

this submission to his orders is the creation of harmony in his constitution which is the source of health as well as every form of physical enjoyment and pleasure. To summarize, we can say that within his outward life man possesses an inner life, a spiritual life, which is related to his deeds and actions and develops in relation to them, and that his happiness or misery in the hereafter is completely dependent upon this inner life.

The Holy Qur'an also confirms this explanation. In many verses it affirms the existence of another life and another spirit for the virtuous and the faithful, a life higher than this life and a spirit more illuminated than the spirit of man as we know it here and now. It asserts that man's acts have inner effects upon his soul that remain always with him. In prophetic sayings there are also many references to this point. For example, in the *Hadith-i mi'raj* (hadith of the nocturnal ascension) God addresses the Prophet in these words: "He who wishes to act according to My satisfaction must possess three qualities: he must exhibit a thankfulness that is not mixed with ignorance, a remembrance upon which the dust of forgetfulness will not settle, and a love in which he does not prefer the love of creatures rather than My love. If he loves Me, I love him; I will open the eyes of his heart with the sight of My majesty and will not hide from him the qualities of My creatures. I will confide in him the darkness of the night and the light of the day until conversation and intercourse with creatures terminates. I will make him hear My word and the word of My angels. I will reveal to him the secret which I have veiled from My creatures. I will dress him with the robe of modesty until the creatures feel ashamed before him. He will walk upon the earth having been forgiven. I will make his heart possess consciousness and vision and I will not hide from him anything in Paradise or in the Fire. I will make known to him whatever people experience on the Day of Judgment in the way of terror and calamity."

Abu 'Abdallah—may peace be upon him—has recounted that the Prophet of God—may peace and blessing be upon him—received Harithah ibn Malik ibn al-Nu'man and asked him, "How art thou, Oh Harithah?" He said, "Oh Prophet of God, I live as a true believer." The Prophet of God said to him, "Each thing possesses its own truth. What is the truth of thy word?" He said, "Oh Prophet of God! My soul has turned away from the world. My nights are spent in a state of awakedness and my days in a state of thirst. It seems as if I am gazing at the Throne of my Lord and the account has been settled, and as if I am gazing at the people of paradise who are visiting each other in heaven, and as if I hear the cry of the people of hell in the fire." Then the Prophet of God said, "This is a servant whose heart God has illuminated."

It must also be remembered that often one of us guides another in a good or evil matter without himself carrying out his own words. In the case of the

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prophets and Imams, however, whose guidance and leadership is through Divine Command, such a situation never occurs. They themselves practice the religion whose leadership they have undertaken. The spiritual life toward which they guide mankind is their own spiritual life, for God will not place the guidance of others in someone's hands unless He has guided him Himself. Special Divine guidance can never be violated or infringed upon.

The following conclusions can be reached from this discussion:

1. In each religious community the prophets and Imams are the foremost in the perfection and realization of the spiritual and religious life they preach, for they must and do practice their own teachings and participate in the spiritual life they profess.
2. Since they are first among men and the leaders and guides of the community, they are the most virtuous and perfect of men.
3. The person upon whose shoulders lies the responsibility for the guidance of a community through Divine Command, in the same way that he is the guide of man's external life and acts, is also the guide for the spiritual life, and the inner dimension of human life and religious practice depends upon his guidance.

Henry Corbin

The Meaning of the Imam for Shi'i Spirituality

Shi'ism as the Religion of Spiritual Love that Initiates One into Knowledge of the Self

The term *walayah* has been used frequently, and we know that Shi'ism is the religion of the *walayah*. The richness of this term is evident already, along with the difficulty we have in finding an equally expressive single term in our languages, since it denotes a specifically Shi'i sentiment of manifold aspects. But the contexts in which it appears and the Persian term used most frequently to translate it (*dusti*), as well as the Arabic terms that sometimes are paired with it and sometimes are substituted for it (*hibb*, *mahabbat*, *muwaddat*), all enable us to grasp at once its basic meaning: The religion of the *walayah* is the religion of spiritual love.

Our authors frequently explain that *walayah* is *mahabbat* (dilection, love); the *wali* is the *muhibb* (the friend, the one who loves). This immediate significance, the profound resonance of the term, is lost if we yield to the routine and the approximate, and if we translate *wali* simply as saint. Doubtless, the words have certain aspects in common, but the connotations of *wali* and *walayah* go beyond what customarily and canonically is understood in our language by *saint* and *saintliness*. For this very reason, we are no longer surprised that the essence of Shi'ism so frequently has been misunderstood; it is important to recognize that *walayah* is its central concept, that which it presents in various aspects, framing the whole horizon of its view of the world; and it is important to understand its basic meaning.

The Shi'i were fully aware through the teaching of their Imams that their Shi'ism was basically a devotion of love. This, plus the distinctive tonality that as a result marks their sense of man and of being human is what we would like briefly to summarize here. In fact, it is by virtue of the premises and implications that emerge from Islam professed as religion of love that the concept and the figure of the Imam appear to us in their ineluctable necessity. At the same time, the central problem of Shi'ism is posed, met, and solved, without the occasion even to speak of Sufism. Here, as we have said, is the key to a spiritual situation that even now scarcely has been analyzed. In the end, the meaning of the Imam for the most personally experienced kind of Shi'i spirituality will be found, of course, in the *walayah* itself. The meaning of the Imam as the object of the *walayah* manifests itself as being the initiation of the adept to the knowledge of himself. Once initiated, he understands how and why the love of God is impossible without love of the Imam, for it is in the *walayah*, as the form of his love, that he discovers and verifies the meaning of the famous maxim: "He who knows himself knows his Lord." That being the case, the titles assumed by the Imams in the *hadith* are understandable directly in relation to this experienced spirituality, as leading to the encounter with the "Soul of the soul" (*Jan-i jan*) who is the Imam. Since elsewhere we have analyzed this fructification of imamology as a spiritual experience in Isma'ilism, we devote ourselves here to its Twelver Shi'i aspect.

First of all let us note this. To speak of Islam as a religion of love bears little resemblance to the current representation of Islam in general, or at least of Sunni Islam, as a strictly legalistic religion, as observance of the *Shari'ah*. The paradox normally becomes apparent only when one speaks of Sufism. But it is Shi'i Islam in itself, without any necessity to refer explicitly to Sufism, that presents itself as the religion of the *walayah*. Testimonies to this effect are found assembled in all Shi'i literature. They are presented in a particularly systematic fashion in a monumental, already-cited work, the book of *Prolegomenas to the Shi'i Hermeneutics of the Qur'an*,¹ composed

in Isfahan in the seventeenth century by Abu al-Hasan Sharif Isfahani, who was a student of the great theologian Muhammad Baqir Majlisi. The work presents a considerable number of glossed *hadith*, derived from the Prophet and the Imams, attesting that the *walayah* is the inner, esoteric meaning (*batin*) of the Qur'anic Revelation. The *walayah*, to be sure, is a "category" that makes hierohistory comprehensible, but beyond that, and for that very reason, it modalizes the conscience of every Shi'i believer. For the validity of every religious act, Shi'i doctrine postulates an intention of love, an interior attitude molded by this intention. Hence, the famous *hadith* cited several times already, in which one Imam after another has repeated that to join their cause demands an effort so heroic that it can be assumed only by an angel drawn nigh, a messenger-prophet, or a believer whose heart God has tested for faith—this *hadith* and all those related to it are intended, our author stresses, to exclude and deny that there can be complete surrender to the threefold *Shahadah* (attestation to the Unique One, to the prophetic revelation, and to the Imamic initiation) without the fervor of ardent desire (*shawq*), assent, and perfect love (*mahabbah kamilah*) in regard to the supreme purity (*cismah*) of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones.

Moreover, the profession of this love, of this *walayah*, takes precedence over all the obligations of the *Shari'ah*, not only in the sense that it alone authenticates the performance of these obligations but also because it can compensate for failure to meet them. This the Imams teach in numerous *hadith*, affirming that "the first thing about which a man is questioned after his death is his love for Us. If he has professed this love (*walayah*) and died professing it, then his Prayer, his fasting, his alms, and his pilgrimage, are acceptable to God. If he has not professed this love, then none of his works will be capable of being accepted by God."

Since, in Shi'i ethics, actions originate in the inner-being (the *batin*), pious works and the performance of ritual duties must necessarily originate in a sentiment of love; otherwise they are empty formality. Abu al-Hasan Sharif wrote: "Our shaykh (i.e., Muhammad Baqir Majlisi) states explicitly in his *Bihar al-anwar*: 'All the Imams agree that the spiritual validity of deeds and God's approval of them are conditioned by faith (*Imam*); this point is as integral a part of faith as is love for the Twelve Imams and their *imamate*.' Nothing could be less legalistic than a religion thus conceived in its essence. The consequences are far reaching for the very vocation of Shi'i Islam in this world. It is important to grasp well in what sense and why the Imam is the object of this *walayah* (when we say simply "the Imam," the word refers both to each Imam and to the Fourteen Immaculate Ones, since in the unity of their essence each one is equivalent to all the others).

To clarify the discussion for which we have been preparing throughout the preceding pages, we may say that all the knowledge that man can have

of God, not only the knowledge resulting from his own efforts but also all that the *Deus absconditus* might give of Himself as *Deus revelatus*, i.e., comprising all knowledge born of the inspired revelations to the prophets—all this knowledge, *eo ipso*, is human knowledge of God, whether it be acquired through man's effort or revealed to and for man. This human meaning of all human knowledge of God is recapitulated in the dictum, "He who knows himself knows his Lord". Now, we could not pass from one element of this sentence to the other if the Imam were not the form of knowledge of the self, the form by virtue of which a relationship was established between the human subject and the *absconditum*. The truth of this dictum is then established as through an interiorization of imamology: The imam is the human meaning of all human knowledge of God. For to know and recognize the Imam (not only a certain one of the Twelve Imams but also each of the Twelve and the entire group of Twelve in their essence and their pre-eternal theophanic function) is to avoid the double trap to which *tawhid* is exposed and the simplistic monotheism to which common people and theologians alike succumb, the double trap of *ta'atil* and *tashbih*.

We know already that the former (*ta'atil*) consigns the Divine Reality to an absolute beyond in order to surmount the "human meaning" of the Divine Names and Attributes. Shi'ism also posits this "beyond" of the Names and Attributes expressed in human language, but it holds that if we remain content purely and simply with this consignment to the beyond (*ta'atil*), we plunge into the depths of agnosticism, because we thereby dissolve the personal human-divine bond that every believing consciousness postulates. On the other hand, if we make the divine Super-essence (*hyperousia*) the support of the Names and Attributes, we plunge into the depths of *tashbih* (anthropomorphism). Whoever says, "What good is the Imam? God without an intermediary is enough for me" plainly forgets that, in speaking of this God who is immediate for him, he can never speak save of the God who reveals Himself to him, of God as he knows Him, in and through the form in which God reveals Himself to him. Even if he speaks of God as of something impersonal or transpersonal, he does so only by virtue of the form shown to him or withheld from him. Without this *mazhar*, without this "theophanic form" in which God manifests Himself—in the widest sense of the term—it is impossible even to speak of God. This form is the "Face" of God, and several texts have already shown us the importance of this theme for Shi'ism. We have been told that this "Face of God" is the Imam. Later we shall also see that he is what is *pre-posed*, what goes in "advance of the theory of the being of his devotee (*muqaddam 'ala wujudihi*)."

If, then, we lose or destroy the meaning of the Imam—and with him the validity of the human meaning of the human knowledge of God or of the divine Revelation to man—we shall find ourselves trapped in the circle of

ta'atil and *tashbih*. Because this meaning is human, "too human," it is suspected and rejected, and we advance no further than agnosticism, pure and simple (*ta'atil*); or else it is accepted but without a consciousness of what it really is, so that we fall into the trap of metaphysical idolatry (*tashbih*). Only the theophanic person of the Imam upholds the validity of this human meaning because it transcends the "too human." Thus, outside Shi'ism, certain Sufi masters, for example, have meditated to the point of vertigo in order to escape infernal dialectic in which *ta'atil* and *tashbih* have imprisoned their *tawhid*, their "unification of the Unique." But the mystery of *tawhid* is the mystery of the divine solitude, of "God alone is unique."

This does not mean a solitary, mathematical unity, dominating or surpassing an infinity of other unities or individuations of being. It is the mystery of the every-instance-unique of all the Uniques, of the One multiplied to infinity through itself but that is always the unique One; the Face of God that remains unique for every unique being; that is what the Imam is and what is expressed in the diversity of the titles that the Imams assign themselves in their *hadith*. These titles are repeated in Shi'i prayers that are spread throughout a complex liturgical calendar to such an extent that the commentary on each of these prayers alone might constitute a whole treatise or imamology. An example was cited above.

The universality of the *walayah* with the Imam as its object and the idea of the Imam as the human meaning of the divine Revelation to and for man, such that without the Imam no authentic *tawhid* is possible, is what lends coherence to what might be called *Shi'i ecumenism*, in the sense that Shi'ism aims at combining in the unity of this *walayah* (in this religion of love, all the elements and all the figures of a permanent, prophetic religion as a religion for the whole of humanity) which is the spiritual posterity of Abraham. All the prophets and all their believers have professed this same *walayah*; together, they all form a single, immense *corpus mysticum* (the Isma'ilis for their part, speak of the "Temple of Light" of the Imamate), which cannot be denied except by a denial that is *ipso facto* a repudiation of the prophetic Revelations prior to Islam. An *hadith* of the second Imam, Hasan ibn 'Ali, declares: "Whoever denies the pre-eminence of the Prince of the Believers ('Ali, the first Imam) gives the lie to the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms, the writings of Abraham, and all the other Books of God that have descended from Heaven. For of everything that is revealed in these Books, nothing is more important, after the attestation to the Unique (*tawhid*) and the attestation to the mission of the prophets, than the attestation to the *walayah* in respect to 'Ali and the Imams."

In any case, this affirmation is the corollary of the Prophet's declaration, which we already know, that the Imam was sent with each prophet secretly but that with him, the Seal of the Prophets, the Imam was sent openly. The

walayah, the divine dilection whose object is the pleroma of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones, is the secret, the esoteric aspect of the divinely inspired Revelations to the prophets; the secret of the Treasure that is hidden but aspires to be known. The Imam is this Treasure becoming knowable and the object of love. Christian theologians are faced with this question: Since the Redemption is an accomplished historical fact that is a part of historical chronology alongside other historical facts, how can we conceive of salvation for men prior to this historical fact? As we have gradually come to see, such a question could not be posed in these same terms in the context of a prophetic religion that stretches uninterruptedly from Adam to the last Imam.

Before the Seal of the Prophets, prior prophets already had brought to men the same message, calling them to the same religion of love directed towards the divine Face that their prophetic inspirations had revealed to the prophets. Paradise and Hell lay in man's assent or rejection. In a long conversation with his disciple, Mufaddal, the sixth Imam explains that the Imam is the one who separates the people of Paradise from the people of Hell; he does not even have to judge them; it is their love or their hate for the Imam that is their Paradise or Hell respectively. It is in this sense that one may speak of Ridwan (the Angel of Paradise) and Malik (the Guardian of Hell) as emanating from the order of the Imam. It has been thus from the beginning of the mission of the prophets and thus it will be throughout the cycle of the *walayah*. "The Shi'ci find their salvation in an act of love for them Imam" (this statement entails others that at times afford a degree of consonance with the idea of salvation in Pure Land Buddhism). Initiating his disciple to the mystery of this universal religion of love that encompasses all believers, Imam Ja'far rightly concludes: "Oh Mufaddal, gather all this with care, for it is a Treasure of knowledge, secret and hidden. Show it only to those who are worthy of it."

In fact, this Treasure can be shown only to those whose gaze is raised to that level of the horizon that previously showed us the mystery of the primordial Muhammadan Reality, a mystery situated in the preexistence of pure spiritual beings, where everything takes place in the world of the Spirit, even before there were terrestrial beings and biographies; for what all the prophets proclaimed was this eternal Imam as "site of the mission and message of the prophets". . . . That is what the Imam explains to his disciple. But at first Mufaddal does not understand. How could the earlier prophets profess this lover for the Imam? How could their followers find their Paradise and their adversaries find their Hell therein? So Imam Ja'far explains to him: "Dost thou not know that God Most-High sent His Messenger, a Spirit (the Logos-Prophet), to the prophets, themselves Spirits who were created 2000 years before the creation of creatures? Dost thou know that this Spirit called them to the triple Attestation?" Here again is

verification that Shi'ci theosophy could not conceive of hierohistory except on the plane of metahistory, where preexistence and postexistence are *copresent*. We know that the number that "encodes" the duration in "subtle time" of the anteriority of the world of spiritual beings may vary. Nevertheless, the disjunction of the before and after, the law of irreversibility, concerns only the order of succession in our historical time ("opaque time", *zaman kathif*), not the simultaneous order of events that endure permanently in the world of the Spirit. There is neither chronology nor anachronism in the Imam's explanation; there is a perfect synchronism that, however, is inconceivable anywhere but on the plane where imamology situates us.

Thus, we find this synchronism subjacent to the idea of the *corpus mysticum* formed of all those in existence who have professed or do profess the religion of the one eternal *walayah*. This *walayah* has its source in God Himself in that He reveals Himself in those who are the object of His love. At the same time, because they are the object of this love, they are granted a "right" that was invoked before "their time" in this world and that, accordingly, already has responded to the question posed by Mufaddal. In a *hadith* in which the Prophet alludes to the events of his "celestial assumption"—when he was "two bows'-length away," to which the *surah* of the Star refers (53:9)—he tells Imam 'Ali that he heard God say to him: "I wrote thy Name and his Name on my Throne before creating the creatures because of my love of you both. Whoever loves you and takes you as friends numbers among those drawn-nigh to Me. Whoever rejects your *walayah* and separates himself from you numbers among the impious transgressors against Me."

This tradition in its various implications, is among those tirelessly contemplated in Shi'ism as establishing the very source of the *walayah*, the divine dilection, the dilection for the Hidden Treasure, inclining toward the primordial Light that rises from it and that reveals it to creatures, the divine dilection that gives rise to and motivates the dilection (*walayah* and *mahabbah*) borne by their followers towards those who are its objects—the Fourteen Figures of primordial light—and that gives rise to the ethical law of Shi'ism (expressed in the two familiar Persian words, *tawalla wa-tabarra*, to choose as friends the Friends of God and their friends and to break with their enemies). Thus at the origin, through this predilection, God confers a kind of right to Himself upon those who are the pre-eternal objects of this predilection: Hence that formula of invocation, frequent in Shi'ci prayers, which sounds forth like a supreme conjuration, as if by invoking this "right to Himself" conferred by God upon His Friends, the prayer formulated by their friends bore in itself the force of accomplishment. The Imams themselves proffered the formula *bi-haqqina*, which can be translated "by our right" or "in the name of our cause".

In certain contexts, as we have said, recourse to this "right" is itself a response to Mufaddal's question. Indeed, since this "right" originates in metahistory, it could be invoked by means of a synchronism, which, though it baffles our sense of history, serves as the key to hierohistory, because it was recourse to this "right," the invocation of this "cause," that provides the denouement to the drama experiences in this world by the prophets one after another. It is "in the name of this cause" that God "returned to Adam," who was exiled from paradise; and because this same "cause" also is the secret of the denouement of Qur'anic Christology—Christ victoriously preserved from death of God, who raised him up to Himself. (IV, 156)—this same cause, invoked by the prophets, makes even the idea of an impossible decide to disappear. In a *hadith* going back to the eighth Imam, the Imam 'Ali Rida, and through him to the earlier Imams, it is said: "When Noah was in danger of being inundated, he invoked God by invoking our cause (or our right), and God saved him from inundation. When Abraham was cast into the fire, he invoked God by invoking our cause, and God caused the fire to become a harmless coolness. When Moses opened a path into the sea, he invoked God by invoking our cause, and God made the sea dry land. And when the Jews wanted to kill Jesus, he invoked God by invoking our cause; then God saved him from death and raised him up to Himself (Qur'an, IV, 156)."

Here now is another text, among a great many others, affirming the synchronism of this religion of the *walayah* common to all the prophets. This time, there is a conversation between the fifth Imam, Imam Muhammad Baqir, and his disciple Jabir al-Ju'fi, which forms part of a whole set of conversations constituting, as it were, the Shi'i hermeneutic of the Old Testament of our Bible. "I asked the Imam" his disciple relates, "about the interpretation of dream visions given by Daniel. Is it authentic, or not?"—"Of course it is authentic," the Imam replied. "Daniel truly had a divine revelation, for he was a prophet (*nabi*). Daniel was one of those to whom God taught the symbolic meaning of events (*ta'wil al-ahadith*). He was truthful and a sage. And the divine religion that he professed was the religion of our love (of love for us, the *Ahl al-Bayt*)."¹ The assertion makes sense, of course, only on the plane of the primordial Muhammadan Reality. Taken by surprise, Jabir asks the same question as Mufaddal is supposed to have put to Imam Ja'far: "Of your love, of love for you, *Ahl al-Bayt*?" And the Imam replied: "Yes, God be my witness! There was never a Prophet nor an angel who did not profess the religion of our love (*illa wa-kana yadinu bi-mahabbatina*)"

This is all perfectly clear. At issue is a "religion of love," and it is not a Sufi master who speaks, but the fifth Shi'i Imam. In addition, this religion always has been professed by the followers of all the prophets, because the

revelation of the divine Face to which this love is addressed was the secret of their message. Here, then, we reach the heart of the matter. Given the idea of the religion of the *walayah* as being that of the permanent prophetic religion of humanity because "the Imam was secretly sent with each prophet", given, accordingly, the meaning of the Imam and the Imamate for hierohistory, that is to say, for the history of spiritual events that occurred in the dimension of a time other than the time of profane history, we are in a position to understand the primordial meaning of the Imam for Shi'i spirituality. The universalistic aspect of Shi'ism is linked to the universality of the devotion of love to the theophanic Figure who is the revealed Face of God. Now, man's recognition of this divine Face comes about through his knowledge of himself. It is on the rock of a faith in which love is an integral part that Shi'ism is conscious of gathering together all the believers in the prophetic religion, by means of the message that summons them to the quest for the Soul of their soul. The progression that passes from the meaning of the Imam for hierohistory to his meaning for the most private spirituality can only result in putting into operation the principle of the Shi'i hermeneutic on which we have been so insistent.

Since its inner, esoteric meaning (the meaning with respect to the *walayah*) is constantly being attained in each new believer, the Holy Book remains alive for the whole duration of our Eon. Throughout the periods of the whole cycle of prophecy, it is the center of the "plane of historical permanence" represented by hierohistory, which means that during every period of the cycle the same protagonists and antagonists reappear, the same enthusiasms for the faith, and the same militantly negative refusals: the dramatic personae remain the same under other names and with different actors. This permanence is expressed in the idea of the *walayah*, which is eternal, whereas the prophetic mission is temporary; it is expressed also in the relationship that unites all the prophets and spiritual adepts to the "Seal of the Prophets" and to the "Seal of the Friends of God." It is the *walayah* as the esoteric aspect, the secret element of the message repeated by one prophet after another up to the "Seal of Prophets" that unites all the prophets and all their believers in one and the same *corpus mysticum* (the Temple of Light of the Imamate). What is it, then, to belong to this *corpus mysticum*? How does the *walayah* in respect to the Imam make the faithful adept, the "believer with tested heart," a member of this mystical body ultimately represented by the notion of *Ahl al-bayt* (members of the holy Family, of the "house" or the prophetic "temple")? How, according to the terms of the first Imam himself, is it the "believer with tested heart" who discovers this love in his heart?

We know already that without the Imamate, only a strictly negative theology (that of *tanzih*, designated by Christian tradition as "apophatic"

theology) would be possible, in view of the *Deus absconditus*. 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*. To say that the Imam is this revealed Face, this epiphanic Form, *eo ipso* is to do a great deal more than make an "objective" statement arising from a theoretical theosophy, for such a proposition directly engages the innermost life of the adept, that is to say, the meaning of the Imam for the spirituality experienced by Shi'ism. In fact, assent to this proposition presupposes entering actively into a personal relationship, and the actualization of this relationship is achieved to the extent that the recognition of the Imam as epiphanic Form *eo ipso* is also initiation of the adept to knowledge of himself. When he has attained this, he is himself an epiphanic form of the Imam, just as the Imam is the epiphanic Form of the *Deus absconditus*. Thus, the fifth Imam was able to say, "We are the Treasurers and the Treasures of God in this world and the other world (cf. *infra* the full meaning of this proposition), and our Shi'is are treasurers and treasures for us, the Imams," since, in fact, the Imamate is the content (treasure) of the divine science and something of the knowledge of the Imam is realized in each Shi'is "with tested heart."...

We conclude the following: The Imam is *the* theophanic Forum (*mazhar*); in this Form, God is the object of knowledge and love; to attain this theophanic form *eo ipso* is to attain knowledge of God in the only form in which He is knowable and that, as such, constitutes the supreme degree to which the Lowly can attain, the highest degree of its being, its knowledge, and its love. Since theophany means the establishment of a rapport between the One who shows himself (*mutajalli*) and the one to whom He is shown (*mutajalla lahu*), the One who shows Himself does so of necessity in a form proportionate to and commensurate with the one to whom He shows Himself. Ibn 'Arabi has insisted on this point. But here the rapport clearly is imamology itself, for imamology alone makes possible this rapport, without which *tawhid* would be undermined.

This relationship of homogeneity posited by theophany (*tajalli*), coupled with the fact that theophany is the highest summit that the Lowly, the being of the lower world, can attain, means that by reaching the "place" of this theophany (that mystical Sinai where God is revealed to him), the believer reaches the summit or the heart of his being, his self, his anima (*nafs*). But the form this theophany takes, that it, the Face of this God revealed to him at the summit of his soul, is the Imam. Therefore, to know one's self, one's soul, one's anima, and therewith all the universe of the soul, is to know one's Imam; it is this knowledge that constitutes for every man the knowledge of his Lord, his knowledge of God. The Imam is the form that the *Deus revelatus* assumes in the knowledge of self that is the knowledge of

God. The Imam is the form of his knowledge and of his love of God. The knowledge of the Imam reveals to his adept that it is, as such, the form of his love and consequently the secret of his being, for his being is his itself. Thus, the love of the Imam, the religion of the *walayah*, so conceived by our Shi'is authors as to embrace all the stages of an eternal prophetic religion, all the followers of all the prophets, is initiation to knowledge of the self, a self who is not an impersonal Absolute devoid of qualities but is the Soul and the Beloved of the soul (*jan-i jan*), the self in the second person that "goes in advance of me," the Imam (in the purely etymological meaning of the word).

Thus, Shi'is piety and spirituality culminate in the *walayah* devoted to the Imam as the theophanic Form in which the *absconditum* is revealed to man and in which the hidden God becomes the object of love (this Form being *mahbubiyat*). For this reason, all love of God is *walayah* of the Imam by virtue of the fact that love postulates a God who is the object of love. Non-Shi'is Sufism searched for such an outcome in anguish, in order to escape what Ruzbihan called the "madness of the inaccessible." But it is important to note that the imamology represents precisely the result of it. For this is the meaning of the Imam in the manifold titles conferred upon him in the Shi'is invocations, which only repeat the titles that the Imams give to themselves in their *hadiths*: the Imam as Guide and as Pole, as *A'raf*, as Witness of God, etc. Each of these illustrates the basic theme of a knowledge of self that is knowledge of the Imam and that *eo ipso* is knowledge of God, because there is no knowledge of God accessible to man other than the knowledge of his Imam...

The Imam as Guide and as Pole

This fundamental theme of prophetic philosophy has already been illuminated in the preceding pages. Here it will suffice to sum up the essentials. First of all, there is the situation about which one is questioned in such abrupt terms as the following: What happens when there is no longer, and never will be, another prophet; when, in addition, the *true meaning* of the prophetic Revelation does not lie in the apparent letter; when the true meaning is derived not from conclusions reached through deductions or inference but can be unveiled and transmitted only by "the one who knows"? This question is answered by the bi-unity of the Imam and the Qur'an, affirmed in numerous Shi'is *hadiths*: The Qur'an is the "silent Imam", the Imam is the "speaking Qur'an".

As the "speaking Qur'an," the Imam is the Guide, the permanent Guide, who provides initiation to the true meaning of the Qur'anic Revelation and who thereby preserves the Book in the state of the living Word. We have already referred to the *hadith* of the fifth Imam that evades the trap of

historicism when it is confronted with the letter. For the same reason the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, tests one of his disciples by asking him: "Oh Abu Muhammad, the Prophet was the Warner. 'Ali was the Guide: But is there a Guide (*Hadi*) today?" The disciple answers: "Yes, I swear to thee by my life: In thy House there has always been a Guide, one succeeding the other, and now thy turn has come." "May God have mercy upon thee, Oh, Abu Muhammad," the Imam replies. "If a verse were revealed for a certain man and the man then died, the verse would die with him; the whole Book would by now be dead. No! The Qur'an is alive and will continue to exist for those who will live in the future as it existed for those who lived in the past." Here again, it is impossible to state more clearly that if the matter in question were to understand the Holy Book simply in relation to "its time," in relation to the historical or social circumstances in which the verses emerged, then the Qur'an would have long since been dead. In other words, without the *walayah* of the "Friends of God" who always exist in this world, there would be no future for the Book of God. In this world, the life of the Imam and the life of the Holy Book are bound together.

The presence of the Imam and his friends therefore must be perpetuated. Such was the theme of the dialogue between the first Imam and Kumayl ibn Ziyad cited above, where we encountered the motif of the mystical *pole*, without which the world of man could not endure. Echoing the statements of the first Imam, Mulla Sadra wrote: "The earth can never be devoid of an Imam, a Guide for every era. Otherwise the Qur'an would die, owing to the death of those who support it. But the Qur'an lives and will never die until the Day of Resurrection. The one who guides us towards the Qur'an lives in every moment of time, until the coming of the last Hour." These lines merely recapitulate the content of the *hadith* comprising Kulayni's chapter on the Imam as Guide and Guarantor of God (*hujjah*), he who "answers for" God before men. We should keep in mind some of those *hadith* that affirm the inviolable consciousness that the Imams have of themselves. From the fifth Imam Muhammad Baqir: "As God is my witness, since the gathering in of the soul of Adam (i.e. since the death of Adam), God has not allowed the existence of a terrestrial world without an Imam to guide men to God; he is the Guarantor of God to His servants. The terrestrial world has never been left without an Imam who is Guarantor and Guide for men." From the tenth Imam, 'Ali Naqi: "In truth the terrestrial world is never devoid of a Guarantor and Guide, and, as God is my witness, I am at present he." From the sixth Imam, Ja'far Sadiq, a disciple, Abu Hamzah, relates: "I asked Imam Ja'far, 'Can the Earth remain without an Imam?' He replied, 'If the Earth has no Imam, it would sink.'" Again the fifth Imam: "If the Imam were removed from the Earth for a single hour, it

would roll like waves which would rock its inhabitants as the sea rocks the inhabitants of its waves."

These statements, which cement a mysterious bond, a sacramental bond, so to speak, between the presence of the Imam and the continuance of the terrestrial world of men, are pregnant with certain consequences. First, there is every evidence that the necessity of the Imam is not just one social-political theme among others. We here confront a metaphysical theme that concerns the order and the suprasensible structure of the universe, namely, the theme of the Imam as mystical Pole, Pole of poles (*qutb al-aqtab*). This, Mulla Sadra explains in a very pithy passage. The necessity of the Imam expresses an inner law of being, which requires that every higher degree of being be the goal, the finality, of a lower degree; the lower exists through the higher degree; it cannot find its fulfillment and perfection save in the higher degree. The degree of lower being presupposes the existence of the higher degree but not inversely. More than a law of evolution, it is a law of the *ascension* of being toward the higher degree that is preexistent to it. The same holds true for humanity. It cannot find its fulfillment except at the degree that marks its supreme perfection. Such is the meaning of the Imamate, for, according to Mulla Sadra, "the degree of the Imamate signifies the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*, *Anthropos teleios*), who is the king of the terrestrial world. But precisely because it is the kingdom of the Perfect Man as the finality of being, this kingship neither results from nor depends on political considerations that would make the Imam a mere rival of the Umayyids and the 'Abbasids. It has to do with something other than what is treated by social history, for it is a kingship that by its very essence implies neither the necessity nor even the idea of temporal political success, still less the idea that majorities are always right, under the pretext that they "make" history. Instead it pertains to a history that "is made" without their knowledge; a spiritual kingship above the visible world that operates incognito, something like the role of the dynasty of the Grail.

Other implications also arise. This idea of the incognito, we have seen, had been implied to be essential to the Imamate as early as the Prophet's statements limiting the number of the Imams descended from him to twelve. In effect this limitation implies of necessity the return of the Imamate into occultation (*ghaybah*) at a given moment. Hence, *ipso facto*, the present relationship of the Shi'ci believer with his Imam as the *pole* of his being is not a relationship with an institution of this world but a relationship with the suprasensible world. The permanent but invisible presence of the twelfth Imam after his fleeting appearance in this world, implies for him a mode of existence superior to the conditions that pertain in the biological world — a suprasensible presence and existence manifested only as visions or incognito

encounters. But this invisible presence of the Imam polarizes Shi'i devotion; both its simple believers and its doctors live in familiarity with it. It is no more necessary for the Imam to be physically visible to the eyes of the flesh than it is for him to be known or recognized by the masses and the powers of this world. The Imamate is the intrinsic qualification of his being, that of the Perfect Man. Neither man's ignorance nor his blindness can abolish that element in his being that makes the Imam the Imam...

The Imam as the A'raf

This theme sends us back to the Qur'anic verses that allude to the mysterious rampart erected between Paradise and Hell—the *A'raf*, which gives its name to the seventh *surah* (verses 44–45): "On the *A'raf* stand men who recognize each by his appearance" (VII, 44). A disciple relates that the sixth Imam (himself repeating a remark of the first Imam) replied as follows to a question about the men of the *A'raf*:

"It is we (the Imams) who are on the *A'raf*; we recognize our companions by their faces. And we are ourselves the *A'raf*, for God can be the object of knowledge only to those who pass through our knowledge. And we are the *A'raf*, for on the Day of Resurrection we are those whom God recognizes as being the Way (*sirat*). No one enters Paradise save those who recognize us and those whom we ourselves recognize. No one enters the Fire save those who deny us and whom we ourselves deny. If God Most High had wished, He would have made Himself known to men. But he made us his Thresholds, his way, his path, the Face toward which it is necessary to be oriented. Therefore, one who strays from our *walayah* (i.e. refuses us his devotion of love), or gives others preference over us, strays from the Way."

This relationship of the Imam and the *A'raf* proceeds through three stages to their mutual identification. Mulla Sadra begins here by showing that in their purely exoteric exegeses all the literalist commentators more or less stray around the countryside while the exegeses of the non-Shi'i esotericists allow the essential element in the idea of the *A'raf* to escape them. He himself works out this idea by scrutinizing, the intentions of the Imam, sentence by sentence, in order to give a genuinely Imami exegesis of the *A'raf*. Once it is established that the proper noun *A'raf* is derived from the root *c-r-f*, which denotes the idea of knowing, of being acquainted with, a three-stage process contained in the Imam's reply can be broken down as follows:

1. At the first stage, the Imam begins by stating: "It is we (the twelve Imams) who are on the *A'raf*," which means "at the summit of

knowledge" (*ma'rifat*), its highest rampart, elevation being understood here as spiritual not spatial.

2. At the second stage, there has been noteworthy progress: The Imam no longer simply asserts that the Imams are at the summit of the *A'raf* but affirms that they *are* themselves the *A'raf*, meaning that their knowledge mediates all human knowledge of God. They are not, then, merely the *subjects* of knowledge, *those who know* and those whose knowledge is the summit of knowledge; they also are *that through which* there is knowledge (*ma'rifat*), that through which, and thanks to which, there is an *object* corresponding to this knowledge, for they are the very thing attained by the highest knowledge, the *object* of that knowledge. In this case, we may make use of either the person or his title to designate and name the thing itself, by which we mean here the knowledge that is the cause and the source. In the first phase of the reply, the word *A'raf* is used to denote knowledge, or gnosis itself (*ma'rifat*). "We are at the summit of the *A'raf*," at the summit of this gnosis. In progressing to the second phase of the reply, the word denotes the cause of this gnosis, that through which it exists. "We are the *A'raf*," which means we are *that through which* there is knowledge of God on the part of man. We are the content of the human knowledge of God, for we are the theophany. In other words, there is no *ma'rifat Allah*, God is not knowable, and there is no human knowledge of God except for the man who knows us. We have already seen that the Imam is the theophanic form, that is to say, the Imam is the "Face that God ineluctably assumed in all knowledge that man has of Him or in which God reveals Himself to him; without this "Face" there is only the *Absconditum*. The Imam, being the *A'raf*, therefore, is that supreme face, that through which a human knowledge of God exists.

The meaning of the Imam for Shi'i spirituality again is seen here to be the same as we analyzed above. The Imams themselves teach the reciprocity of the two maxims, since the Imam can say, "He who knows *us*, knows his Lord," and, on the other hand, all our spiritual devotees repeat, "He who knows *himself* (his soul), knows his Lord." Thus, by knowing himself (his soul, his *anima*), he knows his Imam, and whoever knows his Imam knows his Lord. Accordingly, there is alternation or substitution between the notions of Imam and Self: to know one's Imam is to know oneself; to know oneself is to know one's Imam (the Soul of the soul) and to know one's Lord. What Shi'i spirituality offers to its adepts in the person, in the "form of light" of its twelve Imams is access to that

knowledge of the self, outside of which there is no knowledge of God, that is, access to consciousness of the personal relationship that makes God to be what he is—as He shows Himself—for the one who worships him. Hence, the importance of the visions of the Imams in dreams, visions that reveal to the believer favored with them - his innermost secret, the Imam as "Soul of his Soul", the secret of his own knowledge of God. Or, as we said above, "the human meaning of the knowledge of God." Here, at the same time, the Imam announces the divine meaning of this human knowledge.

3. Then, at the third stage, by a new progression, the Imam affirms: "We are the *A'raf*, for on the Day of Resurrection we are those whom God recognizes as being the way . . ." Here, by the *A'raf*, the Imam means "that which is the essential object of knowledge," not what is external and is known *per accidens*. What is this essential knowledge? Just as at the second stage of the reply the Imam is the knowledge that man has of God, that *through which* man knows God, here, too, at the third stage, He is the divine knowledge of man, that *through which* God knows man. The Imam says in effect: the one who knows us, God knows as a being of Paradise. At the second stage, the Imam asserts: The knowledge that the believer has of us is the knowledge that he has of God. At the third stage: The knowledge that God has of the believer is the knowledge that the believer has of us. By knowing us he has knowledge of himself as a being of paradise, and this knowledge is that which God has of him. Inversely, whoever rejects us has a perception of himself that *is* his fall. "No one enters the Fire save those who deny us and whom we ourselves deny," and such is the knowledge that God has of those who deny us. It is the denier himself who drives God from his paradise, and that is what hell is. Thus, at the boundary where knowledge of the Imam and knowledge of self are conjoined, the exoteric meaning of the *A'raf* as "rampant" takes on its fullest truth: The Imam actually is the *rampart* that separates heaven and hell.

The teaching or meditation of a philosopher brings to light limitless possibilities: The Imam *is* the knowledge that man has of God, and as such he *is* the knowledge that God has of man. These twin propositions mark the *situs* of the Imam at the level of the primordial theophany, at the dawn of all divine cognoscibility. Other texts . . . already have allowed us to witness the breaking of this dawn. There, too, it was a particular divine Will that shone through from the horizon of a universal primordial Will, and that dawn made possible the appearance of the form (*tajalli*) in which divinity became an object of love (its *mahbubiyyat*). The voluntarist aspect cor-

responds to a metaphysics of being that, according to a master of the Shaykhi schools such as Muhammad Karim Khan Kirmani, must refuse to include the ineffable divine Being, of whom nothing can be predicated, in an indivisible unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*). In Mullā Sadra Shirazi, however, we have a thinker who accepts this indivisibility, and his metaphysics is expressed initially in terms of knowledge.

There is a global divine knowledge, essential and perfect, that is identical with the simple divine Essence and that involves no multiplicity, because this Essence (*zat*) is the source from which the existence of all things springs and because, by knowing Himself, God knows the totality of things in virtue of that knowledge identical with His essence. And, there is a divine knowledge of individual things consisting either in the fact that their Ideas are actualized in being "prior to" their existence *in concreto*. The whole presents a hierarchy of causes and of things caused. According to Mullā Sadra then, there is a strict symmetry and parallelism in the ascending and descending order of this hierarchy. Just as the Angels are active causes (*fa'ca*), which give rise gradually to the potential existence of creatures, similarly the prophets and Imams, all the "Friends of God," are causes and intermediaries acting upon the potential angelicity of human beings, causing them to leave the states of animality in order to lead them to the actual angelic state that makes them beings of paradise (*ahl al-jinnat*). Just as in the cosmological order the knowledge that God has of beings of this world of becoming is knowledge mediated by the knowledge that He Himself has of their Angels (the *angeli intellectuales* and the *angeli caelestes* of the Avicennian hierarchies), so that it is said that the Angels are the Witnesses (*shuhada'*) before God of His creation; likewise, in the eschatological order, God's knowledge of the fidelity of his believers is mediated through the knowledge that he Himself has of the prophets and the *Awliya'*. For this reason, they will be the "Witnesses" for men before God on the Resurrection Day.

It is through the idea of these Witnesses that the saying of the Imam leads the philosopher spontaneously to discover the symmetry between the function of angelology for cosmogenesis and cosmology (the order of the *Mabada'*) and the role of imamology in the return of souls to their Origin (the order of *Ma'ad*), that is to say in their role in soteriology and eschatology. Imamology, like angelology, has its metaphysical foundation in the divine Knowledge; both culminate in the notion of *Witness*. In this notion a metaphysics and a spirituality of the Presence converge, a Presence toward which all the motifs of prophetic philosophy are oriented. The Imam *is* that point of convergence at which the Witness, the contemplator (*shahid*)—the Imam atop the *A'raf*—is at the same time the contemplated one (*mashhud*), the Witness-of-contemplation—the *A'raf* itself—because this Witness, by attesting to men the God whom he himself contemplates (by "answering

for" Him), also is the same whom men contemplate when this God "shows Himself" to them. He is the eye with which God looks at and relates to men because it is with this same eye that man looks at and relates to God (this motif is fully developed in the mysticism of Ruzbihan). The Imams are at once the eyes through which God watches the world and the eyes through which men contemplate the divine Attributes, since the divine Essence is inaccessible to them. The Imam is indeed the contemplator-contemplated (*shahid-mashhud*, contemplated by God and men), guarding against *ta'til* and *tashbih*; and the knowledge that I have of the Imam is the knowledge that God has of me. Hence, the Imam is truly the "rampart," separating the inhabitants of paradise from those of hell.

Therefore, it is true to say, Mulla Sadra wrote, "that the knowledge which God has of the spiritual state of the two groups is mediated by the knowledge that He has of these Witnesses in their dual aspect (attesting to paradise for some and hell for others). Such is the deepened understanding (*tahqiq*) of the fact that the prophets and the Imams are the Witnesses of God for men, and of the meaning of the following Qur'anic verse: "How then shall it be, when We bring forward from every nation a Witness, and bring them to witness against those! (IV, 45)." The three progressive stages in the reply of the Imam then reveal their final truth: "We are the *A'raf*," that is to say, we are those who by essence are the object of divine knowledge (the *ma'rufun bi-'al-zat*), the objects of the divine contemplation (the *mashhudun li-'Allah*), his Witnesses-of-contemplation, without intermediary, since, being intermediaries for others, we are the exalted degrees of the Path (*sirat*) through which man must pass in order to reach the supreme human proximity to God.

The theme of the *A'raf* thus takes on the outline of the summit, of the "rampart" of "prophetic and imamic philosophy," which is the gift of supreme wisdom. In the words of Imam Ja'far, commenting to a disciple, upon Qur'anic verse II, 272: "He who has been given wisdom has received a great good" (the Proverbs of Solomon), "this wisdom (*hikmah*) consists of having spiritual consciousness, gnosis (*ma'rifah*) of the Imam." There is a whole set of motifs that lie behind the definition of this wisdom, the foremost of which is the motif of the *Hujjah*, to which Sadra Shirazi frequently returns in his commentary on the texts of the Imams. There is a double *Hujjah*, a double Witness, Guide, Guarantor. In its first form, there is an external Guide, the prophet-herald to men; and after him came the Imams for those men who needed a visible guide. But Twelver Shi'ism under the direction of the "hidden Imam" is oriented in essence toward the second aspect of the *Hujjah*, the invisible, inner Guide, the inner Imam (*Hujjah batinah*, *Imam dakhili*): a gleaming light that originates from the Throne, that dawns in the Orient of the soul, on its supreme horizon, illuminates the

"sense faculty of the heart" through which the prophetic message is understood in its esoteric meaning, that is the *walayah* of the Imams; the inner, secret prophecy (*nubuwwah batiniyyah*), relating to the hidden universe and the inner things of the soul. The idea of the "Inner Guide," far from eliminating the necessity of prophetology and Imamology, is their ultimate realization; it is precisely to this that imamology provides initiation. The Inner Guide toward whom the interiorization of imamology leads is he who preserves the mystic from any Luciferian intoxication. Before embarking on the Path, the mystic can be characterized by this remark of the fifth Imam: "Thou knowest even less about the roads of Heaven than about those of Earth." The "quest of the Imam" to which the Shi'i adept therefore is invited, does not mean an encounter with a guide familiar with astronomical space. Another world is intended here, a world "corresponding to the interior, invisible forms that cannot be perceived by our physical, but only by our spiritual, senses."

When the Imam speaks of wisdom (whose degrees are defined as faith in God, in his Angels, his revealed Books, his Messengers and the Resurrection), Sadra reminds us that parallel to the two aspects of the *Hujjat* or Guide—exterior and interior—there are two wisdoms:—unveiled (*hikmah makshufah*) and veiled (*hikmah masturah*). "Wisdom unveiled" consists of the visible persons of the Sages, personifications of wisdom. Whoever sees one of them (with the "eyes of the heart" that reveal his qualities to the observer) sees the form and the person of wisdom. For men in general, this wisdom is a divine gift, "which is a great good", i.e. the visible person of the Imam, since he is wisdom in person (*nafs al-hikmah*). "Veiled wisdom" is that in the heart of the Friends of God (the *awliya*), the prophets, the Imams, *hukama' ilahiyun*, Sages of God, "theosophists" in the fullest sense of the word. And the teaching of the Imams about the *A'raf* enables us to understand that if each of them is a Sage in one aspect, he is also wisdom in another.

Here Mulla Sadra's meditation pulsates with a profound joy, when he reaches the point where Shi'i spirituality and the metaphysics of being and knowledge that he professes as an *ishraqi* philosopher converge in the unity of the spiritual consciousness of the *ishraqi* Shi'i. The same thing takes place, he says, when the Sage becomes one with wisdom, as occurs in the act of intellection when the subject who intellectualizes (*'aqil*) becomes one with intelligence (*'aql*). This assertion illustrates the characteristic feature already noted, that of *ishraqi* Shi'i spirituality in which the philosopher's effort cannot be separated from spiritual realization, and vice versa.

The theme of the double *Hujjah* is but an echo of the theme of the double wisdom. In the Imam, there is both manifest and hidden (*makhfiyyah*) wisdom. Manifest wisdom is the person of the invisible Imam. Hidden

wisdom is the interior, spiritual, intellectual light (*nur batini ʿaqli*), a light that is the spiritual life of the Imam and that illuminates for the adept whom he guides the world of the Beyond and the celestial beings and figures that it contains. Such is the gift of wisdom. Just as in the act of intellection the subject who intellectualizes is himself the intelligence in action (the latter is not superimposed upon him, it is his being), so the person of the Sage (the Imam) is wisdom. To know by gnosis (*maʿrifah*) the person of the Sage (the Imam) is to know the wisdom that is himself in person. But in the act of spiritual knowledge, the wisdom of the Imam, like the intelligence in the case of one who intellectualizes, becomes the wisdom of the adept, of him who takes the Imam as guide and who thereby is made aware of the convertibility of the two maxims: "He who knows his Imam knows his Lord," and "He who knows himself knows his Lord," meaning the Imam. To have complete spiritual consciousness of his Imam, his interior, personal, invisible Guide, is himself to become someone in whom the wisdom of the Imam is actualized, someone in whom there dwells the "inner Witness," precisely the Imam himself as inner Imam (*Imam dakhili*), the "divine Face" who endures when everything else perishes. As we said above, the Imam is the theophanic form in the same way that the adept is the epiphanic form of the Imam. Imami spirituality is initiation to the interior Imam through the exterior Imam, to the knowledge of one self through the knowledge of the Imam.

Thus, we must consider the meaning of each of the Shiʿi Imams and of the whole pleroma of the Imams for Shiʿi spirituality. All the teaching regarding the *Aʿraf* culminates in a metaphysics of the Witness (*shahid*) and the testimonial Presence (*shuhud*), such that the Imam becomes the active consciousness, so to speak, of his follower. And thanks to this, there is perpetuated in this world the *silsilat al-ʿirfan*, the line of gnosis, unknown to most men, a secret line of the heroes of the hierohistory of the cycle of *walayah*, composed of all those individuals in this world who are "living" in the real sense of the word.

This "community of the living" stretches to the extent of being a prophetic "ecumenism," which has the same esoterism as its foundation. The idea of the universal *walayah* (above §1), having the Imam as its Seal, already has led us to use this term above: All the prophets of earlier periods, along with all their followers, all the believers of the same eternal prophetic religion compose together a *corpus mysticum* (the "Temple of light" of the Imamate in Ismaʿili terminology). "It has been the same in all eras, and it will be the same in the future. Indeed, all the Sages of God (*ʿulamaʾ rab-baniyyun*, the *Theosophoi*) all the prophets, and all their Imams, are all of one religion (*din wahid*), one school (*mazhab wahid*). More precisely, they are like one spiritual person, total and unique (*shakhs wahid kulli ʿaqli*). Moreover, the believers who follow them, in whatever place and whatever

time they may exist, are like a single Soul; the school of each Imam also is that of another Imam, and at the same time the school of the totality of the prophets and the *awliyaʾ*.