

sion as a breach in the relationship between *zahir* and *batin*, the external and the internal, the exoteric and the esoteric (see *infra*, § 2). Here, the breach is consummated with the *fifth posterity*, expelled from Paradise. Thereafter the Cherubim prevented access to it. Before them is the flame of a turning sword, which is the love of self and its senseless desires, its persuasions that push man to want to reenter Paradise, but he is continually flung back toward material and terrestrial things. For the Tree of Knowledge having been profaned, henceforth it is access to the Tree of Life that is forbidden.¹¹³

The states of the *Antiquissima Ecclesia* were in the following succession: (1) *Homo* in the state of oneness (masculine-feminine); (2) externalization of ipseity, of the *proprium*, signified by the formation of Eve; (3) the appearance of doubt; (4) the fall; (5) the expulsion from Paradise. The sixth and seventh posterities (Gen. 3:24) fell below the level of man; these exiles from Paradise, whose corruption was even greater because they fell from a higher degree, were the people of the Flood. Chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Genesis treat of the degeneration of the *Antiquissima Ecclesia*.¹¹⁴ The ten names (Seth, Enoch, Kenan, etc.) that are spread out in the course of chapter 5, up to Noah,¹¹⁵ signify not personal individuals, but doctrines, schools, stages in the decline of the *Antiquissima Ecclesia*, until finally no more remain except the small number described under the name of Noah as the *Nova Ecclesia*, reemerging from the darkness.¹¹⁶

6. *The Spiritual Sense of the History of Noah*

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). In the literal sense the earth is where man is, but in the internal sense it is where love is, since man is such as is his love. Now, love is related to the basic and constitutive force or reality in man that is called will; this is why the earth signifies here the will itself of man; for it is from

his basic willing that man is man, and not so much from his knowledge and intelligence, for these only proceed from his basic reality, to such an extent that he wants neither to know nor to understand what does not proceed from it.¹¹⁷

On the other hand, "Noah" signifies a *Nova Ecclesia*, which, we know, will be called *Antiqua Ecclesia* to distinguish it from both the one that preceded it, before the Flood, and the one that succeeded it.¹¹⁸ But the state of each differs profoundly from the other. We have already seen this difference described. The people of the *Antiquissima Ecclesia* had an immediate and direct perception of the Divine Good and of the Truth that proceeds from it. Those of the *Antiqua Ecclesia*, "Noah," no longer had direct perception, but they had a conscience and knowledge. Now, direct perception designates something other than conscience (vulnerable, if it is alone, to all sorts of doubts), and it also is the entire difference between the person that Swedenborg characterizes as the celestial person and the one that he designates as the spiritual person. For the first, it was by means of love that he was given to perceive all truths, those of the intelligence and of faith; in him, faith and knowledge were love. The person of the *Antiqua Ecclesia* became entirely different.¹¹⁹

As a prelude to his exegesis of chapter 6 of Genesis, Swedenborg repeats the warning that he has reiterated in his books. No one can see or understand the history of Noah in its true sense if he intends to apply himself exclusively to the sense of the letter, for here again the *style* that is historical in appearance is in reality symbolic, that is, metahistorical; it is not a matter of external events that would impose their course upon a historical narrative, it is a matter of events of the soul that are "historicized" in the form of external history.¹²⁰ The *Ecclesia* called Noah was the residue, the "remains," of the *Antiquissima Ecclesia* that was saved; it is that which is signified by the *Ark* and which is described in the measurements and the plan of the *Ark*.¹²¹ How is the *Ark* used as a symbol to describe the formation of this new *Ecclesia*?

If it is its symbol, it is because everything that life still possessed and was worthy of possessing was received into it. But before it could be set up, it was necessary that the man of the new *Ecclesia* should pass through all sorts of ordeals, which are signified and described as the rising of the *Ark* upon the waters of the Flood, its floating and drifting on the surface, the long duration of the voyage, until this man finally became a spiritual man, a man who was liberated and free, to whom it could be said: "Go forth from the *Ark*."¹²² The whole tale seems like the account of a long initiatory ordeal, and it is important to stress how closely Swedenborg's hermeneutics agree with what "traditional" sciences teach us, and how, for their part, the latter are confirmed by the testimony of visionary experiences that sustain his spiritual hermeneutics of the Bible.

The state of the person of the *Ecclesia* called Noah is thus that of a person in whom the organs of the internal person are closed, in the sense that they can no longer have direct communication with the spiritual world, with "Heaven," except in such a way that the person remains unconscious of it. Henceforth he must be instructed in it by external means, those of the senses and sensory things; he must learn how to transmute these into symbols. This will be possible, thanks to what has been preserved of immediate revelations or "celestial ideas" of the *Antiquissima Ecclesia*; these will be the *doctrinalia* preserved by Enoch, of whom it is said that "God took him" (Gen. 5:24), because these *doctrinalia*—at the moment when "he was taken"—were not of use or purpose to anyone.¹²³

In addition, the state of humanity represented in the Noah *Ecclesia* as a residue, "remains" saved from the original celestial *Ecclesia* among the exiles from Paradise, is revealed in the profound sense of these words: "And the Lord shut him [Noah] in [to the *Ark*]" (Gen. 7:16). The man Noah could no longer have interior communication with heaven. In fact, a communication remained possible, for the degrees and modalities of communication with the spiritual world are limitless; even an evil or

malevolent person has one, however weak and remote it may be, by means of the angels who are near him, otherwise the person would not even be able to exist. Since "the door was shut," though, the spiritual worlds have not been open as they were for the man of the *Antiquissima Ecclesia*. Afterward, many people, such as Moses, Aaron, and numerous others, had conversations with spirits and angels, but in an entirely different manner. The barrier is of such a kind and the reason for it is so deeply hidden that the person of our time does not even know that there are spirits, much less that there are angels with him, and he imagines that he is completely alone when there are no visible companions present and that he is thinking by himself, that is, only by means of the deliberation of his *proprium*, his illusory self. The reason for this occultation is profound, and Swedenborg analyzes it in an observation that is no less profound. It is that people have so inverted the orders of life, have succumbed to the obsession of wanting to judge suprasensory things only on the basis of sensory things and according to their laws, that in this state any manifestation of the things of heaven would be extremely perilous for them; it would lead inevitably to profanation and blasphemy, to the confusion of the sacred and the profane (the spiritual and the social), which, if it occurs in a spirit, places him in community with infernal spirits in the other world.¹²⁴

A person acquires a life, *his* life, by means of all the things that he professes, his inner convictions. Those that do not affect him are as though nonexistent *for* him, since it is *by means of* him that they must exist. Thus, the unpardonable profanation of holy things is not possible except for someone who has once been convinced of them and has then come to deny and reject them. Those who do not acknowledge them and whom they do not affect may always come to know; it is as though they had not known, for their case is the same as that of people who accept things that have no existence. This is why the mysteries of faith are not revealed except when the state of men is such that they

no longer believe in them and consequently cannot profane them. This is the "total devastation."¹²⁵ It was therefore necessary for the antediluvians to be expelled from Paradise, for they had known; it was necessary that men should no longer know. Thus, there is an extraordinary symmetry between the man Adam driven out to the exterior of Paradise and the man Noah entering into the *interior* of the Ark that is then closed upon him. In this there is also a profound way of expressing the necessity for esoterism. The man Noah does not "come forth from the Ark" until he has overcome the ordeal of the Flood.

In order, then, to understand in what the Flood consisted, as well as to understand the transition from the person of immediate spiritual perception (*Antiquissima Ecclesia*) to the person of conscience (*Antiqua Ecclesia*), and with this transition the necessity for esoterism, it is essential to bear in mind the leitmotiv that Swedenborg stresses particularly in this regard, namely, the physiology of the celestial person compared to that of the spiritual person. The first, we already know, had, aside from his external respiration, a totally silent internal respiration. Among themselves, people did not communicate so much by means of articulated words, as we do, but they did so by ideas, as the angels do. Swedenborg knew that what he formulated in this way would seem incredible, and yet it is so. He also knew that it would be difficult, and perhaps futile, to describe the mode of perception made possible by this internal respiration, for it would not be understood. When the external respiration alone remained, requiring language in words uttered and articulated, in which ideas are delimited and captive, the human state was entirely changed. This is the reason that people may no longer have immediate perception; people no longer had anything but conscience or, at best, something intermediate between immediate perception and conscience, an intermediary that is still known in our time. In brief, however, the result was that people could no longer be instructed directly by means of the internal person; it was necessary to pass through the external person.¹²⁶

Expressed in these terms, the anthropological change allows us to have an idea of the drama. A double danger threatens man: the danger of suffocation by spiritual things, a knowledge of which required that mysterious internal respiration, for he can no longer "breathe" them; and suffocation caused precisely by the absence of the things that had been his life. This double suffocation is the *Flood*. Throughout the Sacred Books, water or waters are symbols of things that relate to intelligence and knowledge, and, as a corollary, to lack of knowledge, for falsification, lies, and deception pertain negatively to knowledge.¹²⁷ (Again, let us note in this spiritual exegesis a striking convergence with the Isma'ili gnosis of the Flood; see *infra*, § 3.)

The Flood, in its internal signification and its spiritual truth, is not a geological cataclysm, nor is it a cataclysm affecting the physical totality of the earth, of its telluric mass. We know what the designation *earth* symbolizes: those who constituted the last posterity of the *Antiquissima Ecclesia*. In them there was still a "breath of life," albeit in a germinal state, that they retained from their distant ancestors, although they themselves were no longer in the life of faith proceeding from love. Possessed by insane desires, abominable appetites, they immersed the things of faith in them; the deceitful persuasions of their being extinguished and suffocated all truth and all good, rendering inoperative the residue, the "remains" of life that they still had. But in suffocating that, in drowning and stifling the internal person and his respiration, they destroyed themselves and expired. Such was the death of the antediluvians, for no one succeeds in living, *living in* the sense that excludes death, without a minimum of conjunction with Heaven.¹²⁸

This conjunction is what maintained the man Noah in the Ark, by preserving the "breath of life" there. But it was at the cost of a long ordeal, a long combat and severe tribulations, before he could achieve the regeneration refused by those who preferred the desolation of their own devastation. All the numbers that are given—the forty days of the Flood, the one hun-

dred fifty days of the submersion of the earth, the age of Noah, as well as the date of the event ("the six hundredth year of Noah's life")—have a symbolic, and consequently initiatory, signification. Thus, the signification is current, present. For the angels of Heaven it is all the same whether a thing is past, present, or to come: "What is to come is present, or what is to be done is done."¹²⁹

We understand, then, the human ordeal symbolized in that of the man Noah or the *Ecclesia* Noah. What our theosopher was witness to in the course of his "visions in the Spirit" was the influx of infernal spirits as something impulsive, furious. Their object was the total subjugation of man, not only to make man one of them, but to reduce him to nothing. People are not free of their domination and their yoke except at the cost of the combat that the Lord gives through the agency of the angels that are with everyone. As long as this internal combat lasts, man remains, for his salvation, in the Ark, ringed by the waters of the Flood, shaken by ordeals, that is, by the attempts of the evil spirits. At the end of his regeneration, "God spake unto Noah, saying, Go forth from the Ark" (Gen. 8:15-16). This address by God to Noah is nothing other than the divine Presence henceforth recovered, for so far as He is present, God speaks with man; and His Presence implies freedom. The more the Lord is present, the more people are free, that is, the more a person is in the state of love, the more freely he acts.¹³⁰ Noah, then, may leave the Ark; he has overcome the ordeal of the Flood. We have been told that the celestial person is called the "Victorious."

Of necessity, we have been limited here to these few themes illustrating the spiritual history of humanity, a recurrent history, always present, since in the spiritual world the moments of time are nothing other than successive internal states; a reversible time, for it is not a homogeneous quantitative time, a time to which some unit of external measurement would relate, subject to the irreversible progression of numbers. What we have been able to gather here, in relation to Swedenborg's immense work,

is not even a drop of water in relation to the ocean. Nevertheless, it has allowed us to penetrate sufficiently into what constitutes the reality and the essence of a *spiritual event*, in order to understand how the truth of this event controls all the approaches of spiritual hermeneutics, that is, the comprehension of a sense that, as such, can absolutely not be *closed* and consequently cannot be *enclosed* in the literal sense of a *history* henceforth "past and gone."

In this way we have approached somewhat more closely to what constitutes the phenomenon of the Sacred Book, the Revealed Book, and to what distinguishes it from every profane book, namely, the exegesis that it imposes: to understand its *true* sense, a sense that, as it is *true*, is the *present* sense. It is here that there is profound accord between the spiritual hermeneutists of the Bible and the spiritual hermeneutists of the Qur'an—the more easily because the Qur'an gathers much data from the Bible, particularly about the history of Adam and the history of Noah, themes to which our examination of spiritual hermeneutics has limited itself, for the time being. This profound accord in the quest for the true sense of the Sacred Book arranges for us the modulation that will allow us to pass from one subject to another. We do not have to search very far for that transition. It is best indicated to us in the response given to one of his acquaintances by the Fifth Imam of the Shi'ites, Imam Mohammad al-Baqir (A.H. 57/A.D. 676-A.H. 115/A.D. 733), who declared: "If the revelation of the Qur'an only had meaning with regard to the person or group of people as a result of whom one or another verse was revealed, then the entire Qur'an would be dead today. No! The Sacred Book, the Qur'an, is alive, it will never die; its verses will be fulfilled among the people of the future, as they have been fulfilled among those of the past."¹³¹

This remark by the Imam admirably anticipates and defeats, before the fact, the trap of what we call today *historicism*, that is,

the systematic attitude which, by making the significance of the Sacred Book *captive* to the date of its material composition, stifles any potential for a significance that goes beyond that "past." We will see that, on both sides, the mirage of these opinionated so-called historical solutions is escaped by means of the *presence* of spiritual universes that symbolize with each other, by means of a comparable architecture, and in relation to which what we call history is a *hikayat*, a "history" that is a *mimesis*. Such will be, in fact, the Shi'ite and Isma'ili vision of things.

II. ISMA'ILI GNOSIS

1. *Shi'ite and Isma'ili Hermeneutics*

It is only possible here to mention allusively, in a few words, what constitutes the essence of Shi'ism in general, both Twelve-Imam Shi'ism and Seven-Imam Shi'ism or Isma'ilism; for more details, the reader is referred to our previously published works.¹³² The Shi'ite religious phenomenon concerns us here in the first place because it differs from Sunni Islam insofar as it postulates, even as its foundation, spiritual hermeneutics of the Sacred Book, the Qur'an. This exigency derives from a theological and theologians' conception that constitutes the originality and the richness of Shi'ism, so that the question that was posed early in Sunni Islam regarding the created or uncreated nature of the Qur'an appeared ill posed in this context, because it was deprived of the metaphysical horizon that it presupposes. It is to Shi'ism that Islamic thought is indebted for a prophetology and a prophetic philosophy. This prophetology is characterized by the fact that the mission of the prophet-messengers (simultaneously *Nabi* and *Rasul*), instructed to reveal a Sacred Book to men, is inseparable from the *walayyat*, that is, the spiritual qualification of the Imams, successors to the Prophet, as "Friends of

God" (*Awliya' Allah*), to whom is entrusted, since they are "Spiritual Guides" and "Sustainers of the Book," the task of initiating men into its *true* sense.

Prophecy and Imamate (or *walayat*) correspond to a double cosmic movement: *mabda'* and *ma'ad*, genesis and return, descent and ascent to the origin. To this double movement correspond, on one hand, *tanzil*, Revelation—the act of *sending down* the Sacred Book, the letter of which the prophet is instructed to express (the *shari'at*, the Law, the positive religion)—and, on the other hand, *ta'wil*, which is the act of *bringing back* the letter of Revelation to its true sense—spiritual *exegesis*, which is the function of the Imam. This true sense is the spiritual sense, the *haqiqat* or Idea. As one of the greatest Isma'ili theologians of Iran, Nasir-e Khosraw (eleventh century), wrote: "Positive religion [*shari'at*] is the exoteric aspect of the spiritual Idea [*haqiqat*], and the spiritual Idea is the esoteric aspect of positive religion; positive religion is the symbol [*mathal*], the spiritual Idea is that which is symbolized [*mamthul*]." ¹³³

All of Shi'ism, considered as Islamic esoterism, is in agreement on these essential concepts. There are, however, a certain number of internal differences between the two principal forms of Shi'ism: Twelve-Imam Shi'ism, on one hand, which is still called *Imamism* and which, for the past five centuries, has been the official religion of Iran; and, on the other hand, Seven-Imam Shi'ism or Isma'ilism, which itself now includes two main branches. The difference relates essentially to the concept of the Imamate, and consequently to the structure of the esoteric hierarchies, and thus to the application of spiritual hermeneutics. Twelve-Imam Shi'ism limits the number of Imams ("Spiritual Guides") to twelve persons in all, who, together with the Prophet himself and his daughter Fatima, the origin of their lineage, form the pleroma of the "Fourteen Pure Ones" (in Persian, *Chahdrdeh-Ma'sum*). Together, they are the earthly manifestation of the *Haqiqat mohammadiya*, eternal prophetic

Reality, in its double aspect (*Logos-Sophia*) of the exoteric manifested in law-giving prophecy and the esoteric manifested in the Imamate. With the Twelfth Imam, the Imamate withdraws into occultation (*ghaybat*). The Imam is never absent from this world, of which he is the mystic pole (*qotb*), without which mankind would not be able to continue to exist, but he was "removed" from this world, as were, according to our Western traditions, the holy Grail and its guardian. Consequently, in both cases, the esoteric hierarchy itself lives in strict incognito; we are not able to say *who* its members are, and they are not permitted to reveal themselves. ¹³⁴

The spiritual hermeneutics of Imamite theosophy is applied in terms of the Manifestation of eternal prophetic Reality, that is, of the Fourteen Pure Ones, to the different degrees of the hierarchy of the spiritual universes preceding our world of sensory phenomena. ¹³⁵ This Manifestation is accompanied by a state of the Divine Word, the Book or eternal Qur'an, varying according to each of these universes. To simplify matters, we will say that four of these are distinguished, symbolized by the "four Lights of the Throne" that are mentioned in traditions extending back to the holy Imams themselves: there are, below the pleroma of the *Haqiqat mohammadiya*, the world of pure Lights (*'alam al-Anwdr*), the world of the *jabarut* [the world of the Cherubim, of the Divine Names of God], symbolized by white light; the world of Spirits (*'alam al-Arwah*), the world of the higher *Malakut* [the world of the *Animae coelestes*, the esoteric aspect of the visible heavens], symbolized by yellow light; the world of Souls (*'alam al-Nofus*), symbolized by green light, and including the *mundus imaginalis*, the world of subtle bodies and the emerald cities; and the world of material bodies (*'alam al-ajsam*), symbolized by red light (it can be seen that the first three are, respectively, in correspondence with the three degrees of Heaven, as Swedenborg describes it: celestial angels, spiritual angels, and angelic spirits).

Each of these worlds is the internal, the esoteric (*batin*) in

relation to the one or ones below it, but it is itself the exoteric (*zahir*), the containant, the rind (*qishr*), in relation to those that are above it. Thus, in a way, an esoterism to the fourth power is reached. Each of these four degrees is capable, besides, of a sevenfold resonance. Another schema relates the exoteric or *zahir* to the entirety of the visible world (from celestial Spheres to minerals); the esoteric or *batin* to the Fourteen Pure Ones in their earthly Manifestation; the esoteric of the esoteric (*batin al-batin*) to their epiphany in the higher spiritual universes; *ta'wil*, as the first exegesis, leads back, on one hand, to the *microcosm* that is the human individual, and, on the other hand, to the *mesocosm*, to the middle world, which is that of alchemical operation. These few premises suffice to make understandable why our thinkers declare that meditation on the Qur'an is inexhaustible. An entire library would be necessary in order to realize integrally the totality of the hermeneutic plan for the totality of verses in the Qur'an.¹³⁶ Moreover, it is the function of the Hidden Imam, at the time of his appearance, to reveal the esoteric sense of all the Divine Revelations; it is precisely this which is the *Qiyamat* (resurrection).

However close the affinities may be, things appear somewhat differently in Isma'ilism. Up to the time of the Sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765), one of the great figures in Shi'ite Islam, there was only one Shi'ism. For very complex reasons, one group of his followers (his "Shi'ites") then became attached to the Imamic line represented in the person of his oldest son, Imam Isma'il, whose premature death caused so many difficulties; for that reason, they were called Isma'ilis.¹³⁷ The remaining followers transferred their allegiance to his other son, Musa Kazem, as Seventh Imam; these were the Imamites or Twelve-Imam Shi'ites. In fact, under the appearance of historical contingencies, the secret law that gives rhythm to spiritual history imposed itself in both instances: in one case, the number twelve (each of the six great prophets had his twelve Imams); in the other, among the Isma'ilis, the number seven (the succession of

each prophet passes through seven Imams or several heptads of Imams).

Isma'ilism, the preeminent Islamic gnosis, experienced the most formidable and paradoxical ordeal that an esoteric religion may undergo, when it gained a temporal and political triumph with the Fatimid dynasty of Egypt. Its eschatological essence would otherwise have required that this triumph be the end of the story. Instead of stopping there, however, external history led to the schism resulting from the death of the Eighth Fatimid caliph, al-Mostansir bi'llah (487/1094). Today, Isma'ilism is still divided into two major branches: one perpetuates the Fatimid tradition, and for it, too, the Imam has entered into occultation with the last Fatimid of Cairo; the other branch, the adherents of the Aga Khan, emerged from the Iranian reform of Alamut.

Alamut! The stronghold lost in the high solitary summits of the Elburz mountain chain, to the southwest of the Caspian Sea, where, on 8 August 1164, the Great Resurrection (*Qiyamat al-Qiyamat*) was proclaimed. We should celebrate its eight hundredth anniversary this month [August 1964] (at least according to the solar calendar).¹³⁸ Undoubtedly, though, a proclamation of this type pertains to that spiritual history, the events of which occur unnoticed by external official history, because their implication cannot be suspected by historians whose attention is given exclusively to the latter. In any case, the proclamation of the Great Resurrection was intended to be the triumph of absolute spiritual hermeneutics, since it purely and simply abolished the *shari'at* and its observances, in order to permit the reign of the spiritual Idea (the *haqiqat*) alone to subsist. Here again, the impatience of the soul provoked a premature anticipation of eschatology, although the Event proclaimed on 8 August 1164, which passed unobserved by the external history of our world, perhaps had the sense of one of those *judgments* "in Heaven," about which we have heard Swedenborg speak. On the other hand, the Shi'ism of the Fatimid tradition, as well as Twelve-Imam Shi'ism, continued carefully to maintain (as did

Swedenborg) the coexistence of the exoteric and the esoteric, for as long as the human condition remains what it is in the present world, the soul cannot manifest itself without being contained in a material body.

For Isma'ilism as well, the literal sense, the external appearance, the exoteric containant (*zahir*) conceals a plurality of internal senses ordered in a hierarchy of universes that symbolize with each other. The Principle (*Mobdi'*), Divine Silence and Abyss, remains, as in every gnosis—and as with Swedenborg—strictly inaccessible, Super-Being (*hyperousion*) beyond being and nonbeing. From the First Archangelic Intelligence that emerges from this Silence, raised up in being as *Deus revelatus*, proceeds the entire supreme pleroma of the primordial Establishment (*'alam al-Ibda'*), formed of hierarchical archangelic Intelligences. A cosmogony that is simultaneously speculative and dramatic posits that from one of these Intelligences, our demiurge, is the origin of our physical universe, the *macrocosm*, including the astronomical sky and the world of Elements; the *microcosm*, or world of man, the structure of which is homologous to that of the macrocosm; and finally, an intermediary world, the *mesocosm*, which is the spiritual world constituted by the esoteric community on earth.

The idea of the macrocosm, which is that of the cosmic Man, is well known in other gnostic and theosophical systems; it is the theme of the Human Form as archetype of the universes (Greek **μακροανθρώπος**, Arabic *Insan kabir*). We have mentioned above that it is a dominant theme in the Swedenborgian topography of the spiritual universes (*Homo maximus*), and the theme seems to us to be in particular accord with the Isma'ili idea of the Imam to come, the last Imam of our *Aion*, as Imam of the Resurrection (*Qa'im al-Qiyamat*), for everything upon which speculative gnosis has meditated in the theme of the *Anthropos* is found collected together in the person of the Imam as *Anthropos* in the absolute sense. Herein is, in fact, his divinity (his lahut), that is, the human form arising in its truth and its integrality; in its

archangelic splendor it is the "Temple of Light" (*Haykal nurani*), constituted by all the "forms of light" of the initiates of the esoteric community, the future temple of their apotheoses, where each of them assumes a rank and a role respectively analogous to those of each of the organs and members in the physical human body.¹³⁹

The hierarchical structure of the *mesocosm*, or of the esoteric community in our world, symbolizes with that of the "Temple of Light," as it symbolizes with the hierarchical structure of the astronomical sky, and as the latter also symbolizes with the hierarchy of the invisible heavens of the archangelic Pleroma. Isma'ili metaphysics is characterized by this fundamental hierarchy of being, and the springboard of its spiritual hermeneutics is essentially the strict correspondence between the degrees of the celestial hierarchy and the degrees of the earthly esoteric hierarchy. The mesocosm also concerns anthropology and angelology simultaneously, since to enter into the mystic community on earth, as a member of the *corpus mysticum*, is to enter into the "virtual paradise," and thereby to allow the potential angelhood in the human being to achieve actual angelhood after death. Here, too, there is another concept that is in profound accord with Swedenborgian anthropology.

Certainly, the developments and vicissitudes of Isma'ili thought have led to modifications in the conception of the detail of these hierarchies. In its most complete form, as it is presented, for example, in the work of Hamid Kermani (d. about 408/1017), the schema agrees with that of the Avicennian philosophers. To the Ten Archangelic Intelligences of the supreme Pleroma (each of these Intelligences itself containing an entire pleroma), corresponds the visible astronomical sky and the grades of the esoteric hierarchy.¹⁴⁰ Before and afterward, less complex schemas were known, especially in the work of the Isma'ili author whom we will be questioning here regarding the Isma'ili conception of the spiritual sense of the history of Adam and the history of Noah.

of the Imam.¹⁴⁴ They are doubled by twelve others called Wings (*ajniha*); these are the *da'is*, the secret emissaries assigned to propagate the Call, the *da'wat*, in each of the twelve *jazira* (regions) into which, ideally at least, the world is divided. Such is the order of things presented by Qazi No'man, the author whom we are following here, and it is sufficient to understand the spiritual dramaturgy concealed under the external history of Adam and Noah, the double theme to which we must limit ourselves here, before saying a few words about Isma'ili Christology.

2. *The Esoteric Sense of the History of Adam*

We have just described the twelve esoteric "dignitaries" designated as *Hojjat* of the Imam. Their establishment extends back to the initiation of the one who was *the first Adam* on earth, the universal primordial Adam (*Adam al-awwal al-kolli*), *pananthropos* who must not be confused with the *partial* Adam, initiator of our present cycle of prophecy. He must also not be confused with the spiritual Adam (*Adam ruhani*), celestial *Anthropos* or Angel of humanity, who was the protagonist of the drama that occurred in the Pleroma, the drama of which our earthly history, understood as hierohistory or spiritual history, is after all the *hikayat* (the repetition, the imitation). Precisely the duration of earthly time, that of the cycles of hierohistory begins in the "delay of eternity" that occurred in the being of the celestial *Anthropos*, immobilized in doubt, in the vertigo of his own person. Earthly time must fill in the *delay*, which is "expressed in numbers" in the degradation in rank of the celestial Adam (from *third* to *tenth*). From cycle to cycle, from prophet to prophet, spiritual humanity, that which responds to the *da'wat*, to the divine Call, tends to this "reconquest," the result of which is assured by the triumph that its Angel has already gained—and gained over himself. It is impossible here to say more about it or to explain how this "drama in Heaven" is the origin of the vertiginous succession of cycles on earth, where a "cycle of

epiphany" (*dawr al-kashf*) and a "cycle of occultation" (*dawral-satr*) alternate with each other. Evidently, the only one that may even be spoken about in full knowledge of cause is our present "cycle of occultation."¹⁴⁵

What becomes apparent—and this is what interests us here—is the manner in which spiritual or esoteric hermeneutics of the Bible and the Qur'an, particularly the hermeneutics of data common to both, tends in each case to discover the same secret that explains the present condition of man. In both instances, there is revealed essentially a drama of knowledge, a dislocation of the conscience, a fall of perceptive and cognitive powers, which cuts off the human being from his presence in other higher universes, in order to imprison him in the fate of his solitary presence in this world. If certain hermeneutic differences cannot but emerge, they are no less instructive, and a great many of them are not irreducible.

In both cases we find spiritual hermeneutics of the idea of the *hexaemeron*, the six days of Creation, a profound symbol that an obsolete literalism can degrade to the point of making it puerile. We have seen that, in Swedenborg's works, the six degrees or stages of creation of the spiritual man are represented; the "seventh day" is the celestial man who symbolizes the *Antiquissima Ecclesia*. For Isma'ili gnosis, the *hexaemeron* constitutes the six days of the creation of the *hierocosmos*, that is, of the religious and sacral universe (*'alam al-Din*) of spiritual humanity. These "six days" are the six periods of our present cycle, each marked by the name of its prophet: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad. We are only at the sixth day of Creation; the "seventh day" (the Sabbath) will be the advent of the Imam of the Resurrection (*Qa'im al-Qiyamat*).¹⁴⁶ But in both cases, celestial man, that is, the state of angelhood in act in man, is at the same time behind us and before us. *Behind us*: as the man of the "cycle of epiphany" before ours, in Isma'ili terms; this is like Swedenborg's morning of the seventh day. *Before us*: under the name of *Nova Hierosolyma*, in Swedenborgian terms; under the