Henry Corbin and Russian Religious Thought
Part II: Themes and Variations[1]

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Arriving at the Shi'ite Sophia: Corbin's Bulgakovian Turn

> *"Un ishrâqî est spontanément un sophiologue"*
> (Corbin, *"Post-scriptum biographique à un entretien philosophique"*).

Henry Corbin's move to Iran in 1945 marked the beginning of a prolific period lasting three decades, during which he produced his landmark works on Islamic thought. Sophiology emerges as a major theme in Corbin's writings from that period. Fr. Sergius Bulgakov played an important role in Corbin's discovery of the Russian Sophiological tradition. In a draft of a letter to Fr. Georges Florovsky dated 17 February 1941 found in his papers, he wrote:

> As you may already have guessed, I've read a lot of Fr. Bulgakov since our last meeting…. Everything I could find in English and German before I could read him in Russian. I have a perfect admiration for him, and I very bitterly regret not being able to correspond with him at the moment: I would like to encourage him, if necessary, in the present hardships. I intend to derive the greatest profit from his thought in the future.[2]

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1. The first part of this study appeared in the previous number of *Dionysius*. It dealt with Corbin's encounter with Russian thinkers in Paris during the 1930s, and the convergence of his interest in Orthodox thought and his interest in Islamic mysticism at the turn of the 40s. This second part focuses on Corbin's thought roughly from the time of his departure from Istanbul to Iran in 1945 until his death in 1978, during which period all of his main writings appeared. I thank Drs. Rula Jurdi Abisaab and Todd Lawson for their comments on a previous version of this study.

2. "Vous devinez par là que depuis notre dernière entrevue, j'ai beaucoup lu le P. Boulgakov, c'est exact. Tout ce que j'ai trouvé en anglais et en allemand, avant de pouvoir le lire en russe. J'ai une parfaite admiration pour lui, et ce m'est un regret très amer de ne pouvoir correspondre avec lui en ce moment; je voudrais l'encourager, si besoin, dans les peines présentes. Je compte à l'avenir tirer le plus grand fruit de sa pensée" (Corbin Papers, Bibliothèque des sciences religieuses,

Indeed, Bulgakov left a considerable impact on Corbin's post-war thought. His influence is notably evident in Corbin's interpretation of Carl Gustav Jung's *Answer to Job* in a 1953 article titled "The Eternal Sophia." Russian Sophiology further led Corbin to conceive of a "Shi'ite Sophiology" and a "Mazdean Sophiology." Indeed, the perceived recurrence of Sophianic motifs in Iranian religious history allowed Corbin to present a unified and progressive narrative of spiritual consciousness "from Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran." In a related aspect, Bulgakov's doctrine of angels shaped Corbin's interpretation of Islamic and Iranian angelology. Further, elements of Bulgakov's teaching on the holy icons are reflected in Corbin's conception of Shi'ite Imamology and his unique interpretation of Andrei Rublev's icon of the Trinity.

"The Eternal Sophia": Corbin's Sophiological Interpretation of Jung

In September 1945, Corbin moved from Istanbul directly to Teheran to "meet Suhrawardi in his own homeland," as he put it. There, he became the director of the Department of Iranology of the newly founded Franco-Iranian Institute, and initiated the series of publications entitled *Bibliothèque Iranienne*, which made available many major texts of Sufism. From that time on until his death, Corbin spent almost every fall semester in Teheran, teaching at the University of Teheran, while also lecturing, from 1949, at the yearly Eranos conferences in Ascona, Switzerland, and teaching, from 1954, as a successor to Louis Massignon at the École pratique des hautes études in Paris.[3]

Eranos had a unique place in Corbin's career. It allowed him, as he put it, "[to reveal and express] in complete freedom…an original way of thinking, outside all dogmatism and academicism."[4] Nearly all of his major works—including *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (originally published in 1954), *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (1958), *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* (1960), and the monumental four-volume *In Iranian Islam* (1971-1972)—were based on lectures delivered at Eranos. These works reflect the freedom from conventional disciplinary limits afforded by Eranos. While

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École pratique des hautes études (5ème section), box 15.)

    3. Landolt, "Between Philosophy and Orientalism," 486; Nasr, "The Life and Works of the Occidental Exile in Quest of the Orient of Light," 277.

    4. Corbin, "The Time of Eranos," xx.

Corbin was by all accounts a scrupulous scholar—as his many editions of Arabic and Persian works fully attest—it is important to take into account the context of Eranos in which took shape and were delivered his interpretations of Islamic thought.[5]

Among the many encounters Corbin made at Eranos, perhaps none has attracted more attention than his meeting with the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961). Partly because of his friendship with Jung, and partly because he makes favourable references to Jung in some of his writings, Corbin has attracted interest from Jungian circles, particularly among the followers of James Hillman, the founder of "archetypal psychology," who credits Jung and Corbin as primary influences. While the attention Corbin has received from followers of Jung and Hillman has contributed to the growth of his fame—particularly in North America—there has also been a tendency to misrepresent his intellectual context and misconstrue his project by indiscriminately associating some of his ideas with those of Jung and Hillman.

To be sure, Corbin's writings, particularly those published between 1949 and 1960, contain many references to Jung, and draw on certain aspects of his thought. Tom Cheetham is no doubt right in pointing out that

> Jung's ideas helped to crystallize many concepts that were perhaps not quite fully conscious in Corbin's mind, but which only needed a small impact to take on their final, and characteristically Corbinian, character…. Yet… Jung's ideas [did not alter] the direction of Corbin's thought in any significant way. It is perhaps more accurate to see Jung as providing confirmation and support for, as well as defining contrast with, ideas that Corbin had already developed, or that were nascent in his mind, and which he continued to pursue long after the initial thrill was gone.[6]

Indeed, with Jung's death in 1961, references to him all but disappeared in Corbin's writings, and Corbin later wrote: "I was friends with Jung, but never a 'Jungian' myself. I say this because for many superficial or naïve readers it is enough for one to make several references to an author to be taken for one of his disciples."[7]

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5. On Eranos, see Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth-Century*. See also Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 295-313.

6. Cheetham, *All the World an Icon*, 137.

7. The full passage reads: "Que dire de ces entretiens [avec Jung] sur lesquels je ne voudrais laisser planer aucune ambiguïté? J'étais un métaphysicien, non pas un psychologue, Jung était un psychologue non pas un métaphysicien, quoiqu'il ait souvent côtoyé la métaphysique. Nos formations et nos visées respectives étaient

Disproportionate emphasis on Jung has further overshadowed other, more decisive influences on Corbin, particularly Russian thinkers. The complex relation between Jung and Corbin, and the reception of Corbin's ideas in Jungian milieus, are outside the present scope.[8] Here I would like simply to draw attention to the way Russian Sophiology influenced Corbin's reception of Jung. Corbin's discovery of Russian religious thought predates by over two decades his encounter with Jung, even though the full extent of the Russian influence on his thought did not become manifest until well after Jung had come into the picture. How did the Russian content in Corbin's thought shape his reception of Jung's ideas?

To answer this question, we turn to Corbin's review of Jung's book *Answer to Job*.[9] Published in 1953, "The Eternal Sophia," helped consolidate the nascent relation between Corbin and Jung. Upon reading it, Jung expressed in a letter to Corbin his "extraordinary joy" at "the not only extremely rare, but even rather unique experience of being completely understood."[10]

In his review, Corbin presents Jung as "an interpreter of Sophia and Sophiology," and describes Jung's book as a "phenomenology of the sophianic consciousness of religion."[11] Jung's work, he writes, "resonates like a strange reminder of those religious themes which, some twenty years ago, a few young philosopher-theologians in quest of new insights which they could claim for their own were concerned with." Corbin then mentions two key thinkers that marked his thought in the 1930s. On the one hand, there was Kierkegaard, who drew young Protestant philosophers toward "the adventurous search for truth through subjectivity." Next to Kierkegaard,

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toutes différentes…. Oserai-je dire que l'enseignement et la conversation de Jung pouvaient apporter à tout métaphysicien, à tout théologien, un don inappréciable, à condition de s'en séparer au moment où il le fallait? Je pense au précepte d'André Gide: 'Maintenant, Nathanaël, jette mon livre….' Jung se défendait avec force et humour d'être 'jungien.' Moi-même je fus ami avec Jung, je ne fus jamais un 'jungien.' Je le précise, car pour maints lecteurs superficiels ou naïfs, il suffit que vous vous référiez plusieurs fois à un auteur, pour qu'ils fassent de vous un de ses adeptes" (Corbin, "Post-scriptum biographique," 48).

8. For a critical comparison of Jung and Corbin, see Cheetham, *All the World an Icon*, 130-189.

9. Corbin, "La Sophia éternelle," 11-44.

10. Letter from Jung to Corbin, May 4, 1953, in *L'Herne: Henry Corbin*, ed. Jambet, 328.

11. Corbin, postface to *Réponse à Job*, by C.G. Jung, 249; Corbin, "Post-scriptum biographique," 48.

there was the voice of Father Sergius Bulgakov, harbinger of Sophia and sophianic thought, who, with Nicolas Berdyaev, was rediscovering the secrets of a neglected tradition for all those who were linked in one way or another to Russian Orthodoxy. Those who will have heard this voice will no doubt be the most receptive to Jung's "sophianic" book, which will at least not become for them a cause for scandal.[12]

Corbin detects a "symphonic relation" between "Fr. Bulgakov's Sophiology and what can also be called Jung's Sophiology."[13] Sophiology here serves as a link between Jung and Bulgakov. Later we will see how Corbin used Sophiology to make a connection between pre- and post-Islamic Iran. Indeed, Corbin's interest in Sophiology is closely tied to his overall ecumenical project. Thus, in his 1964 postface to the French edition of Jung's *Answer to Job*, he envisions a "future work, in which Jung's Sophiology would take its place in an overall phenomenology of the sophianic consciousness." In it, he notes, he would explore the connections between

the Jungian Sophiology and the figure of Sophia in the Spirituals of Protestantism (Jacob Boehme and his lineage…), the Sophiological school of Russian Orthodoxy (Sergius Bulgakov, Berdyaev), and finally the spiritual universe of ancient Iran.[14]

While such a work "remains on the agenda"—the projected work was unfortunately never completed—Corbin refers to his book *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* for those who wish to "familiarise

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12. Corbin, "La Sophia éternelle," 16. On Jung's reception in Russian religious thought, see Crone, *Eros and Creativity in Russian Religious Renewal*.

13. Corbin, "La Sophia éternelle," 38. He also notes some differences: "Of course there are differences…. The Russian Orthodox theologian's thought evolves within traditional Christian dogma whilst Jung's unfolds with total confessional freedom. Sophiology is an interpretation of the world, a theological *Weltanschauung* within Christianity itself. It became one stream of theological thought within the Orthodox Church…represented…by a long tradition (from Soloviev to Fr. Florensky). The way it poses the problem of the relation between God and the world, between God and man, and its affinity with the ideas of Meister Eckhart, Boehme, Schelling and Baader, doubtless make it, of all Christian theological schools today, the one most likely to understand Jung's Sophiological message" (Corbin, "La Sophia Éternelle," 38). In a comparative study of Jung and Berdyaev, Georg Nicolaus describes Corbin as "the first one to notice a deep resonance between the Russian personalist thinkers and Jung with reference to what he calls Jung's 'sophiology.'" According to Nicolaus, the "symphonic relation" of Jung's sophiology to Bulgakov's sophiology "applies…possibly even more to Berdyaev's thought" (*C.G. Jung and Nikolai Berdyaev: Individuation and the Person*, 7).

14. Corbin, postface to *Réponse* à *Job*, by C.G. Jung, 251.

[themselves] with the idea of Sophia as it presented itself to the vision of ancient Zoroastrian Iran as well as of Islamic Persia, that is, to Islamic gnosticism under its specifically Shi'ite form."[15]

Corbin's project of an "eternal Sophiology" that would encompass diverse religious concepts from ancient Iran to modern Russian religious thought and Jung certainly goes beyond the scope of Bulgakov's Sophiology, which developed within a traditional Christian theological context. From a different angle, however, Corbin's Sophiology may be compatible with the "liberal" dimension of Russian Sophiology. As Paul Valliere writes, Sophia, in the works of the Russian Sophiologists, is "best seen as a conceptual representation of the dialogue between the Orthodox theological tradition and modern liberal civilization."[16] For Bulgakov, Sophiology is a "method that enables dogmatic theology to generate fresh constructions…. [T]here can be no final 'system' of sophiology, since new content is at all times being produced by the world-process."[17] This "progressive" aspect of Bulgakov's Sophiology may have inspired Corbin to imagine an ecumenical Sophiology that would encompass religious notions from different cultural and historical periods as part of an "overall phenomenology of sophianic consciousness."[18]

Sophiology as a Response to Secularisation

Born in 1871, Bulgakov studied law, and became a professor of political economy at the universities of Kiev and then Moscow. After a period as a "Legal Marxist," he published *From Marxism to Idealism* (1903), which marked his conversion to belief in absolute values, and he soon passed into religious faith. Together with Berdyaev, he became one of the most prominent voices of the Russian intelligentsia calling for social change on the basis of

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15. Corbin, postface to *Réponse à Job*, by Jung, 251-252. Corbin left an outline of his projected book on the "eternal Sophia" (see Appendix).

16. Valliere, "Sophiology as the Dialogue of Orthodoxy with Modern Civilization," 176.

17. Valliere, "Sophiology as the Dialogue of Orthodoxy with Modern Civilization," 190.

18. On ecumenism in Bulgakov's thought, see Galaher, "Bulgakov's Ecumenical Thought," 24-55, esp. 33-34. See also A. Arjakovsky, "The Sophiology of Father Sergius Bulgakov," 219-235. For a recent example of using Bulgakov's Sophiology as a method of interreligious dialogue, see McDaniel, "Sergei Bulgakov's 'Philosophy of Economy,'" 451-467 (thanks to Dr Todd Lawson for this reference).

a spiritual revolution. Following his exile from Russia in 1922, he visited Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, which marked his Sophiological interpretation of the world. From 1925 until his death in 1944 he lived in Paris, where he was professor of dogmatic theology at the Orthodox Theological Institute, which he helped found.[19]

As well as being a prolific theologian, Bulgakov was also a priest in the Orthodox Church, and as such was an official representative of Orthodoxy. In this respect, Bulgakov was unlike Berdyaev who, despite his adherence to the Orthodox Church, never spoke in the name of any official body, considering himself first and foremost as a "free thinker."[20] Bulgakov's thought by contrast was theological, that is, based on biblical references and specifically informed by Christian doctrine. However, Bulgakov's theology was also profoundly influenced by German idealism.[21] Berdyaev distinguishes two basic trends within Russian religious thought: the "primarily religious-anthropological" and the "primarily religious-cosmological" currents. At the heart of the first trend, which he represents, Berdyaev identifies the problems of man, freedom and evil, creativity and history.[22] Bulgakov, on the other hand, represents the second current, which is principally concerned with the problems of the cosmos, the sophianic aspect of the creature, Mariology and angelology.[23] This distinction,

19. Copleston, *Russian Religious Philosophy*, 91. For an account of Bulgakov's life, see Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, II, 890-893.

20. Of his role in the interconfessional meetings in Paris, Berdyaev wrote: "My embarrassment was due to my own ambiguous position: I was unable to speak in the name of any official body. I could express only my own individual convictions, without claiming to represent anybody or anybody except myself. But when these inter-confessional meetings began our non-Orthodox friends regarded my position as distinctly Orthodox, or even as the voice of Orthodoxy itself. This misunderstanding, which kept on recurring on other occasions, was rather disturbing, and I did my best to dispel it" (Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality*, 259-260).

21. See Seiling, "From Antinomy to Sophiology."

22. As Georgy Fedotov writes: "Berdiaev's life intuition is characterized by an acute sense of evil prevailing in the world. Through this intuition he carries on the tradition of Dostoevsky (Ivan Karamazov), but also that of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia…. The struggle with evil and a chivalric-revolutionary attitude towards the world make Berdiaev stand out in relation to many thinkers of the Russian Orthodox revival. Not a humble or aesthetic affirmation of the world as a Divine all-unity (which is the basis of Russian 'Sophianism'), but a struggle with the world in the image of fallen nature, society and man, makes up the life nerve of his work" (cited in Linde, *Nikolai Berdiaev's Existential Gnosticism*, 120).

23. Berdyaev, "Concerning Sophiology."

although not quite clear-cut, helps us understand Berdyaev and Bulgakov's respective contributions to Corbin's thinking.

Bulgakov's theory of Sophia has received much attention over the years and continues to be the subject of some controversy among Orthodox theologians.[24] Here the aim is merely to indicate a few aspects of Bulgakov's doctrine of Sophia that became important for Corbin. As already indicated, the Russian Sophiological tradition goes back to Vladimir Solovyov, who was the first to identify the Wisdom of God, personified and referred to as "she" in the sapiential books of the Old Testament, with the "Eternal Feminine." While Bulgakov pays tribute to Solovyov as "the first Russian sophiologist," he objects to what he regards as Solovyov's syncretism, and the way in which Solovyov draws on ancient gnostic sources and on the writings of Western theosophers such as Boehme. Instead, Bulgakov wishes to develop Sophiology in conformity with Orthodox doctrine. According to Bulgakov, it was Fr. Pavel Florensky (1882-1937), a Russian Orthodox theologian, who was the first to have placed the theme of Sophiology in a strictly Orthodox setting.[25]

The starting point for Bulgakov's Sophiological speculation is the relation between God and the world, or "what is practically the same thing, between *God* and *man*."[26] In general, Bulgakov tells us, there has been a tendency to confront human beings with a choice, "God *or* the world, God *or* man." This polarisation is metaphysically represented in two extreme positions: monism, in which the distinction between God and the world collapses, and dualism, in which an unbridgeable chasm is postulated between the transcendent God, "wholly Other," and finite beings.[27] Bulgakov, like later Corbin, was particularly concerned with the

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24. "Bulgakov's defence of a Sophiological interpretation of Christian dogmas called forth a polemic against him, and later a harsh censure for heresy on the part of Metropolitan Sergius of Moscow, who, however, had in his possession only long excerpts from Bulgakov's book, which had been made by his opponents and sent by them to Moscow. Metropolitan Eulogius, the Rector of the Theological Institute, found it necessary to appoint a special committee to investigate the question of Fr. Bulgakov's 'heresy.' The report of the committee was generally favourable to Bulgakov, and he was permitted to continue his teaching at the Theological Institute" (Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, II, 893).

25. Copleston, *Russian Religious Philosophy*, 91. On Florensky, see Pyman's excellent biography, *Pavel Florensky: A Quiet Genius*.

26. Bulgakov, *The Wisdom of God*, 30.

27. Copleston, *Russian Religious Philosophy*, 92.

implications of the dualistic viewpoint. In his view, the wider the gap between God and the world, the less one is able to admit the presence of the divine in our lives. A logical consequence of this dualism is the removal of icons and sacraments from our worship, leaving us with a "hidden atheism" of an inaccessible, transcendent *Deus Absconditus*. According to Bulgakov, this dualism between God and the world prevailed in Catholic theology for centuries and was held to be self-evident in the Protestant world.[28]

Bulgakov's theory of Sophia is an attempt to counteract secularisation and maintain the integrity between God and the world by affirming "a certain ontological *continuity* between the Creator and the creatures."[29] He saw the landmark of Orthodoxy, inherited from and defined by the Church Fathers, "in its profound awareness that God and his creation constitute one single reality."[30] Drawing on Gregory Palamas' distinction between God's "essence" and "energies," Bulgakov asserts that God as Absolute is entirely transcendent to the world, but as the Creator he makes himself relative to it.[31] The distinction between God in himself and in creation is therefore grounded in creatural limitation rather than in the divine nature as such.[32] To bridge the two worlds of the Absolute and the relative, Bulgakov postulates the need for Sophia to account for

> that boundary, the very concept of which lies *between* God and the world, the Creator and creation, being neither the one nor the other, but something entirely separate, simultaneously uniting and dividing the one from the other.[33]

Sophia, then, is the Idea of creation, eternally pre-existing in God. In relation to the world, Sophia unites in herself the ideal forms of all created beings. With respect to the Godhead, Sophia is *Deus*

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28. Sakharov, "Essential Bulgakov: His Ideas about Sophia, the Trinity, and Christ," 172.

29. Meyendorff, "Creation in the History of Orthodox Theology," 32.

30. Sakharov, "Essential Bulgakov," 172.

31. "Bulgakov himself saw his teaching as a theologoumenon, which attempts to take forward St Gregory Palamas' teaching about the uncreated energies. These energies ensure the divine immanence in relation to the world, they sustain the world, permeate it, give life to it. So Bulgakov saw the Palamite teaching as an incomplete Sophiology" (Sakharov, "Essential Bulgakov," 174). See also J. van Rossum, "Palamisme et sophiologie," 133-145 (thanks to Dr. Brandon Gallaher for this reference).

32. Slesinski, "Bulgakov on Sophia," 136.

33. Cited in Slesinski, "Bulgakov on Sophia," 137.

revelatus in relation to *Deus absconditus*.[34] As such, she acts as the intermediary between the transcendent God and the created world. As an entelechy of the world, she is the soul of the world and as "*natura naturans* in relation to *natura naturata*."[35] Sophia thus appears to be many things, and to serve many functions, at once. The polyvalence of the concept no doubt facilitated its transposition to a different theological key by Corbin.

"Fatima-Sophia," or the Shi'ite Sophia

Corbin was concerned with the same fundamental theological dilemma that was the point of departure for Bulgakov's Sophiology. This can be gleaned from a brief text written shortly before his death in 1978 and titled "The Combat for the World Soul, or the Urgency of Sophiology." In it, Corbin stresses the importance of the concept of divine Sophia in mediating between apophatic (or negative) theology and kataphatic (or positive) theology. He writes:

> If the only categories we have are those of the creator God and of the creature, we cannot surmount their dualism. The meaning of the doctrine of Sophia…is to introduce this middle term that unites the Creator and the creature. It enables understanding the mystery of Creation as a tragedy simultaneously human and divine…. The mystery of the creative Act becomes amplified into a mystery of the divine Presence to this world. The idea of this Presence is precisely that of the divine Sophia. In its absence, God retires definitely from the world.[36]

Corbin interprets different Islamic notions through the lens of Sophiology. For example, in a text titled "Sufism and Sophia" (1955), he recognises in the Shi'ite cult of Fatima "the traits of the celestial Sophia, a subject of meditation in all schools of gnosticism." In "the feminine figure of Fatima," he identifies "the starting point of a Sophiology" that yet has to be formulated.[37] The same "Eternal-Feminine of the divine Essence" represented in the figure of Fatima, according to Corbin, is manifest in "symbols

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34. Bulgakov, *Icons and the Name of God*, 33.

35. Copleston, *Russian Religious Philosophy*, 92.

36. Corbin, "Suggestions pour la session 1979," 11-12. In this text, Corbin indicates that further research on the notion of Sophia would need to consider "the sophianic concept in Russian Orthodoxy: the Sophiology of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, in what distinguishes it from Vladimir Solovyov's poetic Sophianism and Jacob Boehme's Sophiology" (12).

37. Corbin, *L'Iran et la philosophie*, 233-234.

bearing different names."[38] Thus, in his *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* (1961), he writes:

> When we again find Suhrawardī using the very name Isfandārmuz, the Angel of the Earth and the Sophia of Mazdaism, we have no difficulty in recognizing her features, since even the characteristic name of her function has been carried over from the Mazdean liturgy into the Islamic, Neoplatonic context of Suhrawardī. But it may happen that her name is no longer pronounced, that a Figure with an entirely different name appears in an entirely different context, and that nevertheless we can still identify the same features, the same *Gestalt*…. It is the feminine Archangel of a *supracelestial* Earth, assuming the rank and privilege of the divine Sophia, that it is suggested we may perceive, on the level of the world of the *lāhūt*, the eternal reality of the dazzling Fātima, daughter of the Prophet, as she is meditated in Shī'ite gnosis.[39]

Through a "harmonic perception," Corbin is "led to the idea of a Shī'ite Sophiology, by which we shall perceive afresh something that Mazdean Sophiology already perceived in the person of the Angel of the Earth."[40] The recurrence of the Sophia motif in the history of Iranian religious consciousness allows Corbin to bridge pre- and post-Islamic Iran.[41] Sophiology functions as a leitmotif and unifying thread that ensures the very continuity of Iranian spirituality across different periods. From the Mazdean context to the Islamic, Neoplatonic context of Suhrawardi and the Shi'ite context of Safavid Iran, the figure of Sophia, appearing under different guises and names, is the central protagonist in the spiritual history of Iran.[42]

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38. Corbin, *L'Iran et la philosophie*, 234. She is, for instance, exemplified in the Fravarti of Zoroastrianism as "the feminine entity who is at once [the] archetype and angelic guide [of each faithful believer], his transcendental, heavenly Self" (Corbin, *L'Iran et la philosophie*, 235).

39. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 56-57.

40. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 68 and 59.

41. Corbin, postface to *Réponse à Job*, by Jung, 252.

42. Cf. "Obviously, the passage from one manifestation of Sophianity to another does not involve the material filiation of any historic causality because here plainly both manifestations are acts of the Malakût which occur in the *imaginal* world. We prefer to speak here of the epochs of a spiritual world rather than of constants or of recurring factors of the Iranian consciousness. Now the succession of the epochs of a spiritual world does not consist of a history which one can perceive and demonstrate in the way in which documents permit us to speak of the campaigns of Julius Caesar or of Napoleon. The epochs of the spiritual world are totally different from the epochs of the exterior world of geology or of sociopolitical history. The epochs of a spiritual world make up a history *sui generis*, which is in its very essence *imaginal* history. We are dealing here with a 'history' of the same nature as that

Corbin further imagined what he described as a "Shi'ite Sophiology." Together with his interpretation of Fatima as the Shi'ite Sophia, designated with the compound "Fatima-Sophia," he borrows the adverb "sophianity" (Russian *sofiinost*) from Bulgakov to "faithfully [translate]" the Arabic term "fātimīya."[43] In his review of Jung's *Answer to Job*, he explains (in reference to Bulgakov's Sophiology):

> By its *sophianity*, the world has become the mirror of the divine world, or *creaturely Sophia*. Transcending this duality of the divine Sophia (eternal form and created form) is to divinize the created, to bestow upon it the divine life, to lead the created Sophia back to the eternal Sophia. This is the *theanthropic process* [the process of humanity's divinisation].[44]

The "eternal person of Fātima-Sophia," according to Corbin, is the source of a "cosmic Sophianity…. She is Sophia, which is to say divine wisdom and power, embracing all the universes."[45]

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which is witnessed when our Shi'ite philosophers identify their Twelfth Imam now with the Saoshyant or Zoroastrian eschatological Saviour, now with the Paraclete announced in St. John's Gospel…. To describe the link between the two ages [i.e. Mazdean Iran and Shi'ite Iran] respectively of Sophianity and of Celestial Earth, we have had recourse here to a musical terminology, and we turn to the sound effect produced on the organ by the playing of the *progressio harmonica*" (Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, xvi-xvii). Further on: "Whoever is somewhat familiar with the organ knows what are referred to as 'stops.' Thanks to these stops, each note can cause several pipes of different lengths to 'speak' simultaneously; thus, besides the fundamental note, a number of harmonic overtones can be heard. Among the contrivances that regulate them, the *progressio harmonica* designates a combination of stops which allows more and more overtones to be heard as one ascends toward the upper register, until at a certain pitch the fundamental note also resounds simultaneously.… [T]his phenomenon seems to us the parallel most helpful in understanding the subtitle of this book: 'From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran.' As a result of the connection which was effected between the old Mazdean Iran and Shi'ite Iran…something like a *progressio harmonica* takes place. The higher we 'ascend,' the more harmonics we hear. Finally, the fundamental…will become audible again. The analogy suggested may at last enable us to understand certain features of the spiritual history of Iran" (Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 51).

43. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 68. "[T]he eternal person of Fâtima-Sophia constitutes the *Sophianity* of the pleroma of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones, and…by the cosmogonic virtue of this pleroma, the *Sophianity* becomes the Presence in our world. Our authors coined a term to express this: *fâtimîya*, an abstract noun which literally translated gives something like 'fâtimianité' but which the term Sophianity expresses more directly still once we have recognised in the eternal mediating person of Fâtima the Resplendent, Her who is elsewhere known as Sophia" (Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, xv).

44. Corbin, "La Sophie éternelle," 39.

45. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 64-65.

"Through [the person of Fātima-Sophia]," he writes,

> creation, from the beginning, is Sophianic in nature, and through her the Imāms are invested with the Sophianity that they transmit to their adepts, because she is its *soul*. From this pleromatic height we can distinguish the fundamental sound emerging from the depths: namely, that which Mazdean Sophiology formulated in the idea of *spendar matīkīh*, the Sophianity with which Spenta Armaiti, the feminine Angel of the Earth invested the faithful believer.[46]

As a religious leitmotif from Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran, Sophia is central to what might be called the "Iranian idea" in Corbin's conception (which may be compared with Berdyaev's "Russian Idea"). In this respect, it is worth observing that both Sophia and Iran, in Corbin's view, represent a certain "mediating" function, a "between-two-ness." As we've seen, Sophia embodies the notion of mediation *par excellence* insofar as she is the intermediary between the divine and the human, God and the world. Similarly, Corbin describes the Iranian spiritual universe as an "intermediate world" between the Arabic and Indian spiritual worlds.[47] He perceives an essential affinity between Iran and the "median and intermediary" function of the imaginal world.[48] The overall importance of mediation for Corbin adds another layer of significance to his idea that Russian Orthodox theosophers can serve as a bridge between Islamic and Christian theosophy.

An example of this kind of rapprochement may be seen in Corbin's interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's feminine figuration of the divine. In a chapter of his major work *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (1958) titled "Sophiology and *Devotio Sympathetica*," Corbin interprets the prologue of Ibn 'Arabi's *Diwan* as the "*Sophianic Poem* of a Fedele d'Amore." Similar to his identification of the Shi'ite Fatima with Sophia, Corbin here associates the beautiful Nizam, who is the subject of Ibn 'Arabi's poem, with "Wisdom or divine Sophia."[49] There is an interesting parallel here with Vladimir Solovyov, who in a poem titled "Three Meetings," evoked his three visionary experiences of a "beautiful lady" whom he identified with the divine Wisdom.

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46. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 68.

47. "To affirm the properly Iranian spiritual universe is to state the need for the existence, in the realm of the spirit, of an *intermediary world* between what the properly Arabic spiritual world and what the spiritual universe of India represent there" (Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, 13).

48. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, viii-ix.

49. Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 141.

For Corbin, like for Bulgakov, "the eternal feminine," "femininity," and Sophia in many respects are interchangeable.[50] Thus, according to Corbin, Ibn 'Arabi's "encounter with the mystic Sophia" prefigures "the goal to which the dialectic of love will lead us: the idea of the feminine being (of which Sophia is the archetype) as the theophany par excellence, which, however, is perceptible only through the sympathy between the celestial and the terrestrial."[51] The Sophianic content of Ibn 'Arabi's thought allows Corbin to imagine a connection between the Andalusian Sufi and the Iranian spiritual world.

Needless to say, in interpreting Islamic themes through the lens of Sophiology Corbin was not concerned with a philologically and historically accurate presentation of Islam. Quite the reverse, Sophiology was a tool that allowed Corbin to transcend historical boundaries and cultural differences. At the heart of his Sophiological model is the desire to create a rapprochement between Easter and Western theosophical traditions. His view that Russian Orthodox and Islamic theosophers share a kinship with respect to their cult to the divine feminine (the Russian Sophia, the Shi'ite Fatima, Ibn 'Arabi's Nizam, and so on) is not a view based on verifiable historical evidence, but rather one based on his intuitive perception of a common ideal essence. Indeed, for Corbin, Sophia and Fatima are different exemplifications of the same idea or type. He writes:

> Investigations aimed at a religious typology are obliged to transgress such frontiers as are imposed by the very nature of their subject matter on the historical sciences, because the types which a philosophical

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50. "Fatima-Sophia is in fact the Soul: the Soul of creation, the Soul of each creature, that is, the constitutive part of the human being that appears essentially to the imaginative consciousness in the form of a feminine being, *Anima*. She is the eternally feminine in man, and that is why she is the archetype of the heavenly Earth" (Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 66). On Bulgakov's "exaltation of the feminine," see B.G. Rosenthal, "The Nature and Function of Sophia," 168.

51. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 145. Cf. "Mystic love is the religion of Beauty, because Beauty is the secret of theophanies and because as such it is the power which transfigures…. But the organ of theophanic perception, that is, of the perception through which the encounter between Heaven and Earth in the mid-zone, the *'ālam al mithāl* takes place, is the active Imagination. It is the active Imagination which invests the earthly Beloved with his 'theophanic function;' it is essentially a theophanic Imagination and, as such, a creative Imagination, because Creation is itself theophany and theophanic Imagination. From this idea of Creation as theophany… arises the idea of a sophiology, the figure of *Sophia aeterna* (the Eternal Womanly) as she appears in the theosophy of Ibn 'Arabī" (Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 98).

anthropology will be looking for are distributed on either side of the historical frontiers. The lines of cleavage corresponding to such a typology do not by any means coincide with historical frontiers; they cut across the formations officially and denominationally defined by history.[52]

Spiritual contemporaneity supersedes historical context. Corbin could therefore declare: "An Ishraqi is spontaneously a sophiologist."[53]

Bulgakov as a Source for Corbin's Angelology

As the principle of mediation between God and the world, Sophia is essentially related to Corbin's concept of the *mundus imaginalis*, which refers to the "mediating and intermediary world" bridging the intellectual and material worlds. In the preface to the second edition of *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, titled "Towards a Chart of the Imaginal" (1978), Corbin writes:

> Between the intellectual and the sensible, or expressed more precisely still, between the transcendent and hidden Deity, the *Deitas abscondita*, and the world of man…[there is] an intermediary…which represents the Dwelling, the Divine Presence, for our world. This Dwelling is Wisdom itself, Sophia…. [I]t is the idea of Theophany which is dominant, making itself evident by its own nature and of necessity between the intellectual and the sensible, and what is denoted as Sophia, as the "Soul of the World," is at the same time the *imaginal* locus and the organ of this Theophany. It is at once the necessary mediatrix, the *Deus revelatus*, between pure Divinity, for ever concealed, beyond our reach, and man's world. This is what we have in another place called the "paradox of monotheism."[54]

While the *mundus imaginalis* occupies the ontological space between the material and spiritual worlds, the angel assures the mediation between the divine and the human. In his essay titled "The Necessity of Angelology" (1977), Corbin expressed essentially the same concerns that he expressed a year later in his essay "The Urgency of Sophiology." Indeed, Sophiology, angelology and the theory of the *mundus imaginalis* are perfectly complementary: they are different aspects of the idea of necessary mediation between the divine and the human, the non-material and the material: the *mundus imaginalis* occupies at the cosmological level the same

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52. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 89.
53. Corbin, "Post-scriptum biographique," 46.
54. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, xiii-xiv.

function that Sophiology and angelology fulfill at the ontological and anthropological levels, respectively.

In his book *Jacob's Ladder* (originally published in 1929), Bulgakov explored the connection between angelology and Sophiology. Bulgakov's angelological views had a considerable influence on Corbin (who had translated certain chapters of Bulgakov's book in Istanbul). Here it will be enough to indicate a few similarities.

In his book, Bulgakov pursues a "theological anthropology" founded on the idea that "[a] correct understanding of human nature informs a correct understanding of angels and vice-versa."[55] According to him, "*everything in the world* is preserved by angels, and everything has *its* angel and its *correlation* in the angelic world."[56] At the foundation of this ontological unity of the angelic world and the human world, of heaven and earth, is "Sophia the Wisdom of God in whom pre-eternally the prototypes (*paradeigmata*) of everything created are outlined."[57] The angelic and human worlds are "one in Sophia…but they are distinguished in the form of their being."[58] The angelic world serves as a "heavenly mirror" to the human world.[59] The guardian angel "is our heavenly I – the Sophianic foundation in the heavens of our being on earth."[60] Like later Corbin, Bulgakov describes the relation between the human being and his angel as a "syzygy." This implies an understanding of the self, the "I," as "having its own double…. [I]t knows and possesses itself only in connection with its double, in a duality."[61]

What is the function of this angelic double? According to Bulgakov, the task of this syzygic "guardian angel" is to "[make ready] the realization of his own Sophianic idea in the world, the coming of a human into the world with whom he stands in *a personal* relation as with his own other."[62] Like Corbin, Bulgakov describes this as a "heavenly pedagogy."[63] The "guardian angel" assists humans "to become themselves, to rise to the plenitude of

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55. Smith, introduction to *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, by S. Bulgakov, xii.

56. Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 24.

57. Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 31.

58. Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 42.

59. Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 33.

60. Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 43.

61. Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 6.

62. Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 67.

63. Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 13.

those creative tasks which they are called to accomplish in their self-creativity."[64] Given the dialogic relation between human beings and their angelic counterparts, Bulgakov asserts the "co-humanity of angels and humankind's corresponding co-angelicity."[65]

For his part, Corbin claims that there are "certain traits common to all varieties of Gnosis, traits which put us in the presence of an anthropo-angelology, that is to say, an anthropology which is itself only a phase of angelology."[66] At the basis of this "angelological anthropology" is the Bulgakovian idea that every creature is composed of its earthly part and of its celestial counterpart, its archetype or angel.[67] Indeed, like Bulgakov, Corbin affirms that the totality of our being includes another person, an invisible, transcendent counterpart, which he compares to "what Ibn 'Arabi designates as our 'eternal individuality'—our divine Name—what in ancient Iran was termed *Fravashi*."[68] The idea of the soul's celestial counterpart is expressed in various Islamic and Iranian religious notions.[69] These are but so many exemplifications of a single archetype, which appear in the history of religion "by virtue of a deeper necessity than that for which historical causality is called upon to account."[70]

Corbin's angelological anthropology, like Bulgakov's, supports the idea of an "angelic pedagogy." The possibility of this angelic pedagogy is based on what Corbin describes as the "virtual angelicity of the human soul" (analogous to what Bulgakov

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64. Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 97.

65. Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 38.

66. Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, 103. The expression "angelological anthropology" is found in Corbin, *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam*, 52.

67. See, e.g., Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, 23. Cf. "[T]he sense of a twofold dimension of individual being, [implies] the idea of a celestial counterpart, its being 'in the second person,' that provides the foundation of [a] mystical anthropology" (Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 94).

68. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 173.

69. "It may be the feminine angel Daēnā in Mazdaism, Daēnā again or Manvahmed in Manichaeism; it may be the Perfect Body… of the Liturgy of Mithra, to which the Perfect Nature corresponds among the Ishrāqīyūn, 'the philosopher's angel;' it may be Hayy ibn Yaqzān, the *pir*-youth, corresponding to the *spiritus rector* of the Cathari; it may be the crimson-hued Archangel of one of Suhrawardī's recitals, or any other figure individualizing the relation of the soul to the Active Intelligence. In every case this figure represents the heavenly counterpart of the soul" (Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, 21).

70. Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, 165.

refers to as the "co-angelicity of the human being").[71] Given his essentially angelic nature, the human being in the true sense is he who passes from "potential angelicity" to "actual angelicity."[72] This "angelomorphosis" describes the "individuation of the soul," which occurs when, becoming aware of its alienation in this world, the soul frees itself from its alienated situation and becomes united with its angelic counterpart.[73] The angel hence represents the "perfect human being," the divinised state of the human soul: "the divine Epiphany as anthropomorphosis is accomplished on the level of the Angel."[74]

The idea that the divine can only reveal itself to man at the angelic level is a basic tenet of Corbin's Docetism, which rejects the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, which instead affirms that "[the Word of God] became human that we might become God," to use St. Athanasius' formulation. It should be stressed that Bulgakov's doctrine of the co-angelicity of human beings was never intended to replace the doctrine of the Incarnation, which is at the heart of his theology; nor did Bulgakov see any contradiction between his anthropological angelology and incarnational Christology.[75] Corbin, however, draws selectively on Bulgakov's angelology to promote an anti-incarnational view that places him fundamentally at odds with Bulgakov's theology (and indeed the tradition of Russian religious philosophy as a whole). Therefore, despite certain similarities between Bulgakov and Corbin, their theological projects differ in fundamental ways.

The Imam as Icon—Corbin's Ecumenical Interpretation of Andrei Rublev's Icon of the Trinity

At the centre of Corbin's thought is the concern to overcome the dualism between the divine and the human, to mediate the ontological difference between the spiritual and material worlds. As we've seen, the concepts of Sophia, the angel, and the *mundus imaginalis,* serve to bridge that division. Serving a similar function,

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71. Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, 83.

72. Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, 83.

73. Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, 44.

74. Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, 116.

75. See, e.g. Bulgakov's remarks in *Jacob's Ladder*, 140. On the place of the Incarnation in Bulgakov's theology, see Nichols, *Wisdom from Above*, 75-125.

the icon for Corbin represents the visible aspect of the divine, the "face of God." Here again one can find the influence of Bulgakov, chapters of whose book on icons Corbin translated in Istanbul.

In his book, Bulgakov gave a Sophiological justification for the use and veneration of icons in Orthodox liturgical life. As he states: "Sophia is the Icon of God in God Himself, and every one of our icons is an icon of the Icon."[76] Therefore,

> the God Who is correlative to creation is not the imageless, invisible, unknowable, and therefore unportrayable God; rather, He is the revealed God *Who has His own image*, and this Image of God is the Proto-image of creation which is sketched in the latter. In this sense, in the doctrine of the icon one must take as one's starting point *not the apophatic thesis* of God's invisibility and imagelessness but the *sophiological doctrine* of His imagedness and of the co-imagedness of the world to this image.[77]

God has an image, and this image is Sophia, and our world is made in the image of Sophia, as an icon in relation to the image it represents.

Tom Cheetham has drawn attention to the significance of Orthodox iconography for Corbin. He observes that in Catholicism and the Western Church in general, the religious image had long been harnessed by the Church as a didactic tool for the education and guidance of the masses. In the Eastern Church, on the other hand, the tradition of the icon "as a sacred window onto the invisible world," appealed to Corbin.[78] For Corbin, the icon can

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76. Bulgakov, *Icons and the Name of God*, 114. "[T]he icon of Divinity is the living and life-giving Idea of all ideas in their perfect all-unity and perfect all-reality, and therefore it is the Divine world, or the world in God, before its creation. In other words, this Divine icon of Divinity, His self-revelation in Himself, is that which, in Biblical language, is called Hokhmah, Sophia, the Wisdom of God (in the patristic language it is called, less precisely, *paradeigmata* and *proorismoi*, proto-images and predeterminations of all creation). She Herself bears witness about Herself by the Holy Spirit: 'The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way' (Prov. 8:22). But this Icon of Divinity, which is the Proto-icon of all icons, is itself the Proto-image in relation to the creaturely world, which was *created by Wisdom*…and in this sense the world itself is the creaturely icon of Divinity" (Bulgakov, *Icons and the Name of God*, 53-54).

77. Bulgakov, *Icons and the Name of God*, 54.

78. Cheetham, *All the World an Icon*, 173. Cheetham compares Corbin's concept of the imagination to the theory of the dream world articulated by the Russian Orthodox priest, theologian, philosopher and scientist Pavel Florensky (1882-1937). In his book *Iconostasis*—his last before he was murdered by the Soviet secret police in 1937—Florensky argues that dreams give us access to imaginary space and time. With respect to our waking world, that world is "turned inside out," an

be likened to the idea of "theophanic form" implied in the Shi'ite notion of the Imam. Similar to Bulgakov's understanding of Sophia as the Icon of God, the Imam, Corbin holds, is the proto-image or "Face of God."[79] To affirm the Imam is therefore to eschew the radical iconoclasm entailed by the view of the absolute incommensurability between God and humankind. As Corbin explains:

> Without the Imamate, only a strictly negative theology (that of *tanzih*, designated by the Christian tradition as "apophatic" theology) would be possible…. If the *Deus absconditus* becomes an object of knowledge and an object of love, this happens thanks to the Face, the epiphanic Form (the *mazhar*), that makes of it a *Deus revelatus*.[80]

Elsewhere he writes:

> The ambiguity of the Image comes from the fact that it can be either an idol (Greek *eidolon*) or an icon (Greek *eikon*). It is an idol when it fixes the viewer's vision on itself. Then it is opaque, without transparency, and remains at the level of that from which it was formed. But it is an *icon*, whether a painted image or a mental one, when its transparency enables the viewer to see through it to something beyond it, and because what is beyond can be seen only through it. This is precisely the status of the Image that is known as a "theophanic form." The Image of the Imam, the Image of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones, has for the faithful Shi'ite this theophanic virtue.[81]

The significance of Orthodox iconography for Corbin is further evinced by references in his writings to Orthodox icons, notably the famous icon of the Holy Trinity by Andrei Rublev (c. 1360-c. 1430), who is considered to be the greatest medieval Russian painter of icons and frescoes. Rublev's icon holds a special place in the Russian Orthodox tradition, which is reflected in Fr. Florensky's "proof of the existence of God": "There exists the icon of the Trinity by St Andrei Rublev; therefore, God exists."[82]

The original theme of Rublev's icon is the Biblical scene known as the "Philoxeny" depicting the three angels at the table of Abraham. The Russian Orthodox iconographical tradition has looked upon the three angels in Rublev's icon as figurations of the

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expression which Corbin also used to describe the *mundus imaginalis* (Cheetham, *All the World an Icon*, 173-177).

79. On this theme, see especially Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 245-313.

80. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, I, 295.

81. Corbin, *La philosophie iranienne islamique*, 358-359.

82. Bunge, *The Rublev Trinity*, 107.

three persons of the Trinity.[83] Since its restoration in 1904, Rublev's icon has received various theological commentaries from Russian theologians. Corbin likewise took special interest in that icon.[84] In his book on Ibn 'Arabi, he suggests a novel way of perceiving the scene depicted in the icon.[85] Indeed, he affirms that Ibn 'Arabi has given us "the most magnificent mystic exegesis of Andrei Rublev's icon."[86] The scene of Abraham's philoxeny, the mystic repast presented to the Angels, as Ibn 'Arabi leads us to meditate upon it, is "the most perfect image of *devotio sympathetica*."[87] This notion expresses the fundamental co-dependence and co-penetration of the divine and the human, of God and man. For Corbin, the way in which Ibn 'Arabi meditates Abraham's philoxeny reveals the essence of his theosophy and mystic experience: "to feed the Angel from one's own substance."[88] "To feed the Angel" is

> to answer for this God who would perish without me, but without whom I should also perish…. And if this God is "proof of himself," it is because he is nourished by *my* being, but *my* being is *His* being which precisely He has invested in me.[89]

Corbin links this idea to the paradoxical dictum of the *Cherubinic Wanderer* of the German mystic Angelus Silesius (1624-1677)—the same dictum Berdyaev placed as the epigram in his book *The Meaning of the Creative Act*—: "I know that without me, the life of God were lost; / Were I destroyed, he must perforce give up the ghost."[90]

In a 1973 article titled "Toward a New Chivalry," Corbin gives a personal, unique interpretation of Rublev's icon. In Corbin's eyes, Rublev's icon becomes "a symbol gathering the three lights of the Abrahamic tradition: the Mosaic and Davidic Light, the Christic Light, the Muhammadan Light."[91] Thus, the icon of Abraham's philoxeny for Corbin is "par excellence the icon of the Temple. The table of Abraham is a herald of the table of the Grail." Wolfram

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83. See the chapter on Rublev's Trinity in P. Evdokimov, *L'Art de l'icône*, 205-216. Corbin cites this work in *En Islam iranien*, II, 375 n. 520.

84. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 130.

85. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 130-131. See also Corbin, *Le paradoxe du monothéisme*, 101-102.

86. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 315 n. 75.

87. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 131.

88. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 63.

89. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 315-316 n. 75.

90. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 130.

91. Corbin, "Pour une nouvelle chevalerie," 111.

von Eschenbach (c. 1170-1220), author of *Parzival*, the classic epic poem about the Holy Grail, and Suhrawardi, are kindred spirits who professed the idea of a "spiritual chivalry" common to East and West, Christianity and Islam. This ecumenical experience is conceivable only through a full acknowledgement of "the unique sovereignty of the Spirit."[92] Corbin's ecumenical interpretation of Rublev's icon is a unique example of his view of the mediating role which he attributes to the Russian Orthos dox spiritual world.

Corbin's interpretation of Abraham's philoxeny represented in Rublev's icon as the "table of the Grail" that gathers around it a "spiritual chivalry common to East and West, Islam and Christianity," recalls his vision of a "sophianic chivalry" while visiting the Church of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. In the opening lines of his book *The Wisdom of God*, Bulgakov evokes "a new apprehension of the world in God, that is, of the Divine Sophia," confirmed by the very site of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.[93] Indeed, the Byzantine Church of Hagia Sophia was for Bulgakov a tangible expression of his Sophianic vision of the world.[94] This view captivated Corbin who, in a letter to Fritz Lieb on April 25, 1940, wrote: "Each time I pass in front of the wonder that is the temple of the 'Eternal Sophia,' I send a good thought to Fr. Bulgakov, thanks to whose theology we understand the signification of all that."[95] In 1978, Corbin wrote:

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92. Corbin, "Pour une nouvelle chevalerie," 112. Interestingly, Bulgakov gave an Orthodox interpretation of the legend of the Holy Grail in his *The Holy Grail and the Eucharist*.

93. Bulgakov, *The Wisdom of God*, 13. Cf. "[The] transparency of the image that is adequate to the idea is Beauty…. Beauty is Sophianic, it is the obvious, tangible revelation of Divine Sophia as the pre-eternal foundation of the world…. For, creation is completely transparent for the Creator, but the Creator in Himself remains transcendent to creation, although He reveals Himself to it, inasmuch as He becomes immanent. But this immanence to the world is not realized immediately, but through the mediation of a being, which though creaturely is spiritual all the same, and has a support in the divine nature. The world is Sophianic on the basis of Divine Sophia, but it is Sophianic through creaturely Sophia which is hypostatized in the angelic world. Therefore the beauty of the world is Sophianic through the operation of angels; it is the tangible presence and operation of the angels in the world" (Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder*, 84 and 86-87).

94. Cf. "Truly, the temple of St. Sophia is the artistic, tangible proof and manifestation of St. Sophia—of the Sophianic nature of the world and the cosmic nature of Sophia…. We perceive here neither God nor man, but divinity, the divine veil thrown over the world" (Bulgakov, *A Bulgakov Anthology*, 13-14).

95. "Chaque fois que je passe devant la merveille du temple de la 'Sagesse éternelle,' j'envoie une pensée au P. Boulgakov, grâce à la théologie de qui on

> The Temple of Saint Sophia was for me the temple of the Grail, at least an exemplification of its archetype…. This presence of an invisible sophianic knighthood, also known to the Platonists of Persia, has never left me. One can find a clue of what it has inspired me in my latest research and projects.[96]

One such clue can be found in a section titled "From Byzantium to Samarra" in the fourth volume of *In Iranian Islam*. Corbin there emphasises the Byzantine origins of the princess Narkes, or Narjis, who was the mother of the 12th Imam of the Shi'a. On his reading, the "young Byzantine girl" accomplishes through her "mediation" the "initiation of Christianity into Islam, or rather into Islamic gnosticism." Commenting on the initiatic vision in which the "young Byzantine princess," under the auspices of Jesus Christ and his apostles, and Muhammad and his descendants, celebrates her nuptial union with the 11th Imam, Corbin imagines "the grandiose scene, unfolding in the temple of Saint Sophia, in Constantinople."[97] The Byzantine Church dedicated to Saint Sophia thus becomes the ideal meeting place between "Christian gnosticism" and "Islamic gnosticism."

Iranian Islam in a Russian Key: Spritiual and Philosophical Aspects

"Mais comment reconnaît-on que c'est l'Imâm, me demanda-t-on encore? – Aussi simplement qu'un chrétien de n'importe quelle confession reconnaît une image de Christ"
(Corbin, "Avicennisme et iranisme dans notre univers spirituel").

In 1974, Corbin retired from the École pratique des hautes études

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comprend la signification de tout cela" (Lieb Papers, Basel University Library, University of Basel, NL 43: Aa 260, 1-9).

96. Corbin, "Post-scriptum biographique," 46.

97. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, IV, 313. Cf. "C'est au jour de la Pentecôte que le jeune Galaad, le chevalier 'attendu,' le 'Désiré,' paraît à la cour du roi Arthur et de là prend départ pour la Quête du Graal. D'autre part, nous avons signalé déjà la certitude avec laquelle plusieurs théosophes shî'ites identifient l'Imâm 'attendu' avec le Paraclet. Le mystère liturgique dans lequel se rencontrent invisiblement chevaliers d'Occident et chevaliers d'Orient, apparaît alors comme le mystère même de la Pentecôte. Et comme mystère dont le cérémonial fut contemplé, au cours de ses visions en songe…par la princesse Narkès (Narcisse), mère du XIIe Imâm, lorsque dans l'enceinte d'un temple idéal de Sainte-Sophie, elle *vit* le Christ et ses douze apôtres, le Prophète et ses *onze* Imâms, gravir ensemble les degrés de la même chaire de lumière" (Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, IV, 430).

and helped found the Université Saint-Jean de Jérusalem, a society of scholars dedicated to comparative studies in spiritual matters.[98] That same year he succeeded Gabriel Marcel as president of the Nikolai Berdyaev Association.[99] In a personal tribute to Berdyaev on the occasion of the symposium dedicated to him in that year, Corbin said:

> If I have been able to face freely as a philosopher the philosophical problems I have encountered, I think I owe it largely to Berdyaev, as shown by the references to his writings in my books. This is especially the case because the metaphysics of Shi'ism is, like Berdyaev's, essentially an eschatological metaphysics.[100]

Corbin's debt to Berdyaev is evident in his masterwork *In Iranian Islam* (4 volumes, 1971-1972). In the prologue of the first volume, he writes: "Let no one be surprised if reference to the Russian philosopher Berdyaev is made on more than one occasion in the course of this work."[101] Again near the end of the fourth volume, he says:

> There have been very few Christian thinkers who have had the lucidity and courage to face the drama of Christianity. Berdyaev was one of them. It is no coincidence that, having cited him at the beginning, we cite him again at the term of this study. The motifs that he brings to light are also those that Shi'ite theosophy and imamology can inspire to the researcher in "divine sciences."[102]

Berdyaev is not an isolated thinker for Corbin, but rather he represents a tradition of Russian Orthodox spirituality which has a mediating role in Corbin's project of an Abrahamic ecumenism. As he wrote in 1967:

> If I am once again citing a Russian thinker in the person of Berdyaev, this is not only because Berdyaev was the great gnostic thinker of Russian Orthodoxy in our times; rather it is because, in attempting to establish a communication between Shi'ite theosophy and the world

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98. The USJJ yearly colloquium attracted participants who were in one way or another connected to Russian religious thinkers, including the French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément, the French philosopher and friend of Berdyaev Marie-Madeleine Davy, and Constantin Andronikof, best known for his translations of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov into French among others.

99. The Nikolai Berdyaev Association was founded in 1951 at the initiative of Eugenie Rapp, Berdyaev's sister-in-law, for the purpose of encouraging studies about him (Bambauer, introduction to *Wahrheit und Offenbarung,* by Berdyaev, 94 n. 140, and Baird, "Russia's Religious Philosophers in the West," 483).

100. Corbin, "Allocution d'ouverture," 49.

101. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, I, xx.

102. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, IV, 451.

> of Christian theosophy, certain theosophers of Russian Orthodoxy may be a first step.[103]

This helps explain the references in Corbin's writings to other Russian religious thinkers, e.g. Aleksey Khomiakov, Konstantin Leontiev and Vasily Rozanov, and so on. These are all "[representatives] of this Christian philosophy of Russian Orthodoxy, generally so little known among our Eastern [viz. Iranian] friends, though unquestionably closer to their thought than our socio-political ideologies."[104]

In the following we will consider some convergences between Russian and Iranian or Shi'ite themes in Corbin's writings. Important aspects of Berdyaev's "critique of revelation" are reflected in Corbin's reading of Islam. Notably, Berdyaev's distinction between a "historical Christianity" and an "eschatological Christianity" influenced Corbin's conception of a historical, exoteric, legalistic Islam, identified with Sunnism, to which opposed an eschatological, esoteric, spiritual Islam, identified with Shi'ism. Moreover, the Russian concept of Divine humanity (theandry) was decisive for Corbin's conception of the Imam as being simultaneously the face that God shows to man and the face that man shows to God. We will then look at how Corbin selectively used Rozanov and Berdyaev in his polemic against traditional Christianity. Finally we will consider how Khomiakov's notion of "Iranism" and Leontiev's "Byzantinism" influenced Corbin's conception of Suhrawardi's "Iranism."

Eschatological Metaphysics in Berdyaev and Shi'ism

In the important introduction of the first book of *In Iranian Islam*. Corbin tackles the problem of "secularisation," which he defines as the "socialisation of the spiritual."[105] This refers to a view of man and the world in which every reference to what is beyond this world is eliminated, such that "the hopes of men [can] no longer cross the boundaries of death."[106] Corbin's conception of secularisation is influenced by what Berdyaev describes as the passage from "eschatological Christianity" to "historical

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103. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 304.

104. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, I, 30.

105. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, I, 22-38.

106. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, I, 23; Corbin, "De la situation philosophique du shî'isme," 65.

Christianity," that is, "the adaptation of Christianity to external historical conditions."[107]

In his book *The Beginning and the End* (1946), Berdyaev argues that the Christian revelation is essentially an eschatological revelation, a revelation of the Kingdom of God, which implies the end of this world, and the coming of another, a transformed world. Primitive Christianity was eschatological in its orientation. It expected the Second Advent of Christ and the coming of the Kingdom of God. However, when the path of history between the first appearance of the Messiah and the second came into view, the eschatological character of Christianity began to weaken, causing the accommodation of the Christian revelation to historical conditions.[108] As Berdyaev writes: "In the wilderness Christ, the Messiah, had rejected the temptation of the kingdoms of this world. But Christian people in history have yielded to that temptation."[109] Historical Christianity and the historical Church therefore represent failure in the sense that the Kingdom of God has not come as a result of the adjustment of the Christian revelation to the kingdom of this world.[110]

Corbin makes a similar distinction between a historical, legalistic, exoteric, Sunnite Islam, and an eschatological, spiritual, esoteric, Shi'ite Islam. He likens the suppression of prophetic inspiration in Christianity and its replacement by the authority of the "dogmatic magisterium of the Church" to the situation in "official Islam" resulting from the doctrine that the Prophet Muhammad is the "Seal of the Prophets," that is, that there can be no prophets after him.[111] In Christianity, the formation of "historical consciousness" is a consequence of the doctrine of the Incarnation, which affirms that "God became historical, incarnated in the fabric of visible and material facts."[112] Because it asserts that Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection, were historical events, the Christian teaching, in Corbin's view, confines revelation to the past. This implies the

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107. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, I, 31-32; Corbin, "De la situation philosophique du shî'isme," 65-66.

108. Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, 203.

109. Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, 203. Corbin cites this passage in *En Islam iranien*, I, 32. Cf. "N. Berdiaev a énoncé le diagnostic exact: la grande tragédie est là, dans le fait que le christianisme, sous ses formes officielles et historiques, a succombé à la tentation que le Christ avait repoussé" (Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, I, 23).

110. Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, 210.

111. Corbin, "De l'histoire des religions comme problème théologique," 147.

112. Corbin, "De la situation philosophique du shî'isme," 67-68.

closure of prophetic inspiration, and the instauration in its place of an infallible dogmatic magisterium, or what Corbin rather vaguely calls the "phenomenon of the Church."[113] Similarly, the denial of the possibility of future prophetic inspiration transforms Islam into an external, legal doctrine primarily concerned with the regulation of the social system, wherein conformity to social norms and external regulations becomes the sole measure of faith.[114]

Against the historical view of revelation, Corbin holds that revelation is first and foremost a spiritual event. He derives this conception from Berdyaev. For the latter, revelation is not an external, historical event, but rather "the fact of the Spirit in me, in the subject; it is spiritual experience, spiritual life."[115] As he writes:

> [T]he concept of historical revelation involves a contradiction and is a product of religious materialism…. Only spiritual revelation exists, revelation in the Spirit, whereas historical revelation is the symbolization in the phenomenal historical world of events which take place in the noumenal historical world.[116]

There is, according to Corbin, a "remarkable convergence" between Berdyaev's views on spiritual revelation and those of Shi'ite theosophers "when they show us where the spiritual events have *their place*, and when they talk about events that take place and have *their place* in the *Malakut*."[117] Corbin here is making a reference to the *mundus imaginalis*, a world "where the spiritual takes a body and the body becomes spiritual," and which is therefore "the *place* of theophanic visions, the scene on which visionary events and symbolic histories *appear* in their true reality."[118] He notes that Shi'ite theosophers developed ideas that would "usefully converge" with Berdyaev's views regarding the breaking of "metahistory" into the historical world and its inevitable adaptation to the limits of historical time and space.[119] Berdyaev and Shi'ite theosophy agree on affirming the polarity of the exoteric and the esoteric.[120]

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113. Corbin, "De la situation philosophique du shî'isme," 65-66.
114. Corbin, "De la situation philosophique du shî'isme," 65-66.
115. Berdyaev, *The Divine and the Human*, 14.
116. Berdyaev, *The Divine and the Human,* 17.
117. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 309.
118. Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 4.
119. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 309.
120. Cf. "I favour the distinction between 'esoteric' and 'exoteric' religion. The act of revelation is a twofold act, and takes place, as it were, on two levels: it issues from God, who cannot be reduced to any categories taken from this world, but

Corbin further claims that Shi'ite thinkers and Berdyaev share the same sense of the primacy of apophatic or negative theology.[121] Berdyaev champions the significance of the Orthodox tradition, which is inclined to privilege the use of negatives when speaking about God, in contrast to Western theology, which has been predominantly affirmative or kataphatic.[122] Berdyaev's "critique of revelation" thus involves the cleansing of the understanding of God from the "sociomorphic" categories with which historical theological traditions have operated.[123] He writes:

> The existence of God is revealed in the spirit in man. God resembles neither the forces of nature, nor the authority of society or of the state. Here no analogy is valid: all analogy would mean slavish cosmomorphism and sociomorphisms in the understanding of God. God is freedom, and not necessity, not authority over man and the world.[124]

Given this apophatic imperative, Berdyaev argues that God "is in the world *incognito*. He both gives glimpses of himself in the world and at the same time hides himself."[125]

These notions had an impact on Corbin's interpretation of Shi'ism. Although, like Sunnism, Shi'ism also considers the Prophet Muhammad to be the last in a long line of prophets, the Shi'ite concept of *walaya* and the concomitant doctrine of the Imam preserve the continuation of divine guidance after the Prophet's death. According to Corbin, however, this divine guidance is not the same as the dogmatic magisterium of the Church or as the legal Islamic authority, but instead refers to the intimate, personal relation between the faithful Shi'ite and the Hidden Imam. The Imam spiritually reveals to his disciples the hidden meaning of the Qur'an, without which the revealed text is an empty husk.[126]

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it is also dependent on man, the recipient, limited and imperfect though he be" (Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality*, 300).

121. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 309.

122. Linde, *Nikolai Berdiaev's Existential Gnosticism*, 136.

123. Linde, *Nikolai Berdiaev's Existential Gnosticism*, 137.

124. Berdyaev, *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar*, 41.

125. Berdyaev, *Truth and Revelation*, 112.

126. "Dans le christianisme, l'inspiration prophétique et l'herméneutique prophétique ont été closes officiellement dès le IIᵉ siècle, avec la répression du mouvement montaniste. Désormais le magistère de la Grande Eglise est la source et le seul organe régulateur du dogme…. D'autre part, lorsque l'Islam officiel proclame que Mohammad est le 'sceau des prophètes,' qu'il n'y aura plus de prophète après lui, il en résulte mêment que, dans cette conception, l'histoire des religions est définitivement close. D'où l'apparence monolithique, légalitaire et statique,

In a passage replete with Berdyaevian tonalities, Corbin writes:

> If Shi'ite prophetology and Imamology withstand efforts to socialise the spiritual, it is because the idea of *walaya* is one of a spiritual Initiation, a gnosis, not that of a Church: the Friends of God, the "men of God," are Guides, Initiators; they do not constitute a dogmatic magisterium. Theophanic visions and persons do not assume any Incarnation that secularises the divine by bringing it into empirical history. The *ghaybat*, the occultation of the Imam, the divine *incognito*, maintains the eschatological dimension (that of primitive Christianity), just like it maintains in the *incognito* of an *Ecclesia spiritualis* the esoteric hierarchy that avoids any socialisation, and therefore any secularisation…. The time of the *ghaybat* is not a time with which external history "is made;" it is an existential time. The hidden Imam *is* the time of the Shi'ite consciousness, its permanent link with metahistory.[127]

Despite the many thematic parallels, including the "socialisation of the spiritual," the divine as *incognito*, eschatologism, the *Ecclesia spiritualis*, and existential time, Corbin's rejection of the Incarnation and of the historical Church places him at odds with Berdyaev. Indeed, Berdyaev unequivocally affirmed the Incarnation and, while he denounced the sociomorphisms resulting from the adaptation of the Christian revelation to historical existence, he never rejected the legitimacy and necessity of the Church. The notions of spiritual revelation, divine *incognito* and metahistory expressed by Berdyaev did not for him entail a rejection of orthodox Christian teachings. On the contrary, he considered those concepts to be elaborations of fundamental Christian truths. Corbin's rejection of the Incarnation and the Church surely has more to do with Islamic anti-Christian polemics than with Berdyaev's thought. Corbin's thought therefore cannot be called Christian in the traditional sense of the word, although it is heavily inspired by themes from Christian theology and philosophy.[128]

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de cet Islam officiel…. Or, cette clôture de la mission prophétique, le shî'isme, lui aussi, la professe, mais – il y a un grand *mais* – il y a la *walâyat* et l'imâmat. Et avec et par la fonction initiatique de l'Imâm, il y a encore quelque chose à venir: la pénétration du sens caché des Révélations, jusqu'à la *parousie* du XIIᵉ Imâm, l'épiphanie de l'Imâm caché" (Corbin, "De l'histoire des religions comme problème théologique," 147-148).

127. *En Islam iranien*, I, 35-36.

128. For a critical response to Corbin's views on Christianity, see R. Arnaldez, "Henry Corbin et le christianisme."

From Theandry to Polarity: Berdyaev and Rozanov as "Imam-Seekers"

Related to the concept of Sophia, the notion of Divine humanity (Russian *Bogochelovechestvo*, literally "God-manhood," a word parallel to the Greek *theandria*, which, in the patristic writings, referred to the incarnation of Christ) helped Corbin formulate his conception of the Imam. It was Vladimir Solovyov with his *Lectures on Divine Humanity* who gave currency to the concept of Divine humanity in Russian thought.[129] Solovyov and his successors derived this concept from the implications of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, in particular the Chalcedonian formula that Christ possessed two natures in one person. As Berdyaev writes:

> The secret of Christianity is the secret of God-manhood, the secret of the meeting of two natures which are united but not commingled. Man does not cease to exist, but he is deified and retains his humanity in eternity.[130]

Russian thinkers affirmed the "divine in man" as opposed to the juridical interpretation of the relation between God and man prevalent in Western Christian theology.[131] For Berdyaev, Christ reveals that the human being "bears within himself the image which is both the image of man and the image of God, and is the image of man in so far as the image of God is actualized."[132] Through Christ, the Second Hypostasis of the Trinity, the Face of Divinity is manifested as the human face.[133] Indeed, in affirming the divinity of humanity, the concept of Divine humanity

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129. These lectures were delivered at the University of St. Petersburg in 1878. See B. Jakim, introduction to *Lectures on Divine Humanity*, by V. Solovyov, vii-xvi.

130. Cited in Spinka, *Nicolas Berdyaev: Captive of Freedom*, 143.

131. "The idea of God-manhood means the overcoming of the self-sufficiency of man in humanism and at the same the affirmation of the activity of man, of his highest dignity, of the divine in man. The interpretation of Christianity as the religion of God-manhood is radically opposed to the juridical interpretation of the relation between God and man, and the juridical theory of redemption which is widespread in theology both Catholic and Protestant…. Russian religious philosophical thought in its best representatives makes war upon every juridical interpretation of the mystery of Christianity, and this enters into the Russian Idea. At the same time, the idea of God-manhood tends toward cosmic transfiguration. It is almost entirely alien to official Catholicism and Protestantism. In the West affinity with the cosmology of Russian religious philosophy is to be found only in German Christian theosophy, in Jacob Boehme, Franz Baader and in Schelling" (Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, 189).

132. Cited in Guroian, "Nicholas Berdyaev," 120.

133. Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, 206.

simultaneously affirms the humanity of God. "True human-ness," Berdyaev states, "is likeness to God." The human being at present "is but to a small extent human; he is even inhuman. It is not man who is [fully] human but God," and the fullness of our humanity is contingent upon our participation in the divine life.[134]

Corbin acknowledged his debt to Berdyaev for revealing to him the idea that "the divine mystery and the human mystery [are] one and the same mystery."[135] This conception formed the basis of Corbin's understanding of the Imam. Thus, in an important essay entitled "Face of God and Face of Man" (1967), Corbin argues that the "Imam is simultaneously the divine Face shown to man and the Face that man shows to God."[136] He notes that "at the heart of this discussion [are] present the concept and problems connoted by the Greek term *theandria*, a term that designates the humano-divine unity that dominates the horizon of Christology."[137] Later, he asserts that "in [the] idea of the Imam as humano-divine Face we approach the mystery of *theandry*, which in turn is the very mystery of Christology."[138]

While "Imamology assumes [in Shi'ite theology and theosophy] a function homologous to the function of Christology in Christian theology," Corbin claims that Shi'ite theologians have solved the problems of Christology in a way that has been marginalised in the history of "official Christianity."[139] Imamology differs from Christology in that the Imam is not considered "incarnate," but rather is a "theophanic figure." In contrast with the doctrine of the Incarnation, Shi'ite Imamology

> remains a theology of transfiguration. The manifestation of a theophanic form correlatively implies that the perceiver undergoes an intimate metamorphosis. If one had to translate the theophanic mode of being of the Imam into a Christological context, this would only be possible within a Christology that essentially professes the idea of a *caro spiritualis Christi*.[140]

134. Cited in Guroian, "Nicholas Berdyaev," 121.

135. "C'est à [Berdiaev] que nous avons dû d'entendre l'appel à méditer le mystère divin et le mystère humain comme n'étant qu'un seul et même mystère" (Corbin, "Allocution d'ouverture," 49).

136. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 246.

137. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 246.

138. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 265. For a comparison of theandry in the works of Berdyaev, Corbin and Raimon Panikkar, see K. Bambauer, introduction to *Wahrheit und Offenbarung*, by N. Berdjajew, 94-109).

139. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 246.

140. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 281. Cf. "Les Imâms ne sont pas

This argument receives further treatment near the end of the essay in a paragraph entitled "Aspects of Theandry." Corbin there invokes the unique figure of Vasily Rozanov (1856-1919), a controversial Russian writer who participated in the religious-philosophical renewal at the turn of the 20th century. He writes:

> At the time I was studying and expounding the texts of the Shi'ite Imams and of their commentator, Qazi Sa'id Qommi [c. 1633-1692], on the theme of the Imam as the divine Face and the Face of God, I was struck by reading the book of a Russian thinker very little known to the West, an extraordinary man whose tormented genius eludes every classification: Vasily Rozanov…. This book was titled *The Dark Face of Christ*.[141]

A controversial figure, Rozanov was torn between the Greek and Egyptian religions of antiquity and Christianity, between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Particularly troubling for him was the perceived acosmic character of Christianity. He claimed that God has two children: the world and Jesus Christ. Christ is foreign to the joys of this world; he demands that Christians love only Him and forsake this world. In this anti-worldliness, Rozanov holds, is revealed the "dark face of Christ." Christ is at war with the world since he "[disrupts] the divine activity on Earth by refusing to perpetuate [God's creative activity]."[142] Rozanov remains torn between the reign of God and the reign of the Son.[143]

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non plus des Incarnations divines; ce sont des figures théophaniques. Il est capital de marquer techniquement la différence pour la conscience religieuse: l'image *n'immane* pas dans le miroir, comme la couleur noire, par exemple, dans le corps noir. Elle y est 'en suspens;' le miroir la montre, c'est tout; l'image n'est pas 'incarnée' dans la substance du miroir. Les saints Imâms sont des miroirs théophaniques, rien de moins ni de plus, parce que l'Homme Parfait est créé à l'image de la forme du Très Miséricordieux. Ce n'est pas un hasard, si chaque fois que l'imâmologie s'est trouvée en présence de problèmes analogues à ceux de la christologie, ce fut pour incliner à des solutions conformes à l'esprit de la Gnose et rejetées par le christianisme officiel" (Corbin, "De la situation philosophique du shî'isme," 77).

141. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 300.

142. Ure, "Rozanov, the Creation, and the Rejection of Eschatology," 241-242.

143. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 301. A.L. Crone indicates an interesting parallel between Rozanov and Jung: "In his important article 'Answer to Job,' Jung treats the unconscious dark side—the shadow—of the Christian godhead of which the believer is usually not conscious. Rozanov, too, sees the Christian believer as mesmerized by the unearthly beauty of the Gospel texts, as so stunned by the beauty and incapacitating 'love' and 'tenderness' of the Gospel words that he forgets to understand the harm the bright face of Christ is actually causing him. While both [Jung and Rozanov] see the average believer as largely unconscious of or afraid to admit his ambivalence about 'the dark face' of Christ, Rozanov is

Corbin views Rozanov's dilemma as a consequence of the "official Christological dogma."[144] He therefore argues that the concept of the Imam carries an implicit solution to Rozanov's spiritual dilemma. On Corbin's reading, Rozanov "remains as if in quest of that spiritual concreteness of the *mundus imaginalis*" contained in the "secret of the Imam."[145] He claims that "every question we might ask concerning [Rozanov] would seem to lead us back to the theme that we have developed here: the Face that God shows to man is the very Face that man shows to God."[146] Considering that Rozanov and other Russian thinkers of his generation were known as the "God-seekers" (Russian *Bogoiskateli*), it could be said that Corbin interprets Rozanov as an unknowing "Imam-seeker."

While Corbin portrays Rozanov's spiritual dilemma as a symptom of the traditional teaching of the Incarnation, he also recognises the existence of a "current of thought with an entire tradition within Christianity, and which replies differently than official Christology to the question: at which level of man does the meeting of the divine nature and the human nature occur?"[147] This heterodox current includes "all those who have been animated by the spirit of gnosis." In contrast to the dogma of the hypostatic union of the two natures, which situates the humano-divino encounter, in the person of Jesus Christ, "at the level of the carnal man perceptible to our senses and subject to the laws of physics, history, [and] society," Corbin refers to a lineage of Christian gnostics who allegedly "have known that it is at the level of the *real* man, that is, of the spiritual man and the *caro spiritualis*," that the meeting of the divine and human natures occurs.[148] Corbin names Berdyaev as an eminent representative of this lineage. We cannot here examine Berdyaev's Christology in depth. It is certain, however, that Berdyaev did not see his Christology as

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maximally cognizant of it" (*Eros and Creativity in Russian Religious Renewal*, 235-236).

144. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 301.

145. "[Rozanov] reste ainsi comme à la recherche de ce spirituel concret du *mundus imaginalis*, dans lequel nous avons vu la Nature transfigurée par le geste de l'Imâm frappant la terre de la paume de sa main, si bien que toutes les beautés germant de la Terre germent du *malakût* comme un secret de l'Imâm; c'est ce secret que l'Imâm montre à une poignée de fidèles, en les enlevant sur le 'Nuage blanc' jusqu'à ce *malakût*" (Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 301).

146. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 302.

147. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 304.

148. Corbin, "Face de Dieu et face de l'homme," 304-305.

contradicting the orthodox teaching concerning the dual nature of Christ. Quite the opposite, he presented his teaching on theandry as an elaboration of the Chalcedonian doctrine on the nature of Christ. It is therefore safe to say that Corbin here rather indiscriminately projects his own views onto Berdyaev.[149] It is worth recalling here the words of the French Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément who, in response to Corbin, noted that for Berdyaev "the Holy Spirit is beyond the opposition of spirit and matter, and that flesh can, and must, become spiritual." Correcting Corbin's reading, Clément claimed: "the *caro spiritualis* for Berdyaev is not the place of the Incarnation, but its result."[150]

Iranism and Byzantinism: Suhrawardi, Khomiakov and Leontiev

We have already seen how Corbin used the theme of Sophia to express a unified, progressive spiritual narrative from Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran. Corbin indeed perceived the Iranian world as "forming an enduring totality and cultural unity."[151] In an essay titled "Iranology and Philosophy" (1951), he claimed: "There exists an Iranian spiritual universe forming a totality with definite outlines, and whose constant inner principle ensures the unity amidst its many vicissitudes."[152] Later he wrote:

> The Iranian world has formed since its origin a totality, whose characteristic traits and vocation can only be explained on the condition that we consider the Iranian spiritual world as forming a whole, before and after Islam.[153]

Given this assumption, Corbin argued for "the introduction of a concept of 'Iranism' into the universe of philosophical and religious conceptions."[154] It is from the lexicon of the Slavophile thinker Aleksey Khomiakov (1804-60) that Corbin borrowed the

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149. Antoine Faivre's observation regarding Corbin's reading of Oetinger and Swedenborg also applies here: "Corbin fait dire à Oetinger ce que lui, Corbin, aurait aimé qu'Oetinger eût dit. On l'y voit se faire le médiateur entre les deux théosophes, mais en tirant Oetinger du côté de Swedenborg et en exposant davantage sa propre pensée philosophique que celle de deux parties en présence" (A. Faivre, "La question d'un ésotérisme comparé des religions du livre," 96).

150. Clément, "Histoire et métahistoire chez Nicolas Berdiaev," 155.

151. Corbin, *L'Iran et la philosophie*, 42.

152. Corbin, *L'Iran et la philosophie*, 40.

153. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, I, xxvii.

154. Corbin, *L'Iran et la philosophie*, 63.

term "Iranism." Much like Russian Sophiology provided Corbin with a model for his "Shi'ite Sophiology," Khomiakov's "Iranism" influenced his conception of what he described as Suhrawardi's "Iranism." Also important in this connection is the concept of "Byzantinism" coined by the conservative Russian thinker Konstantin Leontiev (1831-1891).

Corbin defined Suhrawardi's "Iranism" for the first time in an essay titled "From the Heroic Epic to the Mystical Epic" (1966).[155] The title of this essay refers to Suhrawardi's mystical interpretation of the national epics of ancient Iran. According to Corbin, Suhrawardi's main project as he conceived it and as it appeared to his disciples was to "resuscitate" the "theosophy" professed by the Sages of ancient Persia whom he named "Khosrawaniyun," after Kay Khosrow, a legendary king of the Kayanid dynasty and a character in the Persian epic book, the *Shahnameh*.[156] Suhrawardi considered the "Khosrawaniyun" of ancient Iran as the predecessors of the "Oriental theosophers," the "Ishraqiyun" in Islamic Persia.[157] Suhrawardi's "Iranism" is expressed in his conception of a spiritual lineage linking pre- and post-Islamic Iran.[158]

In tracing the philosophical lineage of the "Ishraqiyun" to the sages of ancient Iran, Suhrawardi is not writing an objective history of philosophy. His claim of kinship with the "Khosrawaniyun" of ancient Persia, Corbin argues, is not a historical fact—it cannot be verified by historical and genealogical records—but rather a "meta-historical" fact, in the sense that it refers to an "event" that took place in Suhrawardi's soul.[159] For this reason, Corbin indicates that

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155. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 175-243.

156. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 179 and 223-224. Cf. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 10 and 30.

157. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 186-187.

158. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 179.

159. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 38. Cf. "[A]vec Sohrawardî un philosophe 'oriental' ne 'fait l'histoire' de la philosophie qu'en faisant acte de philosophe. Or, faire acte de philosophe, ce n'est pas être un spectateur de la philosophie, c'est *agir* la philosophie. Sohrawardî nous a montré que, pour lui, 'faire l'histoire' des *Ishrâqîyûn*, c'était faire la 'théosophie orientale' en revendiquant pour elle l'ascendance des *Khosrawânîyûn*, des Sages de l'ancienne Perse. L'événement a lieu d'autorité, et mobilise *eo ipso* le passé que le *shaykh al-Ishrâq* fait sien comme 'résurrecteur de la théosophie de l'ancienne Perse;' ce faisant, il 'fait l'histoire' des *Ishrâqîyûn*, et l'Événement désormais demeure, parce que Sohrawardî ne décrit ni ne raconte pas seulement une histoire; il *est* cette histoire" (Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 202). And: "Sa [Sohrawardî] propre 'histoire' est une *métahistoire*, parce qu'elle

Suhrawardi's "Iranism" is not based on racial or ethnic affiliation, but rather is "essentially sacral, hieratic."[160] In other words, Suhrawardi's self-proclaimed kinship with the sages of ancient Persia does not depend on his being from the same geographical region, or belonging to the same ethnic stock, as the ancient Persians. Instead, it involves a "creative intuition" that cannot be explained by historical causation or contingent circumstances, because it "is itself the *source* and *principle* of explanation. It is from this creative intuition that antecedents precisely become antecedents."[161] According to Corbin, Suhrawardi *absolves* the past of ancient Persia from its discontinuity in relation to Islamic Persia."[162] With Suhrawardi, it is "a *new past* that emerges, as new as the present, and that finds itself in relation to the present in a relation of prophetic fulfilment."[163] This recalls Berdyaev's view that "creative newness" cannot be explained in terms of the past, because "it is achieved in existential time which knows no system of causal links."[164]

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brise la contrainte linéaire de l'histoire exotérique, et cela parce que son origine et son avenir n'ont pas lieu, n'ont pas *leur lieu*, au niveau de cette dernière" (Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 212).

160. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 179.

161. Cf. "[L]e grand projet de Sohrawardî ne saurait être 'expliqué' par la simple récapitulation d'antécédents. Disons plutôt que c'est à l'inverse sa personne qui, en première et dernière instance, est elle-même l'explication rendant raison de la rencontre de ces antécédents. L'accumulation des antécédents ne suffirait jamais à expliquer l'éclosion d'un projet de ce genre, aux yeux de quiconque est convaincu que l'intuition créatrice n'est pas l'*objet* explicable, mais est elle-même *source* et *principe* de l'explication. C'est à partir de cette intuition créatrice que les antécédents deviennent précisément des antécédents" (Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 26). Cf. "Certes, l'historien qui ne peut se prononcer que sur les faits matériels, branle la tête devant un *fait* qui échappe aux catégories de la science positive, et dont on ne peut rendre compte causalement en remontant du même au même. Lorsqu'il arrive à un philosophe de reconnaître ses ancêtres spirituels et d'en revendiquer l'ascendance, il ne s'agit pas d'une succession d'ayants droit, légalisable par des documents d'archives. Et c'est un événement qui *innove*, qui s'accomplit dans l'histoire de l'âme et dont le retentissement, jusque dans son passé, est capable de remodeler celui-ci, si bien qu'on ne peut 'expliquer' l'événement en le ramenant à quelque antécédent. Ou plutôt l''antécédent' est ailleurs, au niveau d'un monde dont la réalité historique en ce monde-ci n'est que la manifestation éphémère" (Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 165).

162. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 187.

163. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 180.

164. Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, 169. Cf. "Newness cannot be explained with the object as the point of departure. It is only when we start from the subject that it becomes explicable" (Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, 168). Also: "It is

Suhrawardi's hieratic "Iranism" thus produces a "reversion of time."[165] Corbin finds this idea illustrated in Suhrawardi's "mystical recitals." In these short tales, the protagonist narrates the deeds of the heroes of the ancient Iranian epic, the *Shahnameh*, as if they were the personally lived adventures of his soul. "In the person of Suhrawardi, in the mystical Recital," Corbin writes, "the deeds of the heroes of ancient Iran are accomplished in the present."[166] Suhrawardi's hermeneutics, Corbin argues, "absolves" the deeds of the ancient Iranian heroes from the past and "resuscitates" them in the present of the first person.[167] This type of hermeneutics is suggested by the Arabic word *hikayat*, which denotes a narration that simultaneously is an imitation, a repetition.[168] The *hikayat*, Corbin explains:

> is a re-cited history, but whose Reciter is therefore the "mime," the *actor* in the *active* and *actual* sense of the word. This is because the *event* is never closed, and only becomes a *history* to the extent that it is a *comprehended event*…. We are the *mimes* who actualise the meaning of the exemplary models. We do not make ourselves captives of that past, not any more than that past is captive of itself, as if it were

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in fallen time that the life of nature and historical life flow on. But everything that happens in time which has broken up into past, present and future, that is to say in time which is sick, is but a projection on to the external of what is being accomplished in depth. True creative newness is achieved in existential time, time which is not objectified, that is to say it happens in the vertical and not in the horizontal. But creative acts which are accomplished in the vertical are projected upon a plane and are accepted as accomplished in historical time. Thus it is that meta-history enters into history" (Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, 163).

165. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 39.

166. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 214. Cf. "On peut concevoir que Sohrawardî ait lu le *Shâh-Nâmeh* comme nous-mêmes lisons la Bible ou comme lui-même lisait le Qorân, c'est-à-dire comme s'il n'avait été composé que 'pour son propre cas'…. [L]e *Shâh-Nâmeh* pouvait donc ainsi devenir l'histoire ou la métahistoire de l'âme, telle qu'elle est présente au cœur du gnostique. Spontanément donc, c'est toute l'histoire de l'âme et du monde de l'âme que Sohrawardî pouvait percevoir jusque dans la trame du *Shâh-Nâmeh*, en le lisant au niveau auquel il est lisible dès que l'on a présente à la pensée la totalité de l'être et des mondes de l'être, c'est-à-dire à la façon dont l'éminent Proclus savait lire l'histoire de la mystérieuse Atlantide comme histoire vraie et simultanément comme 'image d'une certaine réalité existant dans le Tout'" (Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 212-213).

167. "[Le Récitateur] est donc le *patiens*, le 'lieu' dans lequel s'accomplit au présent la geste récitée, 'parce qu'il a aboli en lui-même la montagne de 'l'égoïté close'. Il est l'absolu dans lequel cette geste passée s'absout de son passé, parce que simultanément il est celui que cette geste, en s'absolvant ainsi, *absout* du passé" (Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 206).

168. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 176-177.

> "outpassed".... No, we ravish this past, and ourselves with it, from the *causality* known as historical causality.[169]

Corbin therefore describes the recital as a "history that breaks history," an eschatological history, which by leading the deeds of the Iranian heroes back to their "true," "inner" meaning, simultaneously leads the mystical pilgrim back "to his real being, to his *origin*, to his 'Orient.'"[170] This is what Corbin calls "the passage from the heroic epic to the mystical epic."[171]

Near the end of the essay, in a paragraph titled "Of Iranism and the Hieratic World," Corbin draws a comparison between Suhrawardi's "Iranism" and "the use of the word *Iranism*, as it was understood by Aleksey Khomiakov and the Slavophiles in ancient Russia during the first half of the 19ᵗʰ century." This comparison, Corbin notes, "may be one of the pathways allowing Iranian philosophers, who have remained all but unknown in the West, to make their way into the circuit of our thoughts and problems."[172]

Khomiakov distinguished two fundamental principles that he placed at the foundation of his historiosophy. On the one hand, there is the principle of freedom, expressed through creation, and on the other hand, there is the principle of necessity and materialism. "Freedom and necessity," Khomiakov wrote, "constitute the mysterious principle around which, in various forms, all human thoughts are centred."[173] In his posthumously

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169. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 177. Cf. "Comment notre Récitateur craindrait-il que le passé soit dépassé ou que lui-même soit alors dépassé, puisqu'il est là, lui, et que c'est en lui-même que le passé se passe, et que lui-même, en s'absolvant de sa propre égoïté close, *absout* le passé, l'arrache à sa fixité, si bien que désormais c'est ce passé qui lui succède? La Tradition ne se *trans*met que par cette création" (Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 198).

170. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 179 and 191. Cf. "[C] omme en témoigne l'épopée iranienne des Kayanides, ce n'est pas dans l'histoire habituelle de nos chroniques que les héros d'épopée font leur entrée. Leur geste visible s'amplifie simultanément à la dimension du monde *imaginal*, du 'huitième climat,' là où sont *pris au mot* leurs actes qui défient les lois physiques de notre monde. C'est pourquoi justement leur histoire est *orientable*, je veux dire peut être reconduite à l''Orient' métahistorique, au *pôle* céleste, et y trouver son dénouement" (Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 189-190). Also: "Le récit, la *hikâyat*, est essentiellement la mise en œuvre herméneutique, reconduisant chaque fois chaque 'récitateur' au sens vrai de ce récit pour lui, et *eo ipso* au sens vrai de son être" (Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 239).

171. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 191.

172. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 235-236.

173. Corbin cites Khomiakov without giving a reference. The same passage is cited in Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, I, 189. Corbin cites this work in

published "Notes on Universal History," Khomiakov calls the first principle "Iranism" [*iranstvo*]. The "Iranian" principle denotes "the creative spiritual principle, the religion of moral freedom." The second principle Khomiakov refers to as "Kushitism" [*kushitstvo*], in reference to Kush, the Biblical name for Ethiopia. The "Kushite" principle designates the power of materialism and logical necessity. "Kushitism," according to Khomiakov, finds its fullest expression in Hegel's system.[174] "Iranism," on the other hand,

> is founded on tradition and cannot be restored by a purely logical action, because the concept of creative freedom cannot be chained to and deduced from formulae. It can only be discerned by a superior intuition, going beyond the narrow limits of reasoning, or by the work of centuries, having gone through all the degrees of negation.[175]

Corbin links Khomiakov's notion of "Iranism," which signifies "creative freedom" rooted in tradition, to the "free creative inspiration" which enabled Suhrawardi to claim he was the "resurrector" of the theosophical wisdom of ancient Iran.[176] As he writes:

> May we not say that, in Suhrawardi, *Kushitism* is represented by Peripatetic philosophy, the dominion of Logic, of the necessity of the laws of rational understanding? Peripateticism, if not Aristotle himself, typified for Suhrawardi what Hegel represented for Khomiakov. It is the dominion of logical necessity, as well as that of physical necessity, that is shattered by the visionary theosophy of the *Khosrawaniyun* from Iran, by the free flight of the configuring

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En Islam iranien, II, 362 n. 512.

174. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 236-237. Cf. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 336-338. Cf. "[Khomiakov's "Notes on Universal History"] rests as a whole upon the contrast between two types and upon the conflict of two principles in history, that is to say, it is consecrated to what is always the same fundamental Russian theme, of Russia and Europe, of East and West…. [Khomiakov] sees the conflict of two principles in history—freedom and necessity, spirituality and materialism. Thus it is made clear that the principal thing, the thing of highest value to him, was freedom. Necessity, the power of the material over the spiritual was an enemy against which he fought all his life. He saw this necessity, this power of materiality over the spirit in pagan religion and in Roman Catholicism, in Western rationalism and in Hegel's philosophy. The principles which are seen in conflict by him he expressed in terminology which is relative and fruitful of misunderstanding. They are *iranstvo* and *kushitstvo*. *Iranstvo* is freedom and spirituality; *kushitstvo* is necessity and materiality, and of course it becomes clear that Russia is *iranstvo* and the West is *kushitstvo*" (Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, 61).

175. Gratieux, *A.S. Khomiakov et le mouvement slavophile*, II, 68-69 and 71-73, cited in Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 237.

176. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 237.

> vision, the "superior intuition" penetrating into the spiritual
> universes forbidden to the dialectic of Logic. The affirmation of the
> *mundus imaginalis* is therefore the paradox, which in daring to "exit"
> the constraints of empiricism and rational Logic, surmounts their
> antagonism.[177]

Corbin's reading of Suhrawardi through the lens of Khomiakov
helps explain hi controversial emphasis on Suhrawardi's mystical
writings as being more valuable than his logical and doctrinal
works.

However, Corbin is cautious about the nationalistic implications
of Khomiakov's "Iranism," which for him have no place in
Suhrawardi. In Khomiakov's "Iranism," Corbin detects "the desire
to elevate the hidden type at the root of the life of a people, viz.
the Russian type, to a universal value."[178] For Khomiakov and the
Slavophiles, the vocation of the Russian people is to become the
most Christian of societies, the "pravoslav," Orthodox people.[179]
Corbin criticises the "populism" implied in the Slavophile view,
which he deems too concerned with the consolidation of a
"temporal ideal." By contrast, Suhrawardi's "Iranism" is purely
spiritual. As he explains:

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177. "Ne pourrait-on pas dire que, chez Sohrawardî, le *kouschisme* serait repré-
senté par la philosophie des Péripatéticiens, l'empire de la Logique, la nécessité des
lois de l'entendement rationnel? Ce que Hegel représentait aux yeux de Khomiakov,
le péripatétisme, sinon Aristote lui-même, le typifiait au regard de Sohrawardî.
Et c'est l'empire de la nécessité logique, comme celui de la nécessité physique, qui
se trouve brisé par la théosophie visionnaire des *Khosrawânîyûn* de l'Iran, par le
libre essor de la vision configuratrice, l''intuition supérieure' pénétrant dans les
univers spirituels interdits à la dialectique de la Logique. L'affirmation du *mundus
imaginalis* est alors le paradoxe qui, en osant 'sortir' des contraintes de l'empirisme
et des évidences de la Logique rationnelle, surmonte leur antagonisme. 'Ayant
parcouru tous les degrés de la négation,' dit Khomiakov. De son côté, Sohrawardî,
antipéripatéticien au possible, exige pourtant que son disciple ait tout d'abord
parcouru toutes les étapes de la philosophie péripatéticienne, celles du monde
de la Logique (il le fait lui-même tout au long de la première partie du livre de la
'Théosophie orientale,' mais sous une inspiration stoïcienne où l'herméneutique
domine la dialectique, si bien que la Logique en sort simplifiée et brisée, et le livre
aboutit à une métaphysique de la vision). On ne surmonte pas le principe kouschite
en passant à côté, en le laissant en dehors. Peut-être le pressentiment génial de
Khomiakov prendrait-il un développement inattendu, s'il était confronté plus en
détail avec le propos de Sohrawardî, 'résurrecteur' de la sagesse théosophique de
l'ancien Iran" (Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 337-338).
178. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 237.
179. Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 238. Cf. Corbin, *En
Islam iranien*, II, 338.

It is not the Iranian people that merited, as such, the qualification of "Orientals" in the sense that [Suhrawardi] understands that word. The knowledge possessed by the ancient Sages was not "Oriental" simply because they happened to live in the geographical East. On the contrary, it is rather "Oriental" knowledge that made these Iranians "Orientals" *par excellence*. The light of this "Orient" is the Light of Glory (the *Xvarnah*), which can now empower a being, now withdraw from him. The "Oriental" kinship claimed by Suhrawardi and his followers is not an ethnic principle, but a hieratic ascendant (in the Neoplatonic sense of the word).[180]

Corbin finds a term of comparison in the Russian thinker Konstantin Leontiev (1831-1891). At one time an admirer of Vladimir Solovyov, Leontiev was an aesthete in early life and died as an Orthodox monk. Leontiev's religious and political conservatism placed him at odds with the other religious thinkers of his generation. He rejected Solovyov's "humanism," charged Dostoevsky of promoting a "rosy Christianity," and considered Khomiakov's Orthodoxy as "too liberal and modernised." By contrast, he affirmed Byzantine Orthodoxy and the ascetic monasticism of Mount Athos.[181]

What appealed to Corbin in Leontiev was that, unlike Khomiakov, he "placed his faith neither in Russia nor in its people, but in the sacral and hieratic ideal of the Byzantine world."[182] "Any attempt to give a mystical foundation to a temporal theocratic kingdom was alien to [Leontiev]," Corbin approvingly wrote.[183] Leontiev's "Byzantinism" therefore may be associated with Suhrawardi's "Iranism." For both Leontiev and Suhrawardi,

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180. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 338-339.

181. Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, 68-69.

182. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 339. Cf. "[Leontiev] certainly did not believe in the Russian people. He thought Russia exists and is great thanks simply to the fact that Byzantine Orthodoxy and Byzantine autocracy had been imposed upon the Russian people from above" (Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, 85). Cf. "[Leontiev] was in no sense a nationalist as might appear at first sight: he was even avowedly hostile to nationalism. The principle of race and blood had no intrinsic value for him. He was very much on his guard against it. Like Solovyev he tended to be a universalist. What mattered in the first place were the universal elements, dominating the national idea and stimulating national development…. Rome was Solovyev's universal symbol, Byzantium was Leontiev's. The latter had, indeed, never believed in Russia or its people, but rather in the principles of the Byzantine Church and State. The only mission he believed in was the universal Byzantine one…. In Leontiev's mind, the essential fact was *not the people itself, but the idea dominating it*" (Berdyaev, *Leontiev*, 153-154). See also I. Sokologorsky, "Principe byzantin et principe slave," 30-45.

183. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 339.

Corbin contends:

> it is not the people in itself that is essential, but the sacral idea that
> inhabits it and prevails in it. What the sacral Byzantine idea was for
> [Leontiev], the idea of the theosophical wisdom of ancient Iran, in
> turn, was for [Suhrawardi]. Here again, the principle of freedom that
> typified *Iranism* in the historiosophical dramaturgy of Khomiakov can
> be seen at work. For no one was simultaneously more revolutionary
> and more traditional than Suhrawardi; for while he proclaimed that
> he had no predecessors, the fact remains that it was through him
> and beginning with him that the "Oriental" tradition, the *Ishraqi*
> tradition, linking the spirituality of ancient Iran with that of Islamic
> Iran, came to exist.[184]

For Corbin, the link between Suhrawardi's "Iranism" and
Leontiev's "Byzantinism" reflects an essential affinity between the
Byzantine and Iranian worlds. Elsewhere, he writes:

> The surface of Iranian glazed earthenware, like the surface of
> Byzantine mosaics, emits its own light. Few years ago, the Ravenna
> Mosaic Art School held in Teheran an exhibition that showcased
> a large number of reproductions of mosaics, whose tradition [the
> Ravenna School] maintains. The extreme interest that our Iranian
> friends showed in the Ravenna mosaics suggested to us that there
> had to be something common to both traditions. In fact, is not the
> distinguishing feature of emblematic spaces precisely their ability
> to communicate by secret ways that lie beyond the jurisdiction of
> History?[185]

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184. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 339. Cf. "La conscience religieuse d'un Leon-
tiev est d'essence toute spirituelle et ascétique. Il est même étranger à tout souci
de donner un fondement mystique au royaume théocratique temporel. Il croit à
l'Église orthodoxe, il croit à l'idée, à la beauté surtout, à certaines personnalités
élues, puissantes et créatrices. Mais il ne croit pas au peuple, à la masse humaine,
et par là même il se détache, avec une originalité puissante, de l'ensemble des
penseurs russes. Il reste le témoin d'un monde *hiératique* (je pense principalement
au sens que le néoplatonicien Jamblique donne à ce mot, lorsqu'il parle des 'ver-
tus hiératiques'), — un monde aux figures de Lumière d'au-delà dont il arrive au
monde humain terrestre de pouvoir être liturgiquement la typification, comme en
une succession d'icônes ou comme dans la chevalerie du Graal. Et c'est pourquoi je
crois que l'étude comparée entre l'*iranisme* de Sohravardî et l'*iranisme* de Khomiakov
nous conduirait peut-être finalement à la constatation suivante: que ce que l'idée
et les Sages de l'ancienne Perse ont représenté pour Sohravardî correspondrait
plutôt à ce que Byzance et le principe byzantin ont représenté pour un Leontiev"
(Corbin, "De l'épopée héroïque à l'épopée mystique," 238-239).

185. H. Corbin, "Les cités emblématiques," 8.

HERESIOLOGICAL POST-SCRIPTUM

"On ne peut prétendre écrire l'histoire d'un thème quelconque sans être pris soi-même dans cette histoire et inéluctablement faire cette histoire, d'une manière ou d'une autre, en la prolongeant ou en y mettant fin"

(Corbin, *La philosophie iranienne islamique aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*).

The late Charles Adams said that in valuing certain aspects of the Islamic tradition as more worthwhile and significant than other aspects, Corbin was promoting his own philosophical agenda at the expense of a disinterested, historical and scientific presentation of Islam.[186] The same thing could no doubt be said with respect to Corbin's rather arbitrary interpretation of Russian religious thought. However, it is important at the same time to remember that Corbin's works are primarily those of a philosopher, and therefore to assess the value of his writings solely in terms of their historical accuracy is to miss the point of his project. This is not to say that Corbin should be exempt from critical scrutiny. However, if his extraordinarily rich work is to continue to have relevance, we should allow ourselves to see his mistakes of interpretation as "creative mistakes" that can open up unsuspected avenues of exploration. That entails reading Corbin with the same eyes with which he read Suhrawardi. In claiming kinship with the sages of ancient Iran, Corbin writes, Suhrawardi,

> is not writing an (objective) history of philosophy or mysticism. It is the history of souls that he is describing, as he perceives it in the history of his own soul, which is its proper place. It would therefore be totally void to object as historians that his schematisation of history is a figment of the imagination, on the grounds that it is inconsistent with our historical annals. The objection would miss the only history Suhrawardi intends to tell us, since he *makes* and *is* himself that history…in the lived reality of his innermost depths. And it is at the very moment his spiritual perception *accomplishes* that history that the precursors become and really *are* the precursors of the *Ishraqiyun*….[187]

Corbin's unorthodox reading of Shi'ite and Russian thought is thus a testament to what he called "the unique sovereignty of the Spirit." His work is a testament to "the unique sovereignty of the Spirit."

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186. Adams, "The Hermeneutics of Henry Corbin," 137.
187. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, II, 38-39.

APPENDIX

Projected plan of *Sophia Æterna*

I. The *Answer to Job*

I. Alone with the alone
II. The *Answer to Job*
      1. The absence of Sophia
      2. The Anamnesis of Sophia
      3. The exaltation of Sophia
III.
      1. Kierkegaard, the Christian Job
      2. The Sophiology of S. Bulgakov
      3. The Rock of Rhages

II. Sophia Æterna

1. (Quid: Zacharias and Buisset – Bachofen and his struggle – his failure – Job's question: Where is Sophia?)
2. The angel Daena-Fravarti (Mazdaism) (*the archetype* – R. Otto)
3. Sophia and Shekhina (O[ld] T[estament] – Kabbalah)
4. Kore Kosmou (Hermetism – Isis – the initiating Sophia)
5. Sophia in exile (or fallen – gnosis – Valentinians)
6. The Virgin of Light (Manichaeism) – Cathars – Acts of Thomas
7. The Shepherd of Hermas
8. Fatima the Resplendent (Shi'ite Islam)
9. Seraphic anthropology (the School of Jacob Boehme – Berdyaev – Novalis – Goethe – Balzac – Soloviev).

Taken from H. Corbin, *Autour de Jung: Le bouddhisme et la Sophia*, ed. Michel Cazenave (Paris: Entrelacs, 2014), 171.

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