



Noah and the Near-East (I)

Mircea A Tamas

One of the characteristics of the Great Disarray is the division or the sectarianism, which flourished during Saint Paul's time and continued to prosper, more or less visible, under the same or different garments, until nowadays. We saw in the previous works, from a traditional perspective, some aspects of this division and their consequences. The question is: what are the remedies, or, even better, are there still efficient remedies today to heal the scattering and the division?

The question is so fundamental that the only answer we are allowed to give is a parabolic one; in fact, we already know an example represented by the foundation of the Christian tradition, where such a dogmatism and solidification was needed for the Church to stabilize its unity, that it had to expel and eliminate all the dissident Christian currents.

The organization of Christianity as an orthodox tradition is a sacrifice with more than one face. Having a messianic function, Christianity could not remain at the esoteric or prophetic level. It was not enough to prophesize the end of times and ask the nations to repent, as, for example, Isaiah and Jeremiah did; there was the need to save the whole Occident (the Roman Empire). For this reason, Christ came down and became man, suffered crucifixion and rose after three days. In the same way, Christianity "came down" and became an exoteric tradition. In concert with these facts, Saint Paul strove to unite the nations, who worshiped the idols and the pagan gods, and make them vassals of the transcendent Unity – the one-and-only God, the Most High.

If Christianity was the force that saved and regenerated the Occident, it also caused, with its increasing intransigency and rigidity, the flight of valuable spiritual and intellectual elements, as we saw in the article about the Near-West. Moreover, we must not forget that the Christian tradition not only passed from esotericism to exotericism, but also from a monotheist (Judaic) ambience to a polytheist one (the Roman Empire). In other words, as Saint Paul's letters showed, the problem was to annihilate the "pagan" gods and rituals, which brings us to an essential matter, that of the relation between One and multiplicity. Christianity tried to solve it, on the one hand, by discreetly integrating gods and rituals into the transcendental unity of the Christian religion, promoting the numerous angels and the cult of the saints, and on the other hand, by introducing the Divine Names, as Saint Dionysius the Areopagite registered them:

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The theologians praise God by every name – and as the Nameless One. For they call it nameless when they speak of how the supreme Deity, during a mysterious revelation of the symbolical appearance of God, rebuked the man who asked, «What is your name?» and led him away from any knowledge of the divine name by countering, «Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?» This surely is the wonderful «name which is above every name» and is therefore without a name. It is surely the name established «above every name that is named either in this age or in that which is to come.» And yet on the other hand they give it many names, such as «I am who I am,» «Life,» «Light,» «God,» «Truth.» (**The Divine Names**, I, 6)

Christian tradition built an Ark (the Church)¹ which was prepared to save the many, not only the few, and for this reason it descended into the exoteric domain. To make the Ark float without danger an one-and-only captain was needed, an one-and-only law, the same rules for everybody; any revolt or sectarianism would have endangered navigation and forced, as reaction, the expulsion of the sectarians from the ship; on the other hand, due to its messianic characteristic, nobody was refused on it, and there was not only wrath against the decayed world but also salvation.

We note also the difference with regard to Noah's mission. For the Christians, Noah is indissolubly related to the flood and appears, being "a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time," God's favorite, a chosen one who "walked with God"; "But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord" (**Genesis 6:8-9**), and not His Wrath. The Orthodox Church considers that Noah invented the *semanthro*.² God – it is said – did not order Noah to build only the Ark but also the sacred plank, that replaced the bells and, knocking it, everyday Noah gathered the masons to work, and admonished and warned the population about the flood. The Orthodox monasteries even today use the *semanthro*, as do the churches, especially for Easter, yet almost nobody thinks of Noah's times.

Saint Paul's letters, permanently read in the church, are similar to the sacred plank, *semanthro*, and to the bells, since Saint Paul, like Noah, admonished the decayed people, announcing the Second Coming, *Parousia*, in the same way as Noah announced the flood. And yet there is a difference between the Noachite mission and the Christian one, a distinction stressed by the Judaic Kabbalah with respect to the difference between Noah and Moses. Saint Paul wrote:

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (**1 Thessalonians 4:15-17**)

¹ The boat is one of the Church's symbols.

² In Arabic, this sacred plank, this "special monastery bell" is called *nâkûs*, and in Greek, *semanthro*, "seal."

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Saint Paul, like Noah, announced the imminent coming of the Judgment and it is possible that some of the first Christians even waited for the Second Coming to occur during their life. Yet, as we explained many times, the only concession that was made to us was that we ignore the time when the end will come. Therefore Saint Paul continued:

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, «Peace and safety,» destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. **(1 Thessalonians 5:1-5)**³

Hence, the Day of Judgment will come when everybody will least expect it.

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God «will give to each person according to what he has done.» To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. **(Romans 2:5-10)**

The Day of Wrath announced by Saint Paul corresponds to the Day of Flood predicted by Noah. Yet this Wrath is not inexorable since “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” **(1 Thessalonians 5:9)** and in this declaration is hiding the difference in comparison to Noah.

In the Judaic Kabbalah,⁴ Noah is considered a “righteous man” (and “blameless”), *Zaddik*, a quality suggested also by the fact he “walked with God.” The “righteous man” refers initially to a spiritual station, but this qualification appears in the exoteric domain too, like in the case of Joseph, or of James, “the brother of Jesus,” who is called James the Just or James “the Righteous One” (the *Zaddik*); this term can be found as well in the Qumran's documents and the “Gnostic” gospels.⁵ *Zaddik* is “the world's pillar (fundament)” and we

³ “Every nation has its term; so whenever their deadline comes, they will not postpone it for an hour, nor will they advance it” (**Qur'ân** 7:34). “They may ask you about the Hour: «When will it arrive?» Say: «Knowledge about it rests only with my Lord; He Alone will disclose its time. Things will seem heavy in Heaven and Earth; it will simply come upon you all of a sudden!»” (**Qur'ân** 7:187).

⁴ **Zohar**, I, 59 b (vol. I, p. 193).

⁵ In **The Gospel of Thomas**, the disciple asked Jesus: “We know you will leave us. Who is going to be our leader then?” And Jesus answered: “No matter where you reside, you are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being” (**The Secret Teachings of Jesus**, Vintage Books, 1986, p. 21). The idea of “spotless” in the sense of spiritual righteousness exists also in the official Gospels: “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (**Matthew** 5:20).

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remember that Saint Paul considered Peter, John and James, “the brother of Jesus,” as the three pillars of the Church.⁶

⁶ The “pillar” has a rich symbolic meaning, related to the *Axis Mundi* and the spiritual center. The “pillars of Hercules” are well-known (**Sacred Kernel**, p. 37), as well as the two pillars on Enoch. In this latter case, it is said that the pillars were made of different materials to resist, the one water, the other fire; one was placed in Syria, the other one in Ethiopia, with Syria and Ethiopia being symbolical names with respect to the spiritual center. The “pillars of Enoch” symbolize two spiritual and initiatory centers to which were given the treasure of primordial knowledge to be kept along the centuries (see René Guénon’s notes in **Quelques pages oubliées**, Études Traditionnelles, no. 427, 1971, p. 211).



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The Judaic Kabbalah stressed more than once the harmony between heaven and earth, which in Christianity is said as “on earth as it is in heaven” (**Matthew** 6:10). For example, *Knesseth-Israel* from below corresponds to *Malkuth*, “Kingdom,” and to Shekinah as divine presence in the world; but there is also a *Knesseth-Israel* from above, celestial, and every (sacred) activity the Community of Israel does on earth imitates the divine archetypes: “When we are told that the whole land of Israel came and folded itself under Abram, this refers to another holy supernal land which God has and which is also called «the land of Israel.» ... and it is called «the land of the living» (**Zohar** III, 84 a).¹ The Community of Israel only superficially means the Jewish people, in the same way as Islam bears a universal spiritual significance, beyond the particular Arabic point of view. This Community represents especially “the traditional society” as “explication” of a spiritual center, and is therefore a sort of earthly paradise, image of the Heavenly Paradise. In a perfect case, the Kabbalistic disciple hides in this *Knesseth-Israel*, which he essentially represents, and follows Shekinah’s way to unite with the Community of Israel from above, with God, being also the intermediary through whom the whole community will rise to the Most High, and the community being the intermediary through which the whole world will do the same. *Sephira Malkuth* designates *Knesseth-Israel*, yet, as we said, not as Jewish people in a common sense, but as an “organism” (in the same way the *sephirothic* Tree is an “organism”), as world, as kingdom, as spiritual center and also as king, that is, as illuminated man, who, in some specific epochs, can fall from sacred to profane. In the middle of this *Malkuth* (a “kingdom” that can be in man’s heart) resides the divine presence, Shekinah, the perfect mediator nearby the king (**Zohar** II, 51 a),² very similar to the Babylonian goddess Ishtar.

Generation of the universal manifestation necessarily means the beginning of cosmic divorce, and the Judaic Kabbalah calls this “Shekinah’s exile,” the divine presence leaving the Holy One, blessed be He (*Kaddosh-Baruch-Hu*), and going away, farther and farther; the theme of the exile obsesses the Judaic tradition. We could say that the whole modern world is in exile, in diaspora, from this point of view, the Jews’ exile being somehow the visible model of worldly diaspora. In fact, a double exile takes place: on the one hand, Shekinah’s exile with respect to the Holy One, blessed be He, and on the other

¹ Vol. 5, p. 97. We saw that Guénon considered the name “Israel” as representing the assembly of the initiates.

² Vol. 3, p. 156.

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hand, Israel's exile with regard to Shekinah, which becomes the hidden sun, where this exile represents "the misery" (*daleth*) when the candle of Ishtar's worshiper becomes extinct; the man falls then into ignorance and profanity, since the exile refers not only to the Community of Israel but also to each individual. The straightening means evidently the beginning of a new cycle, after all the scattered ones in diaspora are reunited, after "my scattered family will come back together" (as a Babylonian hymn to Ishtar tells), when Shekinah will unite with *Kaddosh-Baruch-Hu*. The union is first of all, of course, an initiatory one, of spiritual essence, symbolizing the union of the Self with Brahma (in the Hindu tradition), the Supreme Identity when *jîvâtmâ* breaks the worldly chains and reveals his splendour as *Âtmâ*, identical to Brahma.

We witness an attempt to reconcile two points of view, one transcendental, the other one immanent. In all the genuine traditions, the Principle is at the same time the Most High (transcendent) and the Heart or the Center (immanent). A traditional society of "righteous men" respects and imitates the things from the High, and at the same time it is in harmony with the spiritual kernel (center) from where it receives its reality and the kernel is *Zaddik*, "the pillar of the world."

In Noah's times, there were no more "righteous men" in the exoteric domain, and Shekinah was in exile. In other words, the harmonious communication between heaven and earth broke, and the esoteric domain became dry; the spiritual influence withdrew from the world, due to the lack of "righteous men." To regenerate and straighten the world "ten righteous men" were needed, yet at the time of the flood only Noah (and his sons) was found blameless, and only with him did God make a Covenant having as an earthly token the ark, and as a celestial token the rainbow (**Zohar**, I, 67 b).³ It is interesting that Noah's embarking on the Ark (of the Covenant) is considered a union similar to the union in the highest, being therefore a symbol of a supernal archetype; as the river derived from the supernal waters watered the paradisiacal Garden, fertilizing it, and then the river parted into four to produce the world (**Genesis** 2:10), in the same way the union of Noah with the Ark will produce future generations that will multiply upon the earth (**Zohar**, I, 59 b).⁴

As Guénon explained (**Symboles**, pp. 173, 175), the ark from below is analogous to the rainbow from above modeling a complete cycle. The rainbow represents the superior Waters, the ark the inferior Waters and they come together, united in order to regenerate the world and produce a new cosmic cycle. The Judaic Kabbalah says that the greatest sin of the flood generation was that Noah's contemporaries did not let the union between the superior and inferior Waters occur, that is, due to the corruption, crimes and injustice reigning among the people, heaven and earth became completely separated. That is why they were punished with water. The waters of the flood were burning like fire, emerging boiling from the abyss: they corresponded to the inferior Waters⁵; at the same time,

³ Vol. I, pp. 223, 241. The Ark of the Covenant is equivalent to the Garden of Eden, that is, with the spiritual center; on the other hand, the Ark is the World Egg that contains the seeds of the future cycle. The union of Noah with the Ark suggests the union with the Principle from an immanent point of view, as a response to the Covenant with the transcendental God (Noah has already walked with this God).

⁴ Vol. I, p. 193.

⁵ We note that in Greek mythology Minos was killed in a barrel with boiling water; the connection between Minos and the cosmic cycles is known. Regarding the combination fire-water, besides the

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heaven opened and humankind was flooded with the waters from above: they corresponded to the superior Waters.⁶ In this mode the two types of waters came together to punish mankind in proportion to its sin (**Zohar**, I, 62 a, 68 b).⁷ The end of the world means the reassembling of the World Egg as it has been at the beginning, it means the reunification or the superior and inferior Waters as they been before Genesis.

We reach now a capital problem. From a cosmologic point of view and from the doctrine of cosmic cycles perspective, the flood is something normal and logical. When a world has exhausted its possibilities, it has to die and a new one will be born. From an initiatory point of view, salvation (regeneration) of the world is logical and so Noah appears as an ambiguous character.⁸

alchemical symbolism, we should observe that it illustrates *coincidentia oppositorum*, which will be present at the end of times, when the end and the beginning are one; we noted already that “the pillars of Enoch” represent the water and the fire.

⁶ The Greek flood is described as a combination of the waters from above (controlled by Zeus) and from below (controlled by Poseidon).

⁷ Vol. I, pp. 202, 228. “Noah’s folk denied it long before them; they rejected Our servant and said: «He is crazy!» and he was rebuffed. ... So We opened Heaven’s gates for water to pour down. We drilled the earth full of springs and the waters met at a command which had been decreed” (**Qur’ân** 54:9-12).

⁸ For example, Judaic esotericism considers that Noah brought sin into the world: “Noah himself drew death into the world, through his own sin, of which is written, «And he drank of the wine and was drunken, and he was uncovered within his tent»” (**Zohar**, I, 63 b, vol. I, p. 207); on the other hand, we saw what Guénon said about Noah and the initiatory symbolism of the wine. For Saint John Chrysostom, Noah’s drunkenness is a debauchery, yet if it is an initiatory “drunkenness” then Noah’s uncovering is equivalent to a revelation and that is why Ham was punished (in the same way as in **Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz**, those who saw Venus naked were punished). With regard to this Biblical episode, we should note that here is suggested the difference between the exoteric and the esoteric. “Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father’s nakedness and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father’s nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father’s nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, «Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.» He also said, «Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave.»” (**Genesis** 9: 22-27). Philo explained the episode: “In the first place, because he [Ham] did not report the involuntary evil of his father to one brother only, but to both of them; and no doubt if he had any more he would have told it to them all, as he did in fact to every one he could; and he did so with ridicule in his very words, making a jest of what ought not to have been treated with laughter and derision” (QG II, 71, **The Works of Philo**, Hendrickson Publishers, 1997, p. 837). Philo also suggested that the three brothers, Shem, Japheth and Ham, correspond to good, indifferent and bad, which we may interpret in various ways. First, it is possible to compare this triad to the three *gunas* of the Hindu tradition and to Lao Zi’s sayings: “When the best pupil hears about Dao he practises it assiduously; when the average pupil hears about Dao, he seems now to keep it and now to lose it. When the worst pupil hears about Dao, he laughs out loud. If he did not laugh, Dao would be unworthy of being Dao” (**Dao De Jing** XLI). Ham, who did laugh, is the worst pupil and relates to *tamas* (the *guna* directed downwards); Shem corresponds to *sattwa* (the *guna* directed upwards). On the other hand, we may say that Ham represents exotericism, while his brothers illustrate esotericism; or, in more details, Ham should be related to the “outside darkness,” Japheth to exotericism and Shem to esotericism. From a Christian point of view, Shem would indicate the Jews and Japheth the Greeks (or the Gentiles). Eventually, we note that Flavius Josephus and some other traditions considered that Ham was perpetuating the teachings of the Giants and of the fallen angels, after the flood (in the **Bible**, Nimrod is Ham’s grandson), which shows Ham as the ancestor of the present counter-initiation.

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A perfect spiritual realization supposes not only an ascendant initiatory way, but also a descendant one, the two phases being comparable (as Guénon affirmed) to the two halves of a circle⁹; the descendant half is related to the *avatâra*'s function (*avatarana* means in Sanskrit "to descend"), a function, which, compared to Christ, Noah did not have. In the Islamic tradition there is a difference between *walî* and *nabî*: the former is an initiate for himself, the latter for the others (Guénon, **Initiation**, pp. 256-262); *walî*, said Guénon, lacks something, and such a "lack" we find in Noah's case: it is about Mercy.¹⁰ Only when a straightening is no longer possible, the kernel of Tradition and the spiritual seeds gather in the Ark to get ready for a new cycle and the old world is completely destroyed. Yet the initiates have the obligation of striving for a regeneration and revivification of the world in which they operate and that is what happened in the cases of Christianity and Islam. If Noah had operated as a *nabî* maybe the flood would have been avoided. The change of the cycles comes only when all other means are exhausted; therefore the initiates' intervention is compulsory.

When the individuals are "righteous," Shekinah, the divine presence, is among them; but when the world is decayed and full of sins, the people throw Shekinah into exile: this was the flood generation, Noah's people (**Zohar**, I, 61 a).¹¹ When there is one "righteous man" in this world, Shekinah joins him and does not leave him; and Noah was allowed to embark on the Ark only because he was "righteous," since nobody else but the righteous (*Zaddik*) can unite with the Ark (**Zohar**, I, 66 b).¹² When the righteous men multiply the earth is fruitful.¹³ When the sinners multiply the waters dry (the earth becomes a desert and the heart solidifies). God, even if He destroyed the sinners in the time of Noah, He wanted to spare the world, yet couldn't find a redeemer to save the world from His Wrath.¹⁴ The world's salvation required the existence of "ten righteous men," and besides Noah nobody was "righteous."¹⁵ With regard to Noah, all his efforts were required to save himself and repopulate the world (**Zohar**, I, 67 a, b)¹⁶; that is all Noah was capable of, and if from a cosmogonic point of view his role is beneficent, from an initiatory point of view he appears with a "lack."¹⁷

⁹ Even if we obtain the same diagram as the one composed by the ark and the rainbow, here the two semicircles are "vertical" not "horizontal"; there is though a close connection between the two diagrams.

¹⁰ Allâh's greatest name, synthesizer, is *Er-Rahmân*, "the Merciful"; in the same way "the Prayer of the Heart" in Hesychasm is nothing else than divine Mercy.

¹¹ Vol. I, p. 198.

¹² Vol. I, p. 219.

¹³ See also **Qur'ân** 7:57-58.

¹⁴ Since, in fact, Mercy not Wrath is the essential characteristic of God.

¹⁵ In the Sodom episode, Abraham asked God: "«May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten [righteous men] can be found there?»" God answered, «For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it»" (**Genesis** 18:32).

¹⁶ Vol. I, pp. 222-223. "When the sinners were destroyed in the time of Noah, God was anxious for the preservation of the world, but could see no one who might save it from His wrath; for the whole efforts of Noah were required to save himself and to repopulate the world."

¹⁷ Noah "was righteous only by comparison with his contemporaries" (**Zohar** I, 67 a).

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That is the difference between Noah and Moses. The latter, even if he admonished the population, gave the Law and saved them. Compared to Moses, Noah did not intervene to save his contemporaries; he let them perish. Moses, on the other hand, offered his life in change for salvation of his people; Noah saved himself and left the world in God's hands. Moses planted Shekinah in the middle of Israel, risking his life for it. Even if Noah was a "righteous man," he was not holy enough to make God consider him qualified to save the world. Noah should have mercy for others, since when the sinners multiply, the "righteous man" suffers first for their sins. On the other hand, Noah "walked with God," and he was saved in the Ark, having the mission of repopulating the world; moreover, he daily admonished and warned the people and asked them to repent because the flood was coming, and the Wrath of God was awakened, and it is written that the one who admonishes the sinner "saves himself and is not involved in the punishment which befalls them" (**Zohar**, I, 67 b-68 a).¹⁸

¹⁸ Vol. I, pp. 223-225.