



Noah and the Near-East (I)

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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).