

## CORBIN'S INTERPRETATION OF IMĀMOLOGY AND ṢUFISM

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### 1. *Imāmology*

To Henry Corbin, the modern phenomenon par excellence is secularization — reduction of the spiritual and the sacred to the temporal and the profane. It is the will to perceive things no longer in the *mundus imaginalis* ("between Heaven and Earth") but exclusively on the empirical level, in the exoteric history, which is believed to be the only "real" history. Secularization is "dis-orientation", the loss of the Orient, the *Ālam al-mithāl*. In the case of the West, this loss is marked by a transition from eschatological Christianity to historical faith, *fides historica* — a gradual adaptation to the external historical condition and the replacement of the freedom of prophetic inspiration with the dogmatic magisterium of the Church. *Fides historica* is faith that measures the degree of reality of its object by documents attesting to its physical existence in the past; historical faith is concerned with the outer man only, and is denounced by all mystics as *fides mortua*.<sup>1</sup> For a historically oriented faith, "there is no longer a question of practicing an apologetic of 'limits.' The powers of man are unlimited, the powers of *homo progressus* lead *homo sapiens* toward socialization, collectivization, totalization of absolute empire of the technocracies . . ."<sup>2</sup> The great tragedy lies in the fact that the official Christianity has succumbed to the temptation which Christ had resisted.

For the gnostic, "historical meaning" refers not to an external event encapsulated in the past, but to the events that occur on the esoteric plane of history. The esoteric meaning of events does not depend on external historical circumstances, because these events are the events of the soul and belong to the history of the soul. Religious phenomena are essentially spiritual in nature, and as such, they can be understood only by a person who can see what the spiritual adepts saw. To understand spiritual facts, one has to become a spiritual host of a universe in which these facts take place. "If a religion exists, the first and last reason for this phenomenon is the existence of those who profess it."<sup>3</sup> After all, "how scientific is it", asks Corbin, "to pretend explain to people who do see the reasons why they see precisely what one himself is incapable of seeing?"<sup>4</sup>

Corbin is convinced that the process of secularization can be arrested only by rediscovering the polar dimension of man,

and by developing a gnoseology which culminates in the figure of the angel as the *Dator formarum*.<sup>5</sup> To discover *who* is the Donor of the data that are passively accepted by the ordinary natural consciousness (which is really "unconsciousness"), is to be liberated from the yoke of brute data; and this liberation "places the soul in the presence of a *Self* that, while suprapersonal or transpersonal to it, on its part asks . . . the most personal of relations."<sup>6</sup> The Corbinian Self (the Angel) is a figure that "bears witness to the presence of the alone with the alone and for the alone . . ."<sup>7</sup>

In the esoteric Islam, the polar dimension of man is represented by the figure of the *imām*, who is homologous to the Avicennan angel. *Imām* is not revelation of the divine Essence, but epiphany of God in his relation to men, i.e., relative to him who contemplates it.<sup>8</sup> It must be also kept in mind that this kind of epiphany has nothing to do with the fragmentation of a species into individuals differing among themselves only numerically. As in Avicenna's angelology, "the individual person of the *Imām* is itself his entire species . . . his species is his person."<sup>9</sup>

The central idea of imamology is embodied in the word *theoandria*, divino-human unity; the *imām* is simultaneously the divine Face shown to man and the Face that man shows to God. In terms of Christian theodandria, the decisive question therefore will be: on what level should the *subjectum incarnationis* be situated? Should it be on the level of the flesh (incarnation), or on the level of the spiritual body (theophany)?<sup>10</sup>

In answering this question, we must not forget that Shī'ite theology is essentially apophatic in nature, prohibiting attribution of any human characteristics to the divine Essence. At the same time, however, the Shī'ite hermeneutics is perfectly at ease with the anthropomorphism of the Qur'ān. The reason for this is that the divine Names and Attributes are referred not to the divine Essence as such, but to the primordial theophany, the metahistorical pleroma of the "Fourteen Immaculate Ones" (the Prophet, his daughter Fatima, and the twelve *Imāms*), who are the supports of these anthropomorphic Names and Attributes. The faith of the believer is directed towards God as he presents himself, makes himself known, i.e., towards the Face that God shows to man. "God in the abyss of his essence is the unknowable — the unpredictable, the incommunicable. The Face that the *Absconditum* shows to man, the *Deus revelatus*, is necessarily a theophanic Figure who supports, as such, all the so-called 'anthropomorphic' attributes . . . As iron is not fire, the *Imām* is not God; but without the support of the iron, the fire does not appear; without the Face which is the *Imām*, God could not manifest himself." Reciprocally, *Imām* is the form of the believer's faith, the Face through which and in which he presents himself to God. It follows that the Face (i.e., the *Imām*), through which man knows God is *eo ipso* the Face through which God knows man. We find the same situation, the same reciprocity in Meister Eckhart: "The eye through which I know God is the same eye through which God knows me."<sup>11</sup> *Imām* is the imperishable Face of God, the Face of which the Qur'ān

says: "Everything perishes except his face" (28:88).

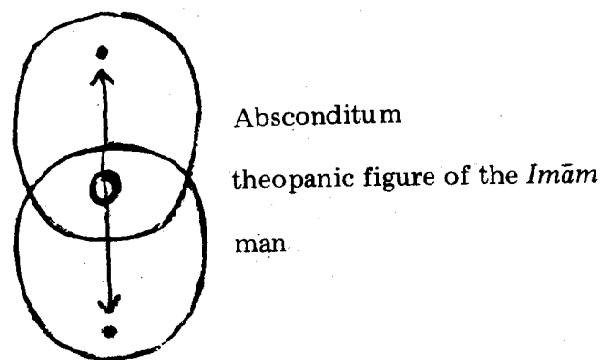
We must try now to understand as fully as possible the theophanic relation between the vision (that which is shown), and person to whom the vision is vouchsafed. God shows himself to each believer in accordance with the degree of his spiritual development. This is to say that there is polarity between the *Imām* and the person to whom the *Imām* shows himself as the Divine Face, just as there is polarity between the *deus absconditus* and the *Imām* as his theophanic form: there is no polarity, however, between the *Absconditum* and the human person. In other words, it is the polar function of the *Imām* that safeguards the unicity of Divinity (*Theotes*), and at the same time makes possible the encounter between the individual and his God in the theophanic form of the *Imām*. Without the *Imām*, one would fall either into the abyss of *tashbih* (anthropomorphism) or into the abyss of *ta'til* (allegorism, agnosticism). It is also to be noted that the twelve *Imāms* are not divine epiphanies in their capacity of historical personalities; theophanies take place on the level of *Malakūt*, the world of concrete spiritual beings, and it is in this world that the encounter between the believer and his *Imām* takes place.

It must be emphasized that the mystical spirituality of Shī'ism "is not a mysticism that plunges the Spiritual into the undifferentiated night of being; it is essentially the meeting of a Face, of an intimate presence."<sup>12</sup> According to the Islamic spirituals, every being has two faces: one represents its quiddity (egoity), which is his indigence, obscurity and negativity; the other is directed towards his dimension of light, his perfection, his "true person" (*prosopon*), the *Imām*. The two faces mirror each other. The culmination of the spiritual experience consists in this "face to face", because "he who knows his *Imām*, knows his God."<sup>13</sup> The person of the *Imām* is simultaneously the eye through which God sees man and man sees God; he is the intermediary, the link between heaven and earth.

In terms of Shī'ite eschatology, our present time is the time of the occultation of the *Imām*. We are in a world that no longer "needs" God, in the sense that for many people the question of God is irrelevant. This banal phrase, however, in the present context, has an ominous sound. "Yes", says Corbin, "God is no longer relevant, God no longer sees us, because we no longer see him. God is irrelevant to us, because we have become irrelevant to him; because we no longer see him, he no longer sees us."<sup>14</sup> It remains however, that the *Imām*, seen or not seen, recognized or incognito, is the mystical pole (*qutb*) of the world; if he ceased to exist, the world of man would collapse. Man cannot survive as man if he loses his polar dimension.

The theophanic relation between God and man is essentially bi-polar. Man can know, worship, love, only a God who is relative to him. God as the *Absconditum* "does not look" ("*ne regarde pas*"), is not concerned with man. Corbin has represented this relation by two intersecting ellipses with a common center. The common center is the *Imām*. The area of intersection is the only

place that is available for kataphatic (positive) theology.



It is possible, continues Corbin, to cut oneself off from one's polar dimension, to stop seeing it. But "this is *eo ipso* to refuse to see oneself, to recognize oneself in this polar dimension: we have repeatedly stated that 'he who knows himself', i.e., who knows his pole, his *Imām*, 'knows his God.' For him who does not know himself, i.e. his divine *pole*, there is only the *unknown and unknowable God*, the one who 'does not see us.' What happens then? Nothing more nor less than what Angelus Silesius said: 'God does not live without me.' Reciprocally, if God dies, man too must die."<sup>15</sup>

The idea of the *Imām* as the divino-human Face leads to the mystery of theoandristm, which is also the central Christological mystery. The question, then, is this: on what ontological level is situated the person of the *Imām* conceived as theophanic form? Or, more precisely: to what type of Christology corresponds imamology? Corbin's answer to this question is that from the viewpoint of divino-human bipolarity, the human pole cannot be on the level of the carnal man nor on the divine level. The subject of the incarnation is neither God nor man, but a middle term between the two, a "divine extradivine person[in Schelling's words: *aussergöttlichgöttliche Persönlichkeit*] as well as a human extra-human person."<sup>16</sup> This means that the human nature of the *Imām* is that of a potential angel. In other words, the ontological level on which the incarnation takes place, has its place in the soul or *caro spiritualis*.

We may conclude with Corbin's observation that in esoteric Christianity there is the expectation of the Paraclete inaugurating a religion of spirit, which, far from being a new religion, would represent the fulfilment of Christianity. The function of the Paraclete, whom gnostics sometimes identify with the hidden *Imām*, is to reveal the spiritual meaning of all the prophetic religions. The basic characteristic of this religion of the spirit is that it will be not only revelation of God to man, but also a revelation of man to man. The final destiny of humanity is envisioned as a creative act which is both divine and human, a synergy, a co-

operation between God and man. The advent of the Spirit is not the end of the world *in time*, but the end of historical time, the advent of a world whose revolutions are measured by existential time.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. *Sūfism: a Religion of Beauty*

Corbin's thesis is that the gnosis of Sūfism<sup>18</sup> is inseparable from the doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi, and the Shī'ite gnosis. The fusion between these two was effected by Haydar Āmulī (d. 1320), whose project was to restore the tradition of "integral" Islam comprising *zāhir* and *bātin*, which is also the essential meaning of Shī'ism. Integral Islam is based simultaneously on *shari'at* (Law, positive religion), *ṭarīqat* (the spiritual, mystical way), and *ḥaqīqat* (realization of spiritual truth). The essence of this integral vision is contained in the following words of Ibn 'Arabi: "From now on my heart has become capable of all forms — it is meadow for the gazelles and a convent for the Christian monks — a temple for the idols and the Ka'ba of the pilgrim — the Tables of the Law (Torah) and the book of Qur'an — I profess the religion of love."<sup>19</sup>

Sūfī spirituality, according to Corbin, has two characteristics. First, Sūfīs are *Muhaqqiqīn*, "those who have understood", in the sense of a twofold *personal verification*: speculative and experimental. A Sūfī is a "speculative," person who realizes that he himself is the *speculum*, the mirror in which he sees all things, and that the image appearing in this mirror is his own representation of things, i.e., a personal realization. Second, Sūfīs are *Ahl-i shuhūd*, eye witnesses or intimates admitted to the contemplation of the mysteries (*epoptes* in Greek).<sup>20</sup> In addition, there is also the idea of *epiphany*, denoting the state of being as *Light* as well as the epiphanic function of Light. Light illuminates at the very moment of its appearance. Something is revealed, i.e., becomes a phenomenon (*zāhir*) as soon as there is Light. Moreover, this illumination, in the Sūfī view, is pre-eminently bound up with the human form. *Speculative mysticism* rests on the idea of "descents" from the primordial source of being. Creation is divine self-manifestation, and the fullness of this self-manifestation is reached in the human form, which the Sūfīs designate as the celestial Adam (spiritual *Anthropos*), insofar as this figure recapitulates all the degrees of being.<sup>21</sup> Spiritual Adam is divine epiphany, because through his human form there is "divine visibility."<sup>22</sup> The perfection of the celestial Adam is considered here not as resulting from a divine decision, but as *active function* inherent in this state in such a way that the patient becomes the agent; the revealed is the revealing. The illuminated object is also the illuminating source. Action and passion however are simultaneous and reciprocal. The divinity reveals (shows) the human form by revealing itself in it, and the human form reveals (shows) the divinity by being revealed through it. Perfect theophany is divine anthropomorphosis (not anthropomorphism). Corbin

emphasizes that this is not incarnation in the technical sense of the word but manifestation of divinity in the mirror of the human form, theomorphosis of the human form. Anthropomorphosis and theomorphosis are simultaneous and reciprocal events. The concepts of theophany and incarnation can be reconciled only if we conceive the latter as "incarnation in the form of the human body, in the perfect plastic beauty of the form, not in the matter, in the 'flesh'." This of course has a docetic flavor, but to Corbin, it is nothing less than "spiritual realism."<sup>24</sup>

Sūfism is a mystical religion in the sense of a dialogal and reciprocal relationship between man and God. But the basic premise in such a relationship is that the individuality of the mystic, far from being confined to his empirical *persona*, is itself a universe, a microcosm. Hence, the mystical self-absorption is always accompanied by liberation from oneself, by an *élan* beyond oneself. The paradox of mystical experience is that the depth of man is more than human, and that it hides a mysterious bond with God and the world. In Corbin's words, "it is in oneself that an exit from oneself is found."<sup>25</sup> This is also why the divine element in man, according to the teachings of mystics, cannot be identical with the *psychic* element. The inmost (esoteric) man is the spiritual or pneumatic man.

The chief representative of the spirituality of the Iranian Sūfism (besides Ibn 'Arabī), is Rūzbihān of Shīrāz (1128-1209), a contemporary of Suhrawardī, and the *imām* par excellence of the *Fedeli d'amore* — Dante's companions for whom "the experience of a cult of love dedicated to a beautiful being is the necessary initiation to divine life . . . ." <sup>26</sup> Love is essentially *philokalia*, love of beauty, or *hierokalia*, a term designating beauty as inseparable from the idea of the sacred and sacrality. As Corbin points out, we are indeed far removed here from the pious but ineffective differentiation made by some Christian theologians, between *eros* and *agape*. The Christian is the man of "unhappy consciousness," the man who is torn by the opposition between love of God and love of the creature, between mysticism and sensuality, between sin and justifying grace, between believing and knowing, between the truth of the historical facts and inner truth, between the object of faith incarnated in history and the timeless spiritual reality. To be sure, says Corbin, there is in Sūfism as well an opposition to be overcome, but the terms of the opposition are different from the ones we have just enumerated. The Sūfī regards himself not as a sinner in need of "justification", but as a stranger, an exile. His aspiration is to return home and to meet a guide who will show the way of return. This, however, should not be construed as escapism from the so-called "real life." The idea of "exile" is inseparable from theophanic perception of what Corbin calls *amphiboly*, the two-fold meaning of every manifested being, simultaneously veiling and revealing the invisible. There is no theophany without amphiboly (both words are from the same Greek root). Theophanic vision, therefore, cannot consist in turning away from the visible. Beauty is not a demonic trap. "The visible

must be perceived as a veil (image) and transformed into a mirror."<sup>27</sup> Thus, to be a "stranger" in this world means not to hate the world, but to be enslaved by the literally visible; and to return home is to see the invisible through the veil of the visible. "Return" is essentially an operation of *ta'wīl*, and it is rather of a secondary importance whether this operation is effected in this life or at the moment of exitus from it. "Home" and "exile" are not literal places, but conditions of the soul.

*Eros* in the Sūfī context is *transfigured* and *transfiguring Eros*: love is not transferred from one *object* to another *object*, from a human object to a divine object; what occurs is a metamorphosis of the *subject*, who now becomes capable of seeing the divine *face* of human love. Beauty becomes a sacred sign (*āyat*), *sacramentum*.<sup>28</sup> Human love and the love for a being of beauty is the ecstasy of the soul in the presence of a theophany.

According to one of the preferred maxims of Sūfism, "God is beautiful and he loves beauty." Beauty is not simply one divine attribute among others; it is the essential attribute. "This is why God himself is the source and reality of *Eros*, preventing us from a double desecration: licentiousness which prophanizes [beauty] and asceticism which . . . negates [beauty]." In his *Spiritual Diary* Rūzbihān relates a vision of his, a vision which was refused to Moses ("You shall not see my face"): "I have seen my God in the most beautiful form." Rūzbihān is in effect saying that we can love only a personal being, a being with a "particular face." Of necessity, then, God, if he is to be loved, must assume the form of the Eternal Companion, the Witness in Heaven. This also means to discover the esoteric *tawhīd* of identity ( $1 \times 1 = 1$ ), and to resolve the contradiction between divine transcendence and his personal individuations in conformity with the aptitude and capacity of each loving soul.<sup>29</sup> To discover *tawhīd* is to be the eyes through which God sees himself: "I am you, you are me." It is to deliver God from jealousy. By contrast, the attitude of the exoteric believer (which is also that of the abstract monotheist), who posits a transcendent Deity to be glorified from outside, finally is not different from the attitude of the infidel, who allows himself to be caught in the visible and who confounds *hulūl* and *tajallī*, incarnation and theophany.<sup>30</sup> Idolatry, in the final analysis, is worship of a God who is separate from and opposed to the worshipper, because what is worshipped is not *seen through*, and consequently remains veiled, opaque, a material thing. It makes no fundamental difference whether the "thing" in question is a stone, a tree, or the supreme being of the official theology. Idolatry is essentially literalism, and as such, the opposite of symbolism, amphibolism, and theophanism.

In Christian apologetics, directed towards Islam, it is common to sneer at the sensual joys of the Qur'ānic paradise. What these apologists fail to realize is that the description of paradisiacal joys must be seen in the context of the more general problem of *tanẓīh* (a negative operation depriving divinity of all attributes), and *tashbīh*

(assimilating God to creaturely objects). For the Sūfī, there is no question of sacrificing one or the other, because for him sensual perception occurs not on the level of the sensual, physical world, but on the level of the intermediary world (*mundus imaginis*), which is the place of "imaginative perception."<sup>31</sup>

The mystic who asks for the vision of God in his pure Essence (i.e., in his abstract unity), divested of all predicates, is every time directed by the Sūfis towards the symbol, the theophany, the amphiboly of the Veil, which must be made transparent. In this respect, Ruzbihān's experience is paradigmatic: "In the course of my visions . . . I gradually woke up in the midst of these theophanic forms; my intention was to reach the uncreated, to reach a point when it will be possible to discard theophanisms. Then I saw God in the most beautiful forms, surging upon me from the world of Mystery."<sup>32</sup> There is no logical solution to this problem. Only love, i.e., experimental verification, can resolve the conflict between the multiplicity and diversity of theophanies and the One. Moreover, it can be resolved only in the course of a long spiritual struggle expressing itself in paradoxes, in "pious blasphemies." At this juncture, the mystic is no longer another eye seeing God, but the eye through which God sees himself and appears to Himself in the form of the infinite variety of "the most beautiful forms."<sup>33</sup> This is not polytheism; polytheists are all those who acknowledge God "objectively", i.e., who posit God as a transcendent object. The monotheism of legalistic and socialized religion remains on this level in that it superimposes the *Ens supremum* upon the sum of creaturely beings. This trap of metaphysical idolatry can be avoided only by esoteric *tawhīd*, which Corbin formulates as follows: "The multiplicity of theophanies is the multiplicity of forms through which the unique divine subject appears to himself and recognizes himself in his creatures, provided that these creatures keep their eyes open, open to Him alone, for then they are His eyes, the eyes through which He sees and through which He sees Himself in the creatures. Then there is no more conflict between the Unique and the multiple; there is the multiple of the Unique, but this multiple is every time and always One."<sup>34</sup> This is the mystery of the *unus-ambo*, two in one: the One and the other, contemplator is the contemplated.

We are witnessing here a total reversal of the perspective: the mystic becomes the eye through which God contemplates himself. But this kind of operation presupposes return to a state prior to the opposition of subject and object, a state in which neither objectivization nor socialization of the divine Being is possible, because He is experienced as the absolute Subject. The Sūfis express this state of affairs by means of the Neoplatonic formula: the divine Being is simultaneously love, lover, and beloved. The mystery of the divine Unity is the mystery of "absolute subjectivity", i.e., absolved of every relation with anything other than itself.<sup>35</sup>

For the *fideles d'amour*, divine love and human love are one and the same love. Human beauty is experienced in Sūfism not

as a diabolical temptation to be conquered, but as an *Urphanomen* — something which is as primary as perception of a sound or a colour. One is either capable of perceiving beauty as being fascinating and terrifying, awakening joyfulness and hopeless nostalgia, or, one is incapable of this kind of perception. The essential point is that the secret of the divinity (*Lāhūt*) is humanity (*nasūt*). But again, it is unnecessary for the divinity to suffer the embarrassment of an incarnation, for the human beauty of the human creature is a direct reflection of the divine beauty.<sup>36</sup> The divine beauty "enters" into beautiful forms as the image "enters" into a mirror. "He who looks into the mirror sees himself by means of this image. He could not see himself without it. That is why the eye of the Image is the eye through which he sees himself . . . Vision is to see the image. To see that the eye of the Image ( . . . ) is my own eye looking at me through this Image, is *Vision of the Vision*."<sup>37</sup>

Corbin summarizes the preceding as follows: "Let it be said: it is the incarnationalist materialization that leads astray love; it erects the first obstacle in the way of the *fidele d'amour*; it is absolutely necessary for the latter to go beyond this obstacle in order to attain theophanic consciousness of love; that is to say, it is necessary to perceive the Image that appears in the mirror, but not as incorporated into the material reality of the mirror. The divine *anthropomorphosis* takes place in the human form, not in the materiality of the flesh. It is precisely by confusing 'flesh' with the human form ( . . . ) that one is led to confuse human *Eros* with the carnal sexuality."<sup>38</sup>

In Shī'ism, Ismā'ilism, and in the theosophy of Sūfism, the divine anthropomorphosis (i.e., anthropomorphosis on the plane of *Malakūt*), is the mystery of divine self-revelation; and this self-revelation is experienced and conceived by the mystic as the mystery of love. Both movements — the divine self-revelation and the experience of this self-revelation by the mystic — originate in one and the same *Eros*. And this is why the human form of love is seen here as the indispensable initiation into the mystery of the divine love, into the esoteric *tawhīd*. We are witnessing, then, a paradoxical identity: the divine Being is himself love, lover, and beloved. Corbin calls it "intradivine mystery" or "intradivine drama." But, as we already mentioned, this is a paradox only for the kind of religious or theological thinking that *objectifies* the Divine. If, however, God is his own object of love and knowledge, and if He reveals to Himself in His Image (the divine Anthropos or Celestial Adam) so as to know Himself precisely in this Form insofar as He is known by It, then it must be admitted that the love which this Image has for Him and the knowledge which it has of Him, is the same love which He himself has for this Image and the same knowledge which He himself has of this Image.<sup>39</sup>

What Corbin calls "intra-divine mystery" of love presupposes three forms or degrees of *tawhīd*. The first degree is designated in Sūfism as the common *tawhīd*. It represents the naïve and dogmatic monotheism, satisfied with complete objectivization

of the divine: an *Ens supremum*, a transcendent object is superimposed upon the totality of creaturely beings. One constructs proofs and arguments, seeking shelter against ravages of doubt, risk and negation. The common *tawhīd* proceeds by divesting the deity from all attributes (*tanzīh*), and is haunted by the twofold peril of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) and agnosticism. The objectivization of the divine results in "socialization" or in a socio-morphic religion: all creaturely beings are assembled on an egalitarian plane and maintained equidistant from the transcendent object ( $n + 1$ ). According to Sūfism and Ismā'īlism, the common *tawhīd* cannot succeed in overcoming metaphysical idolatry.

The second is the *tawhīd* of the elite: one proceeds from the affirmation of a transcendent *object* to the affirmation of the unity of being. The totality of beings is experienced as vanishing into the sublimity of the unique Being. Beings are seen as something purely negative in relation to divine Sovereignty. All existence is immersed in *res divina*. Rational consciousness, the property of the common run of men, is replaced by *intuitive vision*, the privilege of the initiates. The initiates themselves undergo annihilation — *fanā'* — in the divine Superexistence. The experience of *fanā'*, in its banalized form, is expressed in the irritating and facile assertion that mystical experience consists in the dissolution of personality. According to Corbin, such a view is no less naïve than that of the common *tawhīd*, for it replaces the formula  $n + 1$  with something like the sterile  $1 = 1$ . Moreover, the *tawhīd* of the elite is incapable of valourizing the appearances and transforming them into apparitions (images), so that the kind of metaphysical identity which it concocts, turns out to be no less illusory than the metaphysical illusions which it denounces in the adherents of the common *tawhīd*. For the Sūfīs, the second degree of *tawhīd* is only a passage, a transition towards a third form effecting the annihilation of the annihilation.

The third degree is the *tawhīd* of the elite of the elite. If the first *tawhīd* proceeds from the visible world to God and the second *tawhīd* from the personal "self" to God, the third represents a movement from God to God (intradivine mystery); i.e., it is accomplished in God himself. A "twofold negativity" is at work here: annihilation of the annihilation produced by the second degree of *tawhīd*. In other words, it is resurrection and re-appearance of all the forms which previously have been immersed in the undifferentiated divine identity. A total reversal of perspective takes place: what was below is above, what is down is up, and vice versa. The mystic does not disappear; he sees God, and yet it is not he who sees, because it is God who sees through him. Essentially what happens here is transformation of the mystic's subjectivity: he becomes the eye through which God contemplates himself, and he knows now that he is divine knowledge, divine audition, etc. In the Sūfī view, to see that your own eyes are the eyes through which the divine Being contemplates himself, is to have vision of the vision: the Image itself becomes mirror, and

so reveals its secret to him who contemplates it because by contemplating it, the mystic "sees himself seeing himself outside himself", i.e. in the state of an *élan* beyond himself.<sup>40</sup>

At this stage, the conflict between the unicity of pure divine Essence and the multiplicity of theophanies — the conflict which cannot be resolved on the levels of  $n + 1$  and  $1 = 1$  — is resolved in terms of  $1 \times 1$ .  $1 \times 1$  represents a rigorous formulation of the relation between unicity and multiplicity of theophanies, a relation which is verified *each time kath hena*: the contemplated is *each time* the Contempator's own eye; the same eye (*regard*), multiplied by itself, unity of unity, vision of the vision.

Put differently, you are God *each time* you contemplate God, because it is God who (each time) contemplates himself through you. You become God by becoming attentive to God because at that moment your attention to God is God's attention to you. Your attention to God is reciprocated by God in such a way that the "whole God", the wholeness of divinity is directed towards you, is "in" you, and you become the eye through which He sees himself.

The esoteric *tawhīd* formulates a superior unity — a unity that unifies love, lover, and beloved in a moment of supreme lucidity, when human love becomes the hierophant of the divine love; i.e., when the transition from a metaphorical love (seeing only the external form), to love in the true sense (seeing the invisible), is accomplished. To have the vision of the vision ( $1 \times 1$ ) then, means that the eye which the lover contemplates in the mirror is his own eye; simultaneously, it is not his own eye because it is the eye of the Other, and yet this Other is none other than he himself.<sup>41</sup> Or again, God finds his pure mirror in the mystical lover and this mirror is at the same time the mystic's eye and God's eye. The mystic discovers that his contemplation is the contemplation of the divine Being contemplating himself through the mystic.

All this has nothing to do with solipsism which abolishes the spiritual tension inherent in the relation of subject and object. Rather, we have here real polarity, the polarity of bi-unity. The externality of the object of love leads to the exhaustion of the spiritual energy of love, whereas this energy is multiplied by itself ( $1 \times 1$ ) when it is polarized in the reciprocal relationship between the lover and the beloved. The moving force of love is ardent desire, which can grow only in the course of loving relationship, because it is love that *makes see* and because the vision is proportioned to love. To suggest, therefore, that in these circumstances the lover loves himself (or that he is in love with love), is to confuse the two formulae,  $1 = 1$  and  $1 \times 1$ . Love always means "to be-two." It must be understood, however, that this "two" is not a duality, but a *dualitude*: a Unique and a Unique, multiplied by each other, are one.<sup>42</sup>

We said that the state of the lover is that of a mirror of God: his very being is now the eye through which God sees himself. It is in this state of ecstatic paroxysm that Hallāj exclaims: "I am

God." Ruzbihān, however, gives the following instruction to the mystic. "When you have reached vision of the vision, every atom of your being proclaims: I am God." This is so because then "every atom of the creation is an eye of God."<sup>43</sup> And that is precisely the meaning of the annihilation of the annihilation. What is annihilated is the opacity of things: every atom of the creation is resuscitated and becomes perfectly transparent; that is an eye-mirror through which God contemplates himself.

### NOTES and REFERENCES

1. See Henry Corbin. *En Islam iranien* I. p. 26.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 132. Adam's trans.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 9. Adam's trans.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 10. Adam's trans.
5. See Corbin. *Avicenna*, p. 264.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 263; cf. *Creative Imagination*, p. 95.
7. Corbin. "The Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality". p. 394.
8. See Corbin. "Divine Epiphany and Spiritual Birth in Ismaili Gnosis" pp. 129—32; cf. p. 140.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 130; cf. p. 123.
10. See Corbin. "Face de Dieu at Face de l'Homme". *Eranos* 1967 (36). p. 166.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 172. Author's trans.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 174. Author's trans.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 178. Author's trans.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 180. Author's trans.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 182. Author's trans.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 196. Author's trans.
17. See *ibid.*, pp. 216—220.
18. The word "ṣūfī" (from *ṣūf*, the Arabic for "wool") literally signifies "man who wears a wool." According to this theory, a white wool garment was the distinguishing mark of the Ṣūfīs. Corbin speculates that "ṣūfī" might be a transliteration of the Greek *sophos*, sage or sage-prophet (see *Creative Imagination*, p. 30. note 5. On the complex situation of Ṣūfism within Islam, especially within Shī'ism, see Corbin. *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, pp. 262—68; cf. *En Islam iranien* I pp. 83-84; 128-34; III. 149—213. Nasr. *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London: Unwin Paperbacks), 1979, pp. 121—44.
19. See Corbin. *En Islam iranien* III. p. 189. The dominant idea of Amulī is that Shī'ism of the Twelve Imāms constitutes the esoteric Islam, the true sense of the Revelation, the gnosis of Islam. To the extent that Ṣūfism professes the esoteric doctrine, it is Shī'ism incognito, imāmology that does not dare to pronounce its name (see Corbin. *En Islam iranien* III. pp. 10. 154. 198—99).
20. See *ibid.*, p. 247.
21. See *ibid.*, p. 248. "The "Perfect Man" is he who has fully realized his essential oneness with God, in whose likeness he is made. The class of "perfect men" comprises not only the prophets from Adam to

Muhammad, but also the superlatively elect among the Ṣūfīs: i.e. persons named collectively *awliyā'*, plural of *walī*, a word originally meaning "near" which is used for "friend," "protégé," or "devotee". *Walī* or saint is the popular type of "Perfect Man" (see R.A. Nicholson. *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978 p. 78ff; cf. Corbin. *Creative Imagination*, p. 317; "Divine Epiphany and Spiritual Birth in Ismaili Gnosis". p. 123).

22. *Ibid.*, p. 79. Author's trans. cf. p. 84.
23. See *ibid.*, pp. 248—49.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 19. Author's trans.
25. Corbin. *En Islam iranien* I. p. 31. Author's trans.
26. Corbin. *Creative Imagination*, pp. 100—101.
27. Corbin. *En Islam iranien* III. p. vi. Author's trans.
28. See *ibid.*, p. 17.
29. See *ibid.*, pp. 21. 22.
30. See *ibid.*, p. 43.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 53—54. Author's trans.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 59. Author's trans.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 61. Author's trans.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 62—63. Author's trans.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 66—67. Author's trans.
36. See *ibid.*, pp. 72—73.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 80. Author's trans.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 85. Author's trans. cf. p. 125.
39. See *ibid.*, pp. 79. 127. 128. 129.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 132. Author's trans.
41. See *Ibid.*, p. 133.
42. See *Ibid.*, p. 136.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 141. Author's trans.