you reconcile this and the other?" – "Oh! It's difficult, it's difficult", he answered, and there were tears in his eyes.

I must also evoke two of my stays in Hamburg where Ernst Cassirer was teaching. Cassirer was a philosopher specializing in the study of symbolic forms. He had a very thorough knowledge of the Cambridge Platonists and was consequently able to reveal to me yet another branch of my spiritual family thereby broadening my path as well as the scope of what I was ultimately searching for; for I still had but an obscure presentiment of what that latter was. What I was looking for was precisely that which was later to become all my philosophy of the *mundus imaginalis*, whose name, as it happens, I owe to our Persian Platonists. Hamburg, as it happens, was also then home to the Warburg Institute with all the resources of its library. It was in the Spring of 1934 that I made my first visit to Heidegger in Freiburg. On that same occasion we drew up a plan for the collection of opuscles and excerpts that I was to translate under the title "*Qu'est ce que la métaphysique?*" [What is

metaphysics?] One had, after all, to begin by a limited project. Then the generosity of Julien Cain, the National Library Administrator, accorded me a sabbatical leave allowing me to pass the university year of 1935-1936 in Berlin at our Franzosiches Akademikerhaus. The director there was my friend Henri Jourdan, whom I had known as a lecteur at the University of Bonn. In July 1936 my wife and I visited Freiburg, where I was able to submit to our author several of the translation difficulties that I was having. Heidegger, however, had every confidence in me, approved all of my French neologisms and in so doing left me a rather heavy responsibility (I have evoked this visit to Freiburg in the previous interview).

Upon my return, I found that my Germanic experiences had widened my circle of friends back in Paris. I would like to tell how much my friendship with Alexandre Koyré meant to me. His was one of the most beautiful minds I have known. Originally renowned for his monumental work on Jacob Boehme, he was later known for a whole range of eminent publications on the history of the sciences, and the astronomical revolution. Because of his work on Boehme and other publications concerning those Spirituals that, as it happened, Jean Baruzi also studied, many imagined that Alexandre Koyré was himself a great mystical theosopher. He was, however, a man of tremendous modesty and discretion concerning his intimate convictions. Often a sudden tirade gave the impression of agnosticism, or even of a hopeless nihilism. In fact, my friend Koyré took his secret with him. I say it, not without emotion, for I was the last of his colleagues from the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes to take his hand at the clinic, on the eve of his death.

What I wish to say in homage to his memory, is that... to begin with, he was certainly different from Jean Baruzi, the friend and companion of his students and listeners at the Ecole des Hautes-Etudes. Most of Koyré's classes finished at the Harcourt, the historic, comfortable café on the corner of the place de la Sorbonne and the boulevard Saint Michel. It is now long gone, our Café d'Harcourt. Shortly after the war I discovered it had been transformed into an edifying bookstore and then still later I saw that it had become a shoe and clothing store! It was there, at the Café Harcourt that a significant part of the French philosophy of the time was elaborated. Hegel and the renewal of Hegelian studies in particular were of central concern. Around Koyré there were Alexandre Kojève (Kojevnikov), Raymond Queneau, myself, philosophers like Fritz Heinemann, indeed many of our Israelite colleagues had chosen to live in exile and their heart-rending accounts informed us of the sad train of events in Germany. Discussion sometimes became very heated. Kojève and Heinemann were in complete disaccord upon the interpretation of the phenomenology of Spirit. There were frequent clashes between the phenomenology of Husserl and that of Heidegger. On other occasions we would provoke Queneau: "just how did he go about writing a novel? Did he draw up a plan? Did he just let things flow?" While I can't make mention here of all the names of those I hold in my memory, I also can't omit to mention my old friend Bernard Groethuysen, our incomparable Socrates, a central and unforgettable figure in the soirées held by Alexandre Koyré and his wife in their little apartment on the rue de Navarre. Groethuysen's humour seemed to prevail upon the vicissitudes of the times as well as our worries. It was he who inaugurated "philosophical anthropology" (his great work carrying this title remains unfinished) and it was ultimately thanks to his tenacity that my translation of Heidegger appeared on the shelves, for at that time this "unknown" philosopher was of only mediocre interest to the publishers.

The program for the next volume of the review *Recherches philosophiques* [Studies in Philosophy] always occupied a central position in the course of those soirées on the Rue de Navarre. We have nothing like it today. The courageous publisher Boivin shouldered the entire weight of the six large annual volumes of some five hundred pages. For a large number of us these volumes represented a kind of precious laboratory. If the student, research-worker or specialist of today should happen to consult them, he or she will find that rarely has such a pleiad of philosophers been assembled, nor such a number and variety of new subjects been addressed. It goes without saying that among these new subjects, phenomenology held a most significant place.

Phenomenology was also most often the centre of debate during the long soirées held by Gabriel Marcel. Among those present were the philosophers Le Senne, Louis Lavelle (as pleasing to listen to as annoying to read), and then just as in Koyré's circle, many Israelite colleagues having fled Germany. "Jaspers and Heidegger" was another conflictual subject the contingencies of which led to our dear Gabriel Marcel's frequent and ever identical high-pitched exclamation. "In my opinion this is a very serious problem... very serious indeed". And the accumulated grievousness weighed heavier and heavier upon our cogitations.

There was also the group of New Protestant Theologians, who had established their headquarters in the locals of the Publishing House "Editions « Je sers »", which at that time had its seat on the rue du Four. Of course, in a country like ours, the attendance was necessarily limited, but we were in the end answering an imperative dictated by our most intimate convictions. At that time we had every hope that Karl Barth might bring about a renewal of Protestant theology. In the year 1931-1932 we founded (Denis de Rougemont, Roland de Pury, Albert-Marie Schmidt, Roger Jezequel and myself) a small review entitled *Hic et Nunc*, and advanced with the kind of juvenile brutality that causes consternation not only among one's elders, but ultimately in the young themselves; after life has taught them a thing or two and they in turn are elders. We shared Keyserling's conviction that "Karl Barth and his friends hold in their hands the future of Protestantism." Alas! Our illusions were to come tumbling down from great heights, and if dear Rudolf Otto had still been with us, he could have taken me by the hand, led me back to Schleiermacher and said: "Didn't I tell you this would happen?"

I quickly became uncomfortable with « barthism » and dialectical theology. Subsequently we adopted Kierkegaard and Dostoïevsky as spiritual forefathers. That was good, but it was not enough to jar philosophy in the way that my friends intended to. On the other hand Suhrovardi had already shown me a sign, warning me that since this « jarring » operated at the expense of a philosophy that no longer merited the name, it was necessary to rediscover the Sophia of another philosophy. It is very difficult to measure the responsibility of a man and of his work with respect to the work he produces thereafter. But ultimately, it is impossible not to see the distance separating the commentary of the *Römerbrief* [Epistle to the Romans], with its prophetic sparks, and the heavy, colossal Dogmatic, composed by Karl Barth in later years. A new "dogmatic"? No, truthfully, it was not at all what we had been waiting for; and so it was that we seemed to lag behind the "Barthiens" of the final hour. I had communicated to Karl Barth my first Oriental publication: a formal with an accompanying translation of Suhrovardi's *Bruissement des ailes de Gabriel* [The Rustling

of Gabriel's Wings]. He read it and spoke with me about it later with a sort of well meaning smile, pronouncing the words « natural theology ». And it went no further than that. I was quite taken aback and in fact wrote him on this subject (perhaps it is my letter of 1936 that is conserved in the "Barth-Archive" in Basel). In the interim there was his memorable visit to Paris in 1934. I had the opportunity to speak with him of my interest for the "speculative theologians" of the beginning of the 19th century, those that we called the Hegelians of the Right and who read Hegel in the same manner that they read Meister Eckhart. In particular I mentioned Philippe Marheineke, in whom I had been especially interested. I can still see Barth's astonished wonderment and hear his voice asking me: "You have read Marheineke, Mr. Corbin ?". I discerned in him a discrete sympathy for this « speculative » theologian that has remained difficult for me to explain. Marheineke has, in fact, been quite completely if unjustly forgotten, though one day he could conceivably become of renewed and topical interest. This sympathy, however, remained Karl Barth's secret, ultimately creating a gulf between his "dialectical theology" and this Hegelian theology of the Right. It is important to remember that this Hegelianism was vigorously opposed to rationalism, something easily forgotten when the grand majority of our translations mistakenly give "reason" as the equivalent of Vernunft, even though this word refers to the Greek word Noos. The entire Hegelian and Post-Hegelian climate would change if we kept this reference in mind.

For the moment, I had come to a first rather disastrous realization. "Religious science" had been in large part the work of Protestant theologians. And yet the theology of Karl Barth professed the most profound disdain for both religious science and the study of religious history. It naively opposed other religions as the products of human effort, while Christianity had been the descent and initiative of God towards humanity, going so far as to maintain that for this reason Christianity should not even be understood as a "religion". This, of course, is nothing very original, indeed something along the same lines had been said in Islam, well before Karl Barth. To this, as to the legal theologians of Islam, I have a single identical response: it is the answer provided by Ibn 'Arabi and his school. Barthian dialectical theology deliberately opted for complete ignorance of the *res religiosa*, averring itself incapable of envisioning the task of a "general theology of religions" the urgency of which is becoming more and more evident. It is just such a general theology that serves as background to the vast horizon of the cycle of prophetic religion, as the latter is represented in Shiite gnosis, and more specifically by Haydar Amoli in the 14th century. There where, along with Keyserling, we had seemed to see the promise of a new future, we beheld rather the emergence of a "theology of the death of God", followed by a "theology of revolution", and then another "theology of the death of God", and then a "theology of revolution" and then a "theology of class struggle" identifying the latter with the evangelical message. Even in the darkest hours that preceded the Second World War, no one would have dared imagine such a spectacle.

I myself might well have been dragged into that same mess if between times there hadn't arisen one of those decrees issued in the Invisible by the Invisible; if I had not been drawn aside, into a complete philosophical and theological solitude, which allowed an altogether different philosophy and theology to take root in me. There is something that has been systematically ignored throughout the centuries of our dogmas and confessions of faith. I am referring to an intimate and secret solidarity between the "esoteric" core of all the

“Religions of the Book”. If a devastated Christianity has succumbed to the perils of History and historicism, a lengthy pilgrimage through the domains of another of the “Religions of the Book”, namely the world Shiite gnosis in its two forms (Duoceciman Imamism, and Ismailism) will lead one to Christianity’s rediscovery. One will discover a Christianity having its permanent place in the cycle of prophetic religion and yet differing so extensively from the official forms of Historic Christianity that one will have difficulty explaining it to the profane. That said, I may now begin telling the tale of the long years of pilgrimage that kept me far from Europe over the course of its historical tragedy.

Clearly, it is not the external developments of this history, parading across the stage that was Istanbul in those dark years, to which I am referring here but rather to the history of the Malakut. In the springtime of 1939, I was sent on assignment to collect photocopies of all the manuscripts of Suhrawardi that could be found dispersed amongst the libraries of Istanbul, in view of a critical edition of his works in Arabic and Persian. The assignment was officially meant to begin on the 1st of September 1939. On that date, however, the project and its objective appeared very fragile amidst all the unbridled events then taking place. Nevertheless, after much discussion and accompanied by the paternal anxieties of Julien Cain, my wife and I left for Istanbul on the 30th of October 1939. The assignment was officially meant to last three months. In fact it lasted six years, right up until September 1945. In the course of those years (during which time I served as caretaker and custodian to our little French Institute of Archeology the operations of which were then more or less suspended), I learned the inestimable virtues of Silence: of that which initiates call the « discipline of the arcane », (in Persian ketmân). One of the virtues of this Silence was to place me, one on one as it were, in the company of my invisible Sheikh, Shihâboddîn Yahyâ Suhrawardî, martyred in 1191, at the age of thirty-six, which was, as it happened, my own age at the time. I translated his Arabic texts day in and day out, guided only by Suhrawardi’s own commentators and followers, and consequently escaping the exterior influence of the theological and philosophical schools of our days. At the end of those years of retreat, I had become an Ishrâqî, and the printing of the first tome of the works of Suhrawardî was almost ready. I didn’t have much opportunity to speak of such matters with most of those around me, although there were a few people, such as my Turkish friends of Bektashi origin, with whom (thankfully) such discussions were possible. Indeed for just such conversation Yahya Kemal has been indelibly etched in my memory.

But Istanbul was Byzantium! It was Constantinople! In the same way that the Temple of Solomon was the centre of Jerusalem, the temple of Saint Sophia was the centre of the second Roman Empire. Over the course of the previous years the American expert Whitemore had dedicated himself assiduously to the restoration of the mosaics. To visit Saint Sophia in the company of Whitemore was at one and the same time a privilege, an adventure and a pilgrimage. He was at home there --the guardian of the Temple-- and would give one the royal tour, stationing himself there with you (the time flowing by unchecked), before the marvellously liberated splendour of the interior light of the mosaics. One had to be in his company for him to draw your attention to a late drawing, high up on the interior western wall, serving as cipher to the secret of the Temple of Sophia. The drawing presented a little cupola that one acceded to in seven stages: an evocation of the seven pillared Temple of Wisdom (Prov. 9/1). “Say to Sophia, that you are my sister, and call the Intelligence your friend” (Prov. 7/4). An Ishrâqî is, by definition, a spontaneous

Sophiologist. The Temple of Saint Sophia was itself the Temple of the Holy Grail for me, or at least an exemplification of the archetype of that Temple which has been intuited by so many of those on the path of gnosis. In the vast chamber that would have once been the sacristy, there was a precious collection of Arabic and Persian manuscripts. I often went to work there, and while crossing through the Temple I would gently hum the themes of the Grail and of the mystical Last Supper of Wagner's Parsifal. The subtle presence of this invisible Sophianic chivalry (a chivalry that was also known to the Persian Platonists) has never left me, and indeed, one will find an indication of that which it has inspired in me in my most recent projects and research.

I could not return to France, however, without first setting foot in my country of choice, in my chosen hearth, homeland as it was to my invisible Sheykh, Suhravardi. In August of 1944 I received a mission order for Persia from what was then still the "Government of Algiers". Unfortunately, because I needed someone to stand in for me at our Institute of Archeology in Istanbul while I was gone on assignment I was forced to wait until 1945 before I could carry it out. Once again the project was meant to last three months, but here we are and it has been underway for over thirty years now. Back then the trip from Istanbul to Teheran was an adventure. There was the "strategic" railway to Baghdad: no platform at the terminal, you simply stepped off the train onto the track. Then one went by car from Baghdad to Teheran across the Zagreus Mountain Chain. It was an exhausting but exalting trip. The Teheran that welcomed us, on the 14th of September 1945, had little in common with the Teheran of today. The city's dimensions were those of one of our prefectures with somewhere around eight hundred thousand inhabitants. Today the surface of the city has increased upwards of tenfold. That which used to be the north has become the south. That which was then still desert is now an immense city in quadrants of magnificent treed boulevards, and the population has risen upwards of three million inhabitants. Back then the little doroshki (one horse carriages) could still manage in the midst of the traffic. Now, however, with more than a million vehicles the traffic is infernal and defies all chronological forecasts. All of this, together with the creation and growth of a middle class that was then non-existent, is symptomatic of the prodigious mutation that Iran has undergone in the course of a single generation. It has been amazing to witness, but here again these are only external facts that I am evoking.

I have given an account of my Iranian mission goal, and of how I set about working through all those long projects and vast arenas of thought, in a little text entitled *De la Bibliothèque Nationale à la Bibliothèque Iranienne* [From the National Library to the Iranian Library] and which you will find reproduced within this same volume [the *Cahier de l'Herne*]. I therefore needn't repeat myself here. I do however still need to evoke the warm welcome my projects received among my Iranian friends. It was a welcome that had considerable influence upon the French authorities' decision to create a "Department of Iranology" as annex to the new "French Institute" that had been founded by the ministry of French Cultural Relations and inaugurated in Teheran at the beginning of the Fall semester of 1947.

The moment had finally come: I was to carry out the project that had been germinating in my spirit ever since my attendance, all those many years ago, in the classes taught by Etienne Gilson. The tasks at hand: collect the materials, create a working office and begin

publishing. The working conditions in Teheran at that time were not those of today. One did not then find huge collections of catalogued manuscripts. There were libraries at the time of course, but catalogues were rare or nonexistent. In a way this was a stroke of good luck, for indeed it is true that lucky chance has a habit of favouring the obstinate researcher. It was then that I began the publication of the Bibliothèque Iranienne [the Iranian Library], and I have since been able to carry it through (over the course of twenty five years and with the help of several collaborators), to its twenty-second volume. Each volume, made entirely on site, demanded a small tour de force. Essentially, the collection consisted of texts that had remained hitherto unpublished, both in Persian and in Arabic. Each volume was accompanied either by an integral translation or at the very least by an ample introduction, thereby permitting the non-Orientalist philosopher to draw the greatest profit possible from each volume. I believe that this collection, the volumes of which are almost all currently out of print, has succeeded in setting a trend of sorts. At that time, the only people with whom I could carry on a discussion about Suhrawardi, or Molla Sadra or many, many others, were venerable Sheikhs. Today there is an entire pleiad of young researchers who have heartily taken up the cause of this traditional philosophy. I do not wish to dissimulate the difficulties involved. To create or recreate a philosophical tradition; to put at its disposition all the conceptual and lexicographical armature needed... For such a project, clearly, many generations are required. That said, it is worth mentioning another symptom of the present day, of a whole other order this time: In modern Teheran there are large, central avenues bearing the names of our philosophers! One of the most beautiful is "Suhrawardi Avenue". One wouldn't have dared imagine it thirty years ago. Within the same time period, back in the "Western world" concessions had had to be made before overwhelming evidence: Islamic philosophy had not stopped in the 12th century with Averroës, on the contrary, Iranian Islamic Philosophy formed a veritable continent the exploration of which had been completely neglected. Today, I know of young philosophers who have begun to assimilate these new domains. Indeed, the names of Suhrawardi and others, appear in their student's dissertations, and that is something truly new! It was in Teheran, in the spring of 1954, that I received news that the Section of Religious Sciences was calling me to succeed Louis Massignon as Head of Islamic studies. Dear Massignon was aware of the decision, and I, for my part, was aware of his concerns over our differences of opinion. He nevertheless considered me to be the candidate closest to himself with regards to prolonging the direction of his research at the school, if not by its specific content, then at least with regards to its meaning and spirit. In the meantime (in the spring of 1949 to be exact), I had received yet another invitation the consequences of which can be felt, in the rhythm and in the program of my research, to this day.

I am alluding to the invitation sent to me by Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn, inviting me to participate in the Eranos circle that she had founded in 1932, in Ascona (in Ticino on the shore of Lago Majoro). I have already mentioned the part that Rudolph Otto had in inspiring this project. My participation was to consist of two lectures of one hour each, in the month of August 1949. I had no idea at that time that this participation was to be repeated on a regular basis over more than a quarter of a century. I have described the concept of Eranos, that which renders the spirit and ultimate aim of Eranos unique, as I see it, in a little text that is reproduced in the present Cahier de L'Herne. Certainly what the Eranos circle was able to bring to each of the some one hundred and fifty participants whose lectures have succeeded each other over almost half a century now, varies a great deal. There are those

who merely passed through, over the course of one or two years, no more. In these cases some mysterious indefinable sign warned that neither their nature nor their demeanour were in harmony with the aim underlying the Eranos circle: an aim that was itself difficult to define. On the other hand, as the years went by and without any kind of premeditation, there was a small group of participants who became the very cornerstones and primary support of the concept of Eranos. As for the decisive role that Eranos played in relation to each of these individuals, it consisted firstly in demanding that they master the area of their specialty. In this way, Eranos was to draw them on towards an integral spiritual liberty. The gradual discoveries each one of us thereby made ultimately allowed us to speak from the very depths of ourselves. All ecclesiastical and academic orthodoxies, of whatever confessional caste, were and are completely foreign to the Eranos circle. The “training” that we acquired there, towards becoming frankly and integrally one’s self, evolved into a habit that one never lost, even if this in itself could be somewhat of a perilous attribute due to the rarity of it. Each session’s conferences have been published in a compact volume in three languages. In 1978 the collection attained its 45th volume, and now constitutes a veritable encyclopedia for the use of researchers in the “symbolic sciences”. For the participants themselves, each of these volumes represented something like a laboratory, where we attempted the trial-efforts of a new branch of research. For almost all of us, these initial essays were later to become books.

The underlying spirit of the Eranos circle was nourished and reinforced by the constant exchange of opinions and perspectives among its members. Symbolic of the this circle was our Round-Table beneath the Cedar tree, and the friendships that were created there. Rudolf Otto, who had in the very beginning helped Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn define the concept of Eranos, never actually participated in the sessions themselves. On the other hand, Carl-Gustav Jung was for many years something like their tutelary genius. Many listeners were drawn from Zurich to hear his lectures, and the latter were often, in fact, the preliminary draughts and outlines of the books he was then in the process of writing. My encounters with C-G Jung were unforgettable. We had long conversations in Ascona and in Küsnacht, as well as in Jung’s castle stronghold in Bollingen, where I was led one day by my friend Carl-Alfred Meier. But how can I properly describe those conversations so as not to leave even the slightest ambiguity? I was a metaphysician, not a psychologist. Jung was a psychologist and not a metaphysician, (although one might say he often mixed with metaphysics). Our educations and our respective aims were altogether different. Nevertheless, we understood each other and so had the pleasure of engaging in lengthy and profitable dialogues. When it first appeared, Jung’s “Answer to Job” was ferociously torn apart by critics from a whole variety of confessional faiths. Subsequently, I decided to give what I felt to be a faithful interpretation in a long article that, as it turned out, was to win me his lasting friendship. This article made of him, in some manner, an interpreter of the Sophia and of Sophiology. I am altogether prepared to say that Jung’s teaching and conversation could be an inappreciable gift to any metaphysician and to any theologian, upon condition that they dissociate themselves at the moment needed. Indeed, this is something that reminds me of one of André Gide’s precepts: “Now Nathanaël, throw away your book...” On the comic side, Jung vigorously defended himself against charges of his being a “Jungian”. For my part, I was friends with Jung, but I was never a « Jungian ». I clarify this point, because for many superficial or naïve readers, it suffices that one refer several times to a given author to be considered one of his or her adepts.

What was immediately striking about Jung (and I mean about Jung as a psychologist), was the rigour with which he spoke of the soul and the reality of the soul; in short, his rebellion against the dissolution of the soul to which Freud's analysis, the laboratories of psychology and so many other inventions in which our agnostic world is so fertile, joyously conducted. Is it not symptomatic of some underlying ailment that from among the technical terms employed by Jung such as "collective unconscious" or "process of individuation", here in France we seem to have retained only the first, and in so doing have put the accent upon the word "collective"? It is to be feared that the misunderstanding involved (whether still at a partial stage or in fact already at the point of complete and utter confusion), is bound to continue. With this reserve plainly stated and kept in mind, however, we wish to point out and to properly valorize what Jung was the first to discern and to express by the concepts of Animus and Anima (even if unfortunately the use that was later made of these terms bears little resemblance to the original, but instead makes of these concepts something like a little automatic device that one applies come what may to whatever case). In fact, with these concepts and with his work in general, the path upon which Jung placed us was that which leads to the discovery of the internal Imago. To recognize upon the face the lines and the brilliance of this Imago, is not to agitate oneself in vain in an external quest for the inaccessible, but rather to understand that this Imago is first present in myself and that it is this internal presence that allows me to recognize it in the external world. Later I was to become absorbed in the metaphysics of the active Imagination ("Imagination agente") and by what my Iranian philosophers led me to call the "imaginal world" in order to differentiate it from the purely imaginary. In actual fact, the imaginal world, (world of imaginal Forms, or mundus imaginalis this being the literal equivalent of the Arabic *alam a-mithal*) remains one of my central preoccupations. But I was forced to take note of the following. All that the psychologist says of the Imago, acquires a metaphysical meaning for the metaphysician. In turn, all that the metaphysician says will be interpreted by the psychologist in psychological terms. From whence the possible misunderstandings. This is why, as I said above, having once shared the information at each other's disposal, one has to accept the inevitable separation when the time comes.

And this stands true for all of C.G. Jung's admirable research. His works on alchemy are founded upon immense documentation, and anyone doing research in alchemy needs to read and sound their depths. In the course of his research, Jung seized upon the idea of a "world of spiritual bodies". His intuition was profoundly accurate. This world of subtle bodies has been rigorously defined and situated by traditional Islamic theosophers: it is the median world where the spirit takes body and where bodies are spiritualized. More precisely, it is the mundus imaginalis, the world of the Soul, the *Malakut*, first world of the Angel. Unfortunately, regardless of his or her interest in the restorative will and capacity of the Soul and the world of the Soul, the Western psychologist still lacks the seat or metaphysical framework that ontologically assures the functioning of this mediating world. Such a framework is essential because it preserves the imaginal from the derailings and divagations of the imaginary, of hallucination and of madness. It is because of this that I have had to radically differentiate the imaginal and the imaginary. But because this radical and decisive differentiation is seldom admitted, I prefer to avoid speaking of the Angel and of angelology in the company of psychologists, despite the significant place the latter hold in my research. Simply compare the interpretation of the visions of the prophets given by a Kabbalist or that offered through the *ta'wil* of Shiite gnosis, with the analysis that a

psychologist will give them. There is a tremendous gulf between the two. The loss of the imaginal in the West is symptomatic of the entire current issued from Descartes and P. Mersenne opposing the Cambridge Platonists, and all that Jacob Boehme, Swedenborg, and Oetinger represent. We, on the other hand, must wage a “combat for the Soul of the world”. Jungian psychology may serve to prepare the battleground, but a victorious issue shall depend upon other arms than those of psychology.

I have insisted upon the example and the considerable work of C.-G. Jung partly because the sympathy that exists between us is no secret, but also because I feel it necessary to dispel any ambiguity that might make of me the psychologist that I am not, or cast upon me the suspicion of a “psychologism” that I have always actively opposed. That said, the Eranos sessions were the occasion for many memorable encounters and the starting point of many friendships. Adolf Portmann, expert in the domain of the Natural Sciences (in the spirit of Goethe), Gerhard van der Leuw, the great Netherlandish phenomenologist of the *res religiosa*; D.T. Suzuki, the expert in Zen Buddhism; Victor Zuckerkandl, an incomparable phenomenologist of musical discourse; Ernst Benz, to whom no religious movement is foreign either past or present; my friends Mircea Eliade, Gilbert Durand, James Hillman... how to name them all? I must, however, rank among the very first of these my friend Gerschom Scholem, to whom Kabbalistic studies owe their complete renewal. His monumental work is for us, not only an unlimited resource but one that carries with it an imperative message we cannot ignore: we must no longer consider the “esoterisms” of the three great “Religions of the Book” as isolated phenomena.

It was in Teheran, in the springtime of 1954, that I received the news that following a vote held by the counsel for the Religious Sciences Section of the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* I was being called upon to succeed Louis Massignon. On the one hand of course I felt an immense joy at the prospect, but on the other hand I was faced with a troubling anxiety. At that time my research and publications in Teheran were beginning to meet with success. Our little department of Iranology had begun to make its vitality felt, but it was not yet ready to change hands. What would become of it if my return to Paris necessitated its abandonment? Then a convenient administrative solution was found. Combining the holiday time with a regular leave of absence, it was possible for me to retain practically all of the Fall semester to continue my work in Teheran. Thus, year in and year out I would fly to Teheran in September and remain in residence there until December. This perennial perpetuation of my Iranian life was a decisive factor in both the orientation and the content of my teaching at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes*, which certainly wouldn't have been what it was had I not thus kept in contact with my Iranian friends and colleagues. I was thus led to stay abreast of my Iranian friend's publications, to follow through with my own ongoing publications in the *Bibliothèque Iranienne* [Iranian Library] series, and to continue to add to and enrich my collection of photocopied manuscripts. The majority of my classes at the *Hautes Etudes* concentrated on unpublished manuscripts. Each year I gave a long resumé of the work carried out in these classes in the *Annuaire* or *Journal* of our Religious Science Section. The progression of my research is thus easy to follow.

From time to time I would hear of rumours deploring that I had transformed the section placed under my direction into a Chair of Shiite studies. If this critique was ever actually stated as such, it could only have been formulated on the basis of an entirely faulty

perspective. Our Religious Science Section is not a Faculty of Theology with a program divvying up the teaching of dogmas. On the contrary, it is a centre for research that I believe to be unique in the world with regards to the “religious sciences”. Each of us [faculty members] freely chooses the orientation we wish our individual research and teaching to take, choosing the direction that appears to us to be of the most urgent necessity: either because this direction has previously been particularly disregarded, or because the apparition of new documents necessitates a modification of all previously acquired positions. I believe that at that time the study of Duodeciman Shiism, Ismailism and Sufi metaphysics was indeed of urgent necessity and that from both points of view.

Nor was I surprised if my publications provoked a certain degree of astonishment (when it was not outright sceptical resistance). No one had ever heard that there was a specific and original Shiite philosophy. Similarly unknown or simply unheard of were the new Ismaili treaties (only recently published at that time), let alone the few ancient manuscripts that had become providentially accessible over the years. Ignoring what was really at stake, no one had taken this domain seriously. The western world had remained unaware of Suhrawardi’s great project to “resuscitate the theosophy of the ancient Persian sages”. In actual fact, this project had had a significant impact, leaving its impression upon much of later Iranian thought. All of this was, at that time, systematically ignored. We were familiar with the pious ascetics of Mesopotamia in the first centuries of the Hegira but we had barely given any attention to the diversity of what must properly be referred to as the “metaphysics of Sufism”; that of an Ibn Arabi, of a Najmuddin Kobra, a Semnani, of a Haydar Amoli, etc. On the one hand we had identified Islamic mysticism with Sufism. On the other hand we had made Shiism into an adversary of mysticism, because of its sometime severity with respect to a certain Sufism. What we didn’t then know was that Islamic mysticism and tasawwof are not entirely convergent. In fact, there is an entire Shiite mysticism and theosophy (‘erfan-e shii) outside of Sufism and even outside of the specifically Shiite Sufi tara’iq (congregations) ... and this because the peculiar situation of the Shiite believer, contrary to that of the Sunnite believer, places him or her, by definition, upon the mystical path (tariqa). In all fairness, of course, it should be remembered that the great Shiite orafa or mystical theosophers --such as Molla sadra Shirazi and many others-- were the subject of much meddlesome interference on the part of their colleagues whom one must paradoxically refer to as a kind of Shiite clergy. But this only serves to bring them closer, by virtue of a common fate, to their Gnostic compatriots of all times and all places.

These lines merely evoke a few aspects of the immense task facing me if I was to carry out the project that had been germinating in my spirit ever since those days when I had been a young student in Etienne Gilson’s classes. I made myself, not a five year, but a twenty year plan. I must say that that plan and those twenty years were pretty much full up in terms of scheduling, and I can only thank Heaven that I am still being permitted to pursue the realization of my projects, even now in emeritis annis. I have told how I conceived of my task in a collective volume published by my colleagues at the Religious Science Section. It was, at one and the same time, “a program and a testament” (the text is reproduced under the latter title in the present Cahier de L’Herne). I need not attempt yet another overview of this program here, just as I am unable, in such a post-scriptum, to resume the central thesis of my various.

What I still need to say is as follows : one does not live for over thirty years in contact with the very best of what the philosophy and spirituality of a culture has produced, namely those of a spiritual universe such as the Iranian world, without acquiring its coloration. Of course, I am and will remain a Westerner (in the terrestrial sense of this word) because it is perhaps specifically as a Westerner that I have succeeded in accomplishing that which I was given to accomplish. On the other hand, and this is something that every philosopher well knows: one cannot succeed in producing a book on Plato, for example, except on condition of being a Platonist, at least while one is writing. This is something that the Historians of Religion have much more difficulty understanding. I recall once, in the course of an international conference, some twenty years ago, a colleague from a distant country, hearing me express myself upon Shiism in the terms I ordinarily use, whispered to his neighbor : « How can one speak of a religion in such terms, when it is not one's own ? » But then, in precisely what does the « adoption » of a religion or a philosophy consist? Unfortunately, there are those who can only think in terms of « conversion » ; that is, in terms of a process that would permit them to assign you a collective label. No. To speak of « conversion » is to have understood nothing of « esotericism ». A philosopher knows very well that to be a Platonist is not to register one's self in some Platonic Church, and even less to prohibit one's self from also being anything else besides a Platonist. Each and every 'Orafa, whether from the East or from the West, cannot but think and weigh things in terms of interiority and interiorization, which means making in one's self a permanent accommodation and abode for the philosophies and the religions towards which one's Quest conducts one. And such a one must keep his or her secret: *Secretum meum mihi*. A secret that belongs to the Castle of the Soul. It is not through some external sociological choice that he will outwardly manifest this profound internal reality. It is in the "personal" work that he produces, the exteriorization of which results from the concordance of all of his or her "modes of being". The "community", the *omma* of the esotericists, found in all places and in all times, is the "inner Church", and there is no confessional act of adherence required for one to be a part of it.

But it is precisely this inner connection that is the true connection because it is not such as can be prescribed and is moreover invulnerable, and because it is in this sole case that one may truly say that the mouth speaks of the abundance of the heart ». And that is, I believe, what put my Iranian friends perfectly at ease in tendering to me, in return for those long years of labour dedicated to a shared love, a friendship free of all calculation, a friendship that was and continues to be, and here I am reminded of all those who have already departed, the treasure of a long life. This friendship manifested itself in a most moving way when, in 1973, I reached what we call the "age limit". This time, it seemed like I would really have to say my goodbyes to Iran. But no. For at that precise moment, quite providentially, the "Iranian Academy of Philosophy" came into being and welcomed me as a member. This institution proposed at one and the same time to train young Iranian researchers in Philosophy and to enable philosophers from all other countries to undertake studies in Iran. It was a double task, both urgent and far reaching in its perspective. Books are published, classes and conferences given. Thus, having left my Department of Iranology at the French Institute to its own destiny, I was able to continue to spend the fall session of each year in Teheran where I continued teaching at the "Academy of Philosophy". I have already alluded to the privilege that was accorded me at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes* --allowing me to continue giving lectures, even in *emeritus annis*, to the last

breath if I so wished. And so it is that I continue to divide my activities between Paris and Teheran; ongoing activities that I hope will permit me to carry several large projects through to their completion.

Among these large unfinished tasks, priority and pride of place must be given to a project mentioned in this Cahier de l'Herne in the article written by my eminent colleague and friend Sayyed Jalâloddîn Ashtiyânî, professor at the Faculty of theology of the University of Mashhad. In the Iran of today Professor Ashtiyânî is certainly the one man most representative of the philosophical lineage of Mollâ Sadrâ. The extent and magnitude of the material he has collected is prodigious. Devoted day in and day out to his task he is a sort of Mollâ Sadrâ redivivus as well as being a prolific 'erfânî philosopher. Our project was first elaborated in 1964-1965. In response to those who, ever since Ernest Renan, had considered that the destiny of Islamic philosophy went no further than the 12th century and the death of Averroës, as we recalled above, our project consisted in producing a vast Anthology of Iranian philosophers from the 17th century to our day. Mr. Ashtiyânî was to take care of the collection and presentation of the texts; I for my part was to give the quintessence in French, in such a way that the non-Orientalist Western philosophers could at last be informed. Some of these texts had been previously published in lithographed copies, but the great majority were still unpublished manuscripts.

We foresaw five large in-octavo tomes. We now believe there will be seven. The first two tomes have already appeared. The printing of the Arabic and Persian section of the third is now complete (some 800 pages), and that of tome four is in the works. I am currently in the process of gathering the French sections together in independent volumes that will thus present the Iranian Islamic Philosophy within the perspective of its continuity. We are bringing to light and making available the works of some forty philosophers. As vast as the dimensions of this edifice may be however, the collection is still far from complete. Indeed, due to the magnitude of their philosophical production, certain independent Schools had to be left out. This is why we have persuaded our Shaykhi friends themselves to produce an Anthology of their great mashâyekh. The successors of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsâ'î (1826), whom we can group under the denomination of the "Kermani School", have been highly prolific, and have more than a thousand titles to their name. These joint efforts should finally make possible an appreciation of the depth, originality and diversity of the philosophy and mystical theosophy that has come to flourish in the Shiite Islam of Iran, or, if one prefers, the particular form with which Iran has come to illustrate Shiite Islam.

What we may rightly find amazing is that we in the West are only now beginning to speak of all this. Certainly, due to the translations (of Arabic treatises) produced in the 12th centuries, specialists in medieval philosophy have long interested themselves in those Islamic philosophers whom (following the example of our Scolastics) they persisted in qualifying as "arab philosophers" thereby creating a dangerous confusion between the notions of "Islamism" and "Arabism". On the other shore of the Iranian World, there has been a longstanding interest in Indian mystics and philosophers, soliciting not only a great deal of scientific research, but also the hopes of those errant souls straying about in search of the "Way". And that is where Iran has stayed, unexplored between the Arab and Indian worlds. We, in the West, have contented ourselves (and continue to do so) in simply repeating the same monumental ineptitudes concerning the Shiite world. And yet it is not,

after all, pure chance if it was in Iran that the various mystical and philosophical spiritualities have found natural shelters and refuges. Our anthology is an introduction to the best and most profound productions of spiritual Islam. There is, for example, a Shiite concept of the “First Emanated Being” that is linked to Neo-Platonism in a way that at one and the same time presupposes and opens the perspectives of a “prophetic philosophy” proper to Shiism. There is the insistence upon the median and mediating world, the mundus imaginalis (alam al-mithal) to which I alluded above and of which I have so often spoken in my books that I needn’t insist any further here. Without the mediating function of this world that assures the articulation between the purely intelligible and the sensible world, we are deprived of the *clavis hermeneutica* that unlocks the real meaning --real and concrete-- that is to say, the real “ground” of prophetic and mystical visions. As proof: so many of our Western psychologies are incapable of considering these visions in any other way than as hallucinations, or as a doubling of the personality etc. This same mundus imaginalis is the “ground” for real events happening in the Malakut, in the world of the Angel who is so important to Suhrawardi as well as to his French interpreter. Without the mundus imaginalis it is impossible to properly account for and do justice to the reality of the events surrounding the glorious return of the 12th Imâm, to the resurrections and the palingenesis to come. A most significant point of fact, since it is due to this mysterious figure, identified by many Shiite thinkers with the Johannite Paraclete that the “esoteric frameworks” of the gnosés belonging to the Religions of the Book are able to communicate with one another.

In the same breath this point serves as introduction to the theme upon which I would like to end this post-scriptum, that is, the emergence of a project that has been for me the spiritual blossoming of all my scientific work, as well as the ultimate accomplishment of a life-long dream. I’ve already recalled making my way within the Temple of the Saint-Sophia likening the latter to the Temple of the Holy Grail. But I have yet to mention the founding (in collaboration with several friends and university colleagues) of a “center of comparative spiritual research”. Since we were all university academics, we gave it the name of the “University of Saint-John-of-Jerusalem”. Its spirit : that of a spiritual chivalry best defined in the 14th century by Rulman Mershwin, when he gave the Green Island outpost to the Johannite Knights (those of the grand-priory of Brandenburg of the sovereign order of Saint-John-of-Jerusalem). For Rulman Merswin, as for the « Friends of God » of the era, spiritual chivalry designated a particular spiritual state that was « neither that of a cleric nor that of a layman ». As to the ultimate intention behind our centre? To create, in the spiritual city of Jerusalem, a common hearth (something that has not yet ever existed) for the study and the spiritual fructification of the gnosés common to all three great Abrahamic religions. In short, it is the idea of an Abrahamic oecumenism founded upon a sharing of the hidden treasures of the esoteric traditions, and not at all upon any diplomacy with regards to official relations between the external Orders.

To explain the inception of this enterprise, upon which I cannot hope to say all that is to be said here, I would need to evoke all the research, all the thinking and all the traditions that have finally converged in our concept of the University of Saint John of Jerusalem (juridically and conceptually independent of any and all Orders of the same name). I referred earlier to the case of Suhrawardi: he did not content himself to deliberate upon the possible remnants of Iran’s Zoroastrian past, but took this past resolutely in charge, and in the same gesture opened its future before it. And this will or drive towards resurrection is in

perfect harmony with Suhravardi's thinking and with that of his followers. To wit, a philosophical quest that does not end in personal spiritual realization is a vain waste of time, and the search for mystical experience without first going by way of a serious and extensive philosophical education, has every chance of ending with the seeker lost in aberrations, illusions and errancies. This is essentially (at least for the life of the philosopher) the form taken by the idea we designate in Persian as *javan Mardi* and in Arabic as *fotowwat*, two terms that can be precisely translated as "spiritual chivalry" (see the French section of the *Treaties of the Knight-Compagnons*, *Bibl. Iran. Vol 20, 1973*). Indeed, I understand this term, "spiritual chivalry" (and all that it entails), as the very ground and origin of the powerful convergences that have imposed themselves upon me [thereby dictating the direction of the path I have chosen to follow over the course of a lifetime].

To map out the itinerary of these convergences would be essentially to show, within the esoteric horizons of the Religions of the Book, the passage from the heroic to the mystical epic ; the passage from military chivalry to mystical chivalry, or that which Islamic spirituality calls the passage from the minor jihad, (a combat with weapons in the external world), to the major jihad (a spiritual combat taking place in their internal domain of each human being, but also in a supernatural domain of cosmic dimensions).

We can see this same passage being accomplished by Suhravardi and his followers, the inheritors of that Zoroastrian ethic of which it has been justly said (by Eugenio d'Ors) that it has its necessary end in the constitution of an Order of Chivalry. This passage is realized in Shiite Islam in the very concept of the "Friends of God" (in Arabic, *Awliya Allah*, in Persian *Dustan-e Khoda*). Furthermore we may draw a parallel between the idea of the companions of the Zoroastrian *Saoshyant* and that of the companions of the twelfth Shiite Imam. In short, we find expressed therein (in the terms of *javanmardi* and *fotowwat*) a manner of living proposed to each according to his or her state, for each state comports a "chivalry" appropriate to itself. We see this passage over to mystical chivalry accomplished in the 14th century in the West (I just mentioned it above), when *Rulman Merswin* (+1382) gave his outpost in the Green Isle into the keeping of the Johannite Knights thereby opening the spiritual path before them; a path, as it happens, profoundly connected to the mystic *Johann Tauler*. We even see the term "Friends of God" (*Gottesfreunde*) reappear. The idea of spiritual chivalry has also propagated itself through Rhenanian mysticism. The same passage occurs when the military order of the Knights Templars, then taking part in the crusades, become the mystical Order of Templars, Knights of the Holy Grail, in the *Parsifal* cycle of *Wwolfram Von Eschenbach* of the *New Titirel*. Finally, if those individuals who were gathered about the Prince *Zorobabel* and who were responsible for the rebuilding of the Temple were in fact the first Knights of the Temple, it is as a service of mystical chivalry that the Kabbalist cosmogony of *Isaac Luria* summons the "Sons of Light", as they were summoned by the Essenian community in *Qumrân*, to a spiritual combat the idea of which has a clear and evident affinity with the cosmogony and ethic of Zoroastrianism, and does so even independently of any external filiation or influence, demonstrable or not.

That then, in broad strokes, is the sum of what we wished to signify by our concept of the University of Saint-John of Jerusalem (I have also sketched out an overview of this project

at the end of tome IV of my work *En Islam iranien, In Iranian Islam*). Of course, we should not expect this Order of “spiritual chivalry” to be recognized alongside those Orders, both honorific and historical, that have been created over the course of the centuries by the great powers of this world. The very idea of such recognition would be derisory, for the state of spiritual chivalry is ordained in regions beyond those of this world, whereas the finality of worldly Orders inheres in the discourses pronounced at funerals. The Templars officially disappeared in an atrocious tragedy orchestrated by their enemies. But the idea behind the Order of the Knights Templars; as axis to an esoteric tradition prior even to the historical Order of the same name and perpetuating itself after the latter’s disappearance; this idea has never disappeared. No earthly power can stop a soul from acquiring for itself the spiritual ascendancy it chooses, and legitimating this ascendancy through the fidelity it entails. As Unamuno wrote, it is important to recognize “that the past is no more and that nothing exists in truth except that which acts. That a legend, as we call them, when it pushes human beings to veridical action, by firing their hearts or by consoling them with life, is a thousand times more real than the relation of some random act festering in the archives”.

That is why the only authentic orientation is that which takes the « inner Church » as its reference in the manner of such Christian theosophers as Eckhartshausen, in the 18th century. They themselves have used the same term that I myself have just pronounced, for it is nothing other than another name for that spirituality of the Temple common to the mystical theosophers of all three of the Abrahamic religions. This “inner Church” alone is the true abode of the spiritual chivalry ordained in the mystical Temple. It is the only “Church” that can fully provide the answers needed in our day. It is a “Church” that the esoteric code (*ketmân*) must preserve from profane variants and accommodations. It is only within the “inner Church” that we may envisage the strangely profound and incredible task imposed upon us in our day: in some manner to rediscover our God over and against God. But what does that mean?

Centuries of theological certitudes, dogmatic and peremptory, have confounded the universal Cause (the Supreme Principle, unknowable to human beings in their present condition) with the personal and personalized God. Laicized, these concepts have been converted into totalitarian ideologies. More than ever before the Grand Inquisitor reigns supreme. One of the reasons for this is that these theological concepts have gone hand in hand acting in concert with the scientific concepts of their times, whether it be with the certitudes of rational Logic or whether it be, when these certitudes have vacillated, with what we now call the human or social sciences. In this way the exoteric monotheistic religions have prepared that great Void in which the clamor “God is dead” now resonates. But which God ? Gnosis, whether it be that of a Valentin, or that of an Ibn ‘Arabi, or that of an Isaac Luria, has always guarded itself against this confusion between the supreme Cause and the personal God, for true Gnosis has never transgressed against the imperative of apophatic theology, nor has it ever lost track of the meaning of theophanies nor forgotten their necessity. To rediscover our God against God, is to rediscover that God whom you are answer for, it is to liberate our God from the functions that are not His; functions that (having once been mistakenly imputed to the concept of God) have permitted positive science to officially declare the latter’s death. The positive sciences, however, have no cure to offer. There can be no liberation for us if we do not ourselves liberate the God who is our companion in battle. To rediscover our God over and against the God of all the systems, all

the dogmatics and the sociologists, is to experience the relationship whereby if our personal God makes us exist for him, He, for his part, can not exist without us. Our responsibility with respect to our own life and our own death makes us at one and the same time responsible with regard to the life and the death of our God. That He live or that He die postulates our own life or death; a life and a death that must not be understood here in their biological sense but in the Gnostic sense of the first Life, originating in the world of Light.

How better to suggest the incredibly profound engagement of the « spiritual knight » in search of his God, companion to those other companions on the same Quest ? In search of a God that is neither the Omnipotent nor the Final Judge, but the eternal Lover, tormented, anguished and disappointed, whose intimate presence is perceived by the Jewish mystics in the person of Yahveh. The personal God is not the “One” of arithmetic unity, but is the Unique of each unique (1x1x1...) He is the All in each. Each unique of which he is the Unique liberates him from solitude, in making him “one’s” own God. This is the profound meaning of the mystery of the “God of Gods” (Ilâh al-âliha), if I may be permitted to reiterate that originally Hermetic expression, of common usage among theosophers like Suhrawardî. And it is the secret that all gnoses have approached, and perhaps above all, that of an Ibn ‘Arabi and of Ismailism.

This lends every urgency to a task that has hitherto barely been formulated let alone undertaken, since it postulates the existence of a « centre for comparative spiritual research ». The latter phrase, as it happens, is the formula by which we define the U.S.J.J. The urgent task I am referring to is the comparative study of the ta’wîl, that is to say the esoteric hermeneutic of the Book, professed and practiced within the “Religions of the Book”. The subtle convergent connection of the Image and the interior Idea, attested to by the esoteric hermeneuts of the Bible and the Koran, can often lead to the most strikingly dazzling of parallels. Admittedly, I am speaking here of an immense task necessitating the concourse of multiple competencies, and all the more so since we are referring to a hermeneutic not only professed as an article of belief but actively practiced. It is not a question of simple theoretical examination, but of lived consequences in each and every instance. That is why the University of Saint John of Jerusalem is not a simple “Philosophical Society”; nor is it, and even less so, a Faculty of Theology, elaborating and setting forth a program in the service of a dogmatic. Furthermore, to better indicate the difference involved here, each conference is to be followed by some measure of music, a citation intended to draw the listener into an immediate interiorization, seemingly much more appropriate to the underlying intentions of such a centre than applause might ever be. I have just indicated the guiding idea, but that said, each of the members of the fraternal group of the U.S.J.J. maintains his or her complete spiritual liberty. There are many nuanced distinctions between us, coming as we do from diverse origins by way of diverse itineraries. The deep bond that exists between us, however, is one of a common will and a common responsibility with regard to that which we have referred to above as the «inner Church».

Up to this point, five Volumes, counting some thousand pages, have collected the work of our annual sessions. Sciences both Traditional and Profane (1974). Jerusalem, the Spiritual City (1975). Prophetic Faith and the Sacred (1976). “Oriental” Pilgrims and “Occidental” Vagabonds (1977). Eyes of Flesh and Eyes of Fire, or Science and Gnosis (1978).

This last session has been particularly fruitful. It has permitted the dissipation of many an ambiguity concerning the concept of gnosis, either on the part of philosophers and historians --who by prejudice or for lack of information, make of gnosis that which it is not-- or on the part of self-proclaimed neo-Gnostic modern cosmogonies. Gnosis is neither an ideology, nor a branch of theoretical knowledge in contrast with faith. Salvific or salutary knowledge in and of itself, its very content addresses itself to a faith. It is wisdom as well as faith, Pistis Sophia. Nor is it limited to the Gnosticism of the first centuries: there is a Jewish gnosis, a Christian gnosis that has persisted down through the centuries, an Islamic gnosis, a Buddhist gnosis. Above all, Gnosis in no way merits the accusation of “nihilism”. A philosophy, however, that were to refuse both this world and the perspective of other worlds, would indeed be an instance of nihilism. But what does Gnosis have in common with such a philosophy?

I believe that what we have accomplished, through the devotion of a few friends to the same end, represents something rare in our country. It remains for the one who was this project's originator to thank the Heavens for having sufficiently prolonged his days, so that this work could ripen to fruition and finally take its place inscribed here at the end of this post-scriptum. I have been the editor and translator of the incomparable mystic cantor of the high path of human love, Rûzbehân Baqlî of Shîrâz,. I can honestly say that without the presence and cooperation of my partner and companion upon this same high path, a companion who has preserved me from solitude and from discouragement, none of the work that I have here described would have been possible. And because this work was thus made possible, it in turn has made possible --after the desert-crossing of youth--the fulfilment of my wishes as a researcher and professor: for I find myself surrounded by young people, young philosophers (many of whom, particularly dear to me are present in this Cahier de l'Herne), whom I know will continue, in their own way, the work that I must perforce leave unfinished. I know that they will advance still further upon this path the fraying and opening of which has been my lifelong task. At the time of the summons, he who is thus fulfilled may say together with Simeon: Now, Lord, you allow your servant to go in peace” (Luke 2/29). Until then, “so long as day remains” (Gospel of John 9/4), stay at their side, upon the battlement where Destiny has placed you.

Henry Corbin
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