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PREFACE

Esotericism and Academic Research

In *Access to Western Esotericism* (SUNY, 1994), I gave an account of the creation, at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Section des Sciences Religieuses), of a chair dedicated to Modern Western Esoteric Currents. In the heart of the vast field known in academic institutions as "Religious Studies" had finally been officially recognized the existence of this new discipline which, since this dedication, has been the subject of specific methodological approaches and is in the process of being recognized and accepted in other countries as well.

The area that it covers includes various currents of thought that share a certain number of common denominators. The more "classical" are, on the one hand, alchemy (understood as a Philosophy of Nature and as a mode of spiritual transformation), astrology (in its speculative and not only divinatory form), magic (or *magia*, a manner of conceiving Nature as alive, interwoven with correspondences, and to which are related various forms of arithmology and musicosophy). Others were born at the beginning of modern times, such as the Christian Kabbalah, Neo-Alexandrian hermetism, Paracelsism, theosophy, and Rosicrucianism. "Esotericism" is an ambiguous word, which appeared in a specific historical context, primarily in order to serve the purposes and prejudices of its different users. In Religious Studies we have retained it, lacking anything better, as a convenient term serving to designate simultaneously all these currents as a whole, the various aspects of their posterity until today, and the form of thought that they express. But the word has at least two other meanings, and this gives rise to frequent misunderstandings (see below, note 12). First, it currently signifies "secret knowledge," or "secret science," which is reserved for an elite and submitted to the discipline of the "arcane." Then, it also designates a type of knowledge or experience referring to a "place," to a spiritual "center"—known as "esoteric"—situated in the depths of the Being and, consequently, the means and techniques meant to reach this center. In the second half of the twentieth century, the use of the word "esoterism" understood in these last two senses is tending to spread in English, among the

representatives of certain forms of spirituality, while the word "esotericism" corresponds to the sense understood here, namely, a vast area of currents and the forms of thought that they express. Of course, the field proper to "esoterism" is but one of the aspects of "esotericism," that is, of the history of the Western esoteric currents.

The word "Western" here designates the medieval and modern Greco-Latin world in which the religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity have co-existed for centuries, visited by those of Islam. And "modern" refers to the period that goes from the end of the fifteenth century to our days. This has been chosen not only because it circumscribes conveniently or within reasonable limits a historical field that is already very vast, but also because it corresponds to a new and specific phenomenon.

GENESES

A radically new situation appeared toward the end of the fifteenth century, when scientists and humanists undertook to appropriate various traditions of the past—Neo-Pythagoreanism, Neo-Platonism, Alexandrian hermetism, Jewish Kabbalah—with the concern to show that some of them, indeed all of them, mutually enrich one another and represent more or less the branches of a common trunk, that is, of a *philosophia perennis*, an "eternal philosophy," less homogenous on the doctrinal plane, nevertheless, than representative of a common attitude of mind. Thus, Marsilio Ficino, who in 1463 translated from Greek into Latin the *Corpus Hermeticum* (a set of Alexandrian texts dating from the second and third centuries of our era) and attempted to marry the teachings of these texts with those of Christianity and Platonism, while drawing inspiration from the old "magical" tradition, by which Renaissance philosophy would then be nourished in the wake of such an eclectic scholar. In parallel, the Jewish Kabbalah, whose texts began to be known in Christianity especially after 1492 (the date of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain), became an instrument of knowledge for hermeneuts applied to the christianization of its symbolism—whence the name Christian Kabbalah to refer to this new form of literature. It is also the era when Pico della Mirandola affirmed that the Kabbalah and magic prove the truths of Christianity, allowing it to be better understood, and when other hermeneuts began to associate the Kabbalah with alchemy. The *philosophia perennis* thus expressed a need to have recourse to traditions of the past through the deciphering of documents and scholarly work, in the light of analogy. It was expected from all the texts thus solicited that they procure a higher knowledge—a gnosis—which by the same token presupposed a faculty in Man, potential but specific, to penetrate the mysteries of founding or revealed texts and of inspired glosses. This accounts for the series of names, often given in the period, where we see

side by side Moses, Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, and the Sibyls.

Such a concordance of diverse traditions was due to the evolution of theological thought. Indeed, the latter increasingly had eliminated from its scope of thinking the domain of "second causes," that is, of cosmology—Nature—which nevertheless had long remained, during the Middle Ages, in phase with the metaphysics of the theologians—as in the School of Chartres or of Oxford. But when the time came when the sciences of Nature tended to separate from theology, then mostly reduced to metaphysics, this vast domain then became the subject of reinterpretations. These were, on the one hand, secularizing, prefiguring modern science, which would spring to life in the seventeenth century; on the other, extratheological, that is, no longer coming from theologians but from scientists, humanists, and philosophers, who appropriated for themselves this field of thinking that had become almost vacant. It is among the representatives of this second category of reinterpretations that one finds the first "esotericists" in the modern sense of the term. Their thought came in some manner to fill in the interface between metaphysics and cosmology, with speculations tending to account for the relationships between the particular and the universal, or among God, Man, and the universe. Often, they established these relationships in an eclectic spirit, referring to different authorities of the past, but almost always with a vision of universal correspondences inseparable from the idea that the cosmos is alive.

The appropriation of philosophy by the scholastics was thus matched, marginally or reactively, by that of Alexandrian hermetism, the Jewish Kabbalah, *magia* inherited from the Middle Ages, and so on, by scholars who had become "specialists" in these traditions. Esotericism, in the sense that we here give this word, took birth with this appropriation. Its referential corpus was constituted little by little, made up of texts belonging to ancient traditions that, at the dawn of the Renaissance, began to be compared with one another, and new texts—starting at the end of the fifteenth century—which often were commentaries on the first. It was also enriched, especially beginning in the sixteenth century, by works that were not "erudite"—thus, those of Paracelsus—presenting themselves far less as commentaries on ancient texts, with the exception of the Bible, than as direct readings of the Book of Nature, supposed to clarify that of the Revelation. But these works themselves were incorporated straight away into the referential corpus of esotericism. Among the representatives of "erudite" esotericism appeared, in the sixteenth century, Ludovico Lazarelli, François Foix de Candale, Francesco Patrizi (all three are inscribed in the current of Neo-Alexandrian hermetism), and in addition, Johannes Trithemius, Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, Giordano Bruno, Giorgi of Venice. All believed in the need to "reform" magic, which would have as a consequence a salutary reform of Christianity and, therefore, of the whole of

society. For the seventeenth century let us especially mention, for memory, Robert Fludd, Thomas Campanella, and Michael Maier.

To the currents (Neo-Alexandrian hermetism, Christian Kabbalah, speculative and erudite alchemy) that these names illustrate were added three others, from the sixteenth to the beginning of the seventeenth centuries. They were situated marginally to the *philosophia perennis* dear to the Renaissance humanists of esotericist leanings, because they made almost no claims to authorities belonging to a distant past. All three were in Germanic countries. The first is Paracelsism. A doctor from German Switzerland, whose works began to spread toward the end of the sixteenth century, Paracelsus (1493–1541) did not separate physical from spiritual healing. He is at the origin of a tradition that bears many similarities to the "occult philosophy" of the Latin type, but which differs from it as much by its "chemical"—alchemical—approach to all the natural planes as by the place he confers on the imagination, the queen of faculties, understood as essentially active and creative, as well as by an original alloying that blends Germanic-type mysticism with "magical"-type Nature Philosophy. On account of these two major traits, Paracelsism is more or less at the origin of two other currents, which both appeared almost simultaneously.

These are, on the one hand, the theosophical current, which at the end of the sixteenth century and very beginning of the next, was more than merely heralded by the works of Gerhard Dorn, Valentin Weigel, and Johann Arndt. With Jacob Boehme (1575–1624) began the first golden age of theosophy; it extended over the whole seventeenth century with the immediate successors of Boehme (for example, Jane Leade, John Pordage, Quirinus Kuhlmann, Johann Georg Gichtel). Then followed a period of relative latency, interrupted by the appearance of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), very marginal in relation to the theosophy of the Neo-Boehmean type, but whose considerable cultural and spiritual influence widely overflowed the theosophical riverbed proper. This flourished again toward the end of the eighteenth century, with Martinès de Pasqually, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, and others. Then, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it marked its imprint on *Naturphilosophie* of the romantic type, to finally find in Franz von Baader one of its most eminent representatives. Three great common and complementary characteristics could serve to account for the notion of theosophy: (a) an illuminated speculation bearing on the relationships among God, Man, and the universe (Nature); (b) the primacy of myths (biblical) of foundation or origin as a point of departure for this speculation; (c) the idea that Man, by virtue of his creative imagination, can develop in himself the faculty of acceding to the higher worlds.

It is, furthermore, the Rosicrucian current, whose birth certificate is the publication in German, at Kassel, of the two famous Manifestos—*Fama Fraternatis*, 1614; and *Confessio Fraternatis*, 1615 (they had been circulating for

several years in manuscript form)—and then of the novel, also in German, by Johann Valentin Andreae, *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz* (Strasbourg, 1616). Just as the Latin translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* by Ficino, almost a century and a half previously, had been at the origin of the current of modern Neo-Alexandrian hermetism, so these three texts constituted the founding act of Rosicrucianism. In the beginning, this placed itself under the authority of Paracelsus, more so than theosophy had done, and presented itself as an attempt at religious reform not meant to found a newly established Church, but rather to improve, to palliate the insufficiencies of Protestantism, to foster a form of spirituality as much open to alchemy and occult philosophy as to all the sciences of the era. This current was perpetuated in various forms, principally that of initiatic societies, and this in the wake of the myth of Christian Rosenkreutz, the mysterious character who appears in the *Fama* (under the abbreviation C. R.-C.) and in the *Chemical Wedding*.

Starting from the eighteenth century, one sees these initiatic societies proliferating. While they placed themselves explicitly under the sign of the Rosy Cross, they drew their inspiration from other esoteric currents, too. Both the former and the latter took on various forms according to the periods, in function of the culture and the society of the time. One also sees new currents being born, breaking away from those that had preceded but from which they issued: Western esotericism is riddled with discontinuities, rejections, reinterpretations. Thus, the occultist movement that appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century and whose figurehead was Éliphas Lévi, well illustrates the process of discontinuity, because while we recognize there something of an echo of the theosophical program, it is distinct from it by a pronounced taste for "phenomena" and "scientific" demonstration, as well as by an attraction to the picturesque and the fantastical readily cultivated for their own sakes, in this era when the world seemed definitively disenchanted. Occultism gleaned the heritage both of Enlightenment rationalism and of eighteenth-century illuminism. And not among the least interesting characteristics of this current, is that it appears above all as an extension of the occult sciences from before 1860, but now confronted with materialist positivism and connected by affinity to the literary current of symbolism.

So much for the discontinuity. A good example of rupture is furnished by the current issued from René Guénon (1886–1951). This thinker presented himself as the interpreter of the "Primordial Tradition," defined by him in terms of transhistorical truth and in the name of which he not only denounced the misdeeds of modernity, but attacked many aspects of Western esotericism present and past. If we consider his work from the inside only, we are tempted to find there the reflection, intended to be faithful, of a permanence and unity that unfortunate accidents of history would have come to disturb, and tempted also to consider as useless, surpassed, almost all the Western esoteric heritage

prior to Guénon himself. But if we ask ourselves questions about the genesis of his work, the occultist terrain where it took seed, and the forms of esotericism deliberately ignored by it (not only, therefore, the forms that it is attacking), then it appears to us much more interesting still, but as a new current, among others, inside this vast field that our discipline has the object of exploring.[1]

UNIVERSITIES

This field has long been a subject of interest, but only recently has it begun to be approached in a neutral fashion, as one sector among others in the history of religions. At the beginning of modern times appeared works (such as *De Occulta philosophia*, 1533, written in 1510, by H. C. Agrippa) accrediting the idea that various traditions are linked to one another like communicating vessels and comprise a homogenous whole called occult philosophy, *physica prisca*, or *philosophia perennis*, although these terms are not really interchangeable. The authors of such works are esotericists themselves (such as Agrippa) or else their adversaries. They assemble a great deal of knowledge but their aim is not to do the work of objective historians. In the seventeenth century, once the four great currents mentioned above became apparent, the need made itself felt to treat them integrally, and this as much on the part of their enemies (among whom is E. D. Colberg, *Das Platonisch-Hermetische Christenthum*, Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1690–91) as their defenders (such as Gottfried Arnold, *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie*, Frankfurt, 1699–1700).

The first really systematic description of the Western esoteric currents is found in the *Historia critica philosophiae* (1742–44, vols. I, IV, VI) of Jakob Brucker. Although a work of little objectivity, marked by the rationalism of the Enlightenment, its importance should not be underestimated, because for several generations it acted as a point of reference for philosophy in general and esotericism in particular. A little later, Johann Gottfried Herder in Germany and Antoine Court de Gébelin in France also engaged in research on certain aspects of this bushy terrain. Then came the period when, for the first time it seems, the substantive "esotericism" appeared (this is in French, in 1828), shortly before Joseph Scheible began publishing a long series of reference texts in Germany, in the 1850s.[2] The occultist current then developed in its core a historical activity halfway between esoteric discourse and scholarly research, evidence of which are the publications of authors such as George R. S. Mead or Arthur Edward Waite. But one must wait for the twentieth century to witness the appearance of academic research properly said, encompassing wide sectors. Thus, August Viatte's thesis on illuminism marked, in 1928, an important turning point, followed by the works of Will-Erich Peuckert on pansophia and Rosicrucianism. Lynn Thorndike, with his monumental history of magic

and experimental science, was perhaps the first historian to treat the esoteric currents exclusively and integrally (up to and including the seventeenth century), although he accomplished this starting with the sole idea of "magic" and without really distinguishing one current from another or developing a specific method.[3]

Research has progressed well during the past thirty years. Just as the works of August Viatte and Will-Erich Peuckert, those of Frances A. Yates on the Renaissance and the eighteenth century, and of François Secret on the Christian Kabbalah[4] are of a nature to stimulate historians concerned with deepening a given current or treating this discipline in its specificity, or else with studying the relationships that these currents maintain with religion, politics, art, and literature. Studies such as those of Ernest Lee Tuveson on the reception of hermetism in Anglo-Saxon literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, or of Massimo Introvigne on the "magical" movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,[5] represent new approaches of an interdisciplinary nature. The multiplication of such studies has little by little suggested the idea that this is a whole sui generis. For the supporters of *philosophia perennis* or, more generally, of esotericism, this idea had seemed obvious; it was less so for the university historians, but these are increasingly adopting it—even if they do not understand it in the same way as the perennialists.

This idea has oriented, implicitly or explicitly, the works of historians such as James Webb and Joscelyn Godwin in North America; of Jean-Pierre Laurant, Pierre A. Riffard, and Jean-Paul Corsetti in France; of Ernest Benz, Gerhard Wehr, and Karl Frick in Germany; of Massimo Introvigne in Italy.[6] In the course of the past years, periodicals that had initially been devoted to one particular given aspect have widened their scope of subject matter; thus, *Cauda Pavonis* and *Theosophical History*. A periodical such as *A.R.I.E.S.*, in France, publishes methodological articles, accounts of works, positions of theses, and the like, dedicated to the cutting edge of research.[7] One sees conferences and seminars proliferating, where esotericism appears either as one subject among others or as the single theme of the program. In parallel, specialized libraries are the subject of a curiosity and an interest of which the past offered few examples.[8] One then understands the growing necessity to develop specific methodological approaches (cf. *infra*, "Criteriologies" and "Methods").

Even before these questions of method had really been dealt with in depth, the need had made itself felt in France to establish a chair in modern Western esotericism. This was created in 1964, with the title "History of Christian Esotericism," in the section of Religious Studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Sorbonne), and entrusted to François Secret, who occupied it until 1979. At that date, which was also that of my election to this chair, the title became "History of the Esoteric and Mystical Currents in Modern and

Contemporary Europe." In the United States, in 1980, the Hermetic Academy was created, whose purpose is to encourage exchanges among researchers in "esoteric studies"—understood in a broader sense than "modern esoteric currents"—academics for the majority, and it is one of the "Related Scholarly Organizations of the American Academy of Religion" (AAR, the largest professional Group, in North America, of academics in religious sciences). Within the AAR, the Hermetic Academy created an "Esotericism and Perennialism Group" that organized five symposia from 1986 to 1990. This Group became a Seminar starting in 1993, with the title "Theosophy and Its Phases of Development."[9] The title changed in 1999, becoming "Western Esotericism from the Early Modern Period." And, last but not least, at the State University in Amsterdam a new Chair was created in 1999, entitled "History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents from the Renaissance to the Present." This Chair encompasses a full academic curriculum, from the undergraduate to the doctoral levels.

Now that one is witnessing the progressive institutionalization of this new discipline on the academic plane, one may well ask why there has been such a long wait for it to gain the honor of official acceptance. If one considers the domain of Judaism or Islam, a fortiori the religions of the Far East, it seems that fields generally similar to that of modern Western esotericism had long been accepted in Western universities and that, in them, neither mysticism nor ancient gnosticism had been greatly scorned by historians. As Wouter J. Hanegraff rightly comments, such a neglect could well be but the secular form of a Christian polemic: esotericism appeared too late to become a scientific problem inside theological discourse, which rid itself of it by attaching it sometimes, always awkwardly, to mysticism, or condemned it by identifying it with gnosis—understood as gnosticism. Later, the Christian religions had much to do elsewhere in their struggle with the new mechanistic or rational mentality; and when this ultimately predominated, modern historians took interest above all in the vicissitudes of the combat between reason and religion. Esotericism was superfluous, and came along to complicate everything. Today the situation is different, on account of the growing need for new interpretations, more or less complex, of the genesis of modernity.[10]

Yet the interest shown today in esotericism, even by serious people, does not always yield the best fruits. One often sees specialists of a given discipline speaking about esotericism without possessing any particular competence. The reason for this is double. On the one hand, our field, which has long been badly defined and little occupied in the universities, is naturally the target of appropriative aims. On the other hand, in our era of intense editorial activity, publishers often lack points of reference when it is a matter of matching competencies with tasks (popularizing essays, dictionary entries, etc.) relative to esotericism. Now, the fact that one may have some competence on one area

of mysticism, religious symbolism, or psychology, and the like does not mean that one is by the same token qualified to write on esotericism. The result is that today almost everyone feels they have claims to this domain.[11]

Such a confusion, added to those maintained by "loonies," inclines many serious thinkers, and not the least of them, to a negative reaction when faced with an undertaking to define a corpus specific to esotericism, because for them this corpus duplicates those that already exist for philosophy, literature, art, and so on. Indeed, one observes that generally it is not the esoterologists who produce the most satisfactory scientific works on a given author or subject, but rather specialists engaged in focused research (for example, a monograph on a treatise of Paracelsus, by a specialist of the sixteenth century; or a study of a theosopher by a historian of literature).

CRITERIOLOGIES

It is incumbent on any sector of the human sciences to be a subject of thought that aims to circumscribe its field and propose a methodology. As far as our sector is concerned, it seems that until the present only three researchers have undertaken to make a contribution to this type of thinking. After presenting, in relation to mine, that of Pierre A. Riffard, I shall then describe that of Wouter J. Hanegraaff.

The first part of this preface ("Geneses") described the landscape by an enumeration of the features comprising it—essentially the currents: rivers, streams, and tributaries. But one must also ask what makes it a particular region distinct from its neighbors. That is why I have proposed[12] calling "esotericism" in the modern West a form of thought identifiable by the presence of six basic characteristics distributed in varying proportions. Four are "intrinsic," in that their simultaneous presence is a necessary and sufficient condition for a discourse to be identified as esoteric. With them are joined two others, which I call "secondary," that is, not intrinsic but whose presence is frequent next to the four others. This being said, it is clear that none of the six belongs to esotericism alone.

The six characteristics are as follows:

(1) *The idea of correspondence.* This is a matter of symbolic correspondences—but considered here as very real—between all the parts of the visible and invisible universe ("As above so below," says the *Emerald Tablet*). This is the old idea of the macrocosm and the microcosm, or principle of universal interdependence. The correspondences are not obvious at first glance but are veiled, waiting to being read, deciphered. The universe is a theater of mirrors, a mosaic of hieroglyphs to be decoded; everything in Nature is a sign, the least object is hiding a secret. Here the principles of noncontradiction and excluded third middle, as of causal linearity, are replaced by those of synchronicity and

included middle. The correspondences are of two sorts. There are those of visible or invisible Nature: occult relationships between the seven metals and the seven planets, between these and the parts of the human body, between the observable cosmos and the departments of the celestial or supercelestial universes, and so on. But there are also the correspondences between Nature, or even history, and revealed texts (myths of foundation or origin, as in the Kabbalah), or the idea of *physica sacra*, of sacred physicality, a form of esoteric concordism according to which the Bible and Nature are supposed to illuminate each other reciprocally, through a work of permanent hermeneutics.

(2) *Living nature*. The cosmos is not merely complex, plural, and hierarchical, it cannot be reduced to a network of correspondences: it is also alive. The word *magia*, so important in the imaginary of the Renaissance, well evokes the idea of a Nature that is felt, known, understood, as palpitating in all its parts, that one readily imagines as pervaded by a light or hidden fire circulating through it. To this idea of living Nature, seat of sympathies and antipathies, is attached that of magic in the operative sense: astral forces of which seals and talismans would be the bearers, harmonies of the world (of a musical nature especially), or again, stones, metals, plants, appropriate for the maintenance or reestablishment of physical or psychic health. But it is the idea of living Nature, and much less its practical applications—occultism in the general sense—that appears here as one of the constitutive elements of the form of esoteric thought; an idea always more or less inseparable from that of "knowledge," of "gnosis," in the sense that Goethe understands it when he has Faust say that he burns with desire to "know the world/in its intimate contexture/to contemplate the active forces and the first elements."[13] This gnosis produces salvatory effects of which Man is not the only beneficiary: a text of Saint Paul (Romans 8:19–22) is proffered, where one reads that suffering Nature, submitted to exile and vanity, awaiting its part in salvation, is that of the entire cosmos, and that the knowledge that Man develops in himself concerning Nature can have redeeming effects on it. This said, one observes, since the beginning of the twentieth century especially, in the wake of an ontologically dualistic metaphysics, the appearance of a monist form of spirituality claiming the title of esotericism, for which Nature (everyone creates) is seen denied in its very reality. Modernity and, by the same token, the sciences issued from it are also rejected. For historians of esotericist thought, this form of monism is an offshoot or a derived current, whose genesis is all the more interesting to study.

(3) *Imagination and mediations*. These two notions are here complementary. That of correspondences implied already, we have seen, an "imagination" capable of deciphering the hieroglyphs of the world, that is, the "signatures of things." Now, these "signatures" always present themselves more or less as mediators between the perceptible datum and the invisible or hidden thing to

which it refers. Rituals, images of the Tarot, mandalas, symbols charged with polysemia are also mediators because, as supports for mediation, they would allow the various levels of reality to be reconnected to one another. As transmitters, initiators and gurus are also mediators. And not only the Bible, but the whole referential corpus of esotericism are like as many mediations. It is perhaps primarily this notion that makes the difference between what is mystical and what is esoteric. Simplifying a little, one could consider that the mystic—in the very classical sense—aspires to a more or less complete suppression of images and intermediaries, of mediations, because they quickly become obstacles for him to union with God. This, in contrast to the esotericist, who seems more interested in the intermediaries revealed to his inner vision by virtue of his creative imagination than in tending above all to a union with his God; he prefers to sojourn, to travel, on Jacob's ladder, where the angels—the symbols, the mediations—are ascending and descending, rather than venture resolutely beyond. Of course, such a distinction is only a matter of methodological convenience. In practice, there is sometimes much esotericism among the mystics (let us think of Saint Hildegard), and one observes a pronounced mystical tendency in some esotericists (Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, for example).

As for the imagination, it is understood here as the very faculty that indeed allows these intermediaries, symbols, images to be used for gnostic ends, the theory of correspondences to be put in active practice, and the entities mediating between the divine and Nature to be discovered, seen, and known. It is therefore not a question of "flights of fancy" (the "mad woman in the attic"), but rather of a sort of organ of the soul through which Man may establish a cognitive and visionary relationship with an intermediary world, a mesocosm—what Henry Corbin has suggested calling a *mundus imaginalis*. And it is partly under the inspiration of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, rediscovered at the end of the fifteenth century, that memory and imagination are associated to the point of becoming identical, part of the teaching of Hermes Trismegistus consisting in "interiorizing" the world in our *mens*. Thus understood, the imagination (a word often compared here with *Magnet, magia, imago*) is the tool of knowledge of the self, of the world, of myth: the eye of fire that makes visible the invisible. The emphasis is put on certainty and vision rather than on belief and faith; this is why this concept of the imagination innervates the theosophic discourse in which it is exercised, it is deployed there starting from mediations on verses of revealed Books: thus in the Jewish Kabbalah, with the *Zohar*, or in the great theosophical current that springs to life in Germany at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

(4) *The experience of transmutation.* This fourth element comes to complete the first three. We were dealing until now, indeed, with a vision of the world and a spiritual activity barely surpassing the limits of the cognitive. But the

idea of transmutation adds to this the dimension of a living experience, that is, of a type not only visionary but initiatic. What one calls "gnosis" is often this illuminated knowledge that favors the "second birth." This transmutation follows a course whose path is generally marked out, alchemically symbolized by *nigredo* (death, decapitation), *albedo* (whitening), *rubedo* (reddening, philosopher's stone), and that one is tempted to compare with the three phases of the traditional mystical path: purgation, illumination, unification. Finally, as we have just recalled in respect to the idea of living Nature, the transmutation can be that of a part of Nature as much as of the experimenter himself.

Such would, therefore, be the four basic components on which rests the approach, proposed here, of our sector. To these come to be associated two others, "relative" to the extent that they are not indispensable to the definition. To present them as two new necessary conditions would limit the explorable field too much; but both deserve to be considered in their specificity on account of their frequent presence with the four others. These are what could be called, on the one hand, the practice of concordance, and on the other, transmission.

(5) *The practice of concordance.* Although it does not appear as an essential component of modern Western esotericism, the practice of concordance nevertheless occupies an important place in it, and first in its very genesis—as has been seen in relation to the notion of *philosophia perennis*. This practice consists in positing the existence of common denominators between two or several traditions, then studying these by comparing them, in the hopes of bringing out the forgotten or hidden trunk of which each particular tradition would be only one visible branch. This comparativist activity gained prominence starting in the nineteenth century, following a better knowledge of the East and through the appearance of a new academic discipline, "comparative religions"—to the point that the advocates of "perennialism" postulate and teach the existence of a "Primordial Tradition" which, according to them, as we have seen earlier, would overarch all the religious and esoteric traditions of humanity.

(6) *Transmission.* This is a matter of channels, on which varying emphasis is put. It can be one of master to disciple, or initiation into a society. The idea is that one is not initiated by oneself alone and that the "second birth" (cf. *supra*) requires one to undergo this discipline. Some insist on the authenticity or the "regularity" of the channels of filiation supposed to transmit what could not be obtained without them. And it is known how important this idea of transmission has been in the West, in the history of secret or closed initiatic societies, since the middle of the eighteenth century.

Modern Western esotericism is thus a form of thought—one among others, like modern science, mysticism, theology, utopia . . . The specificity of each

consists of the simultaneous presence of a certain number of fundamental or constituent characteristics. Each carries out its own operations and procedures, its various ways of adjusting its components, of articulating them. In so doing, it creates for itself a corpus of references, a culture. As the same component can belong to several forms of thought, some are obviously in a relation of close kinship; hence the "mystical" and the "esoteric." The "scientific" maintains complex, often ambiguous, relationships with this, in which Nature Philosophies are sometimes at issue. It is also interesting to observe the oppositions, the rejections that can result from an epistemological break inside one of them; thus, as long as the "theological" was presented as a form of symbolic theology (in the case of the ancient Fathers, the School of Chartres, or a Saint Bonaventure), it was rather close to what we call the "esoteric," which came afterward, but it became increasingly distinct from it, starting in the thirteenth century, with the development of thought of an Aristotelian type.

A methodological approach different from ours was proposed in 1990 by Pierre A. Riffard.[14] Starting from the idea that a universal esotericism would exist, this researcher attempted to find what its "invariables" would be. He found eight: author's impersonality, opposition of the profane and the initiated, correspondences, the subtle, numbers, occult sciences, occult arts, and initiation. The major difficulty that this model presents is precisely its universalizing aspect, which tends to embrace everything in an effort to end in *one* science *all* esoteric sciences. But, on the one hand, the sum of these invariables in no way constitutes a form of thought (which the author, after all, does not claim); and, on the other, these invariables occurring together only in certain circumstances, one would like to know why, and how, these circumstances would have reoccurred throughout the history of humanity. There is missing in this criteriology a general base, an anchoring in history, without which it becomes, by definition and by default, appropriable by anthropology or psychology.

METHODS

The approach of Pierre A. Riffard at least has merit of proposing a method, and of being distinct from the perennialist attitude. What is more, it usefully revives the question of a comparative science of esotericisms; a pertinent question, even if one does not take a position from a "universal" plane, which is that of this researcher. For Henry Corbin, not long ago, it was not so much a question as a well-defined project on which his heart was set: for him it was a matter of encouraging the comparative study of the three great religions of the Book, by taking their "esotericism" as a methodological point of departure. But the meaning given to "esotericism" in the present work would not be quite applicable to such a program, as Wouter J. Hanegraaff points out. Indeed, this program would imply that a more general "definition" of esotericism should be

sought, inside of which what Hanegraaff and I term in this way would then appear as a subdomain, for which another name or qualifier would have to be found; moreover, the advantage of using the word "esotericism" for this comparativism may be doubted, when "gnosis" or "mysticism" would do just as well.[15]

It is not merely a question of words, all the same. Why a comparative rather than a genetic approach? Experience shows that the fact of favoring the first almost always reveals a position of the religionist type (that is, expressing the religious belief of the researcher in a place of discourse normally reserved for scientific neutrality) on the universality of esotericism, and favors a tendency to efface the differences between the traditions studied, by stressing the similarities to the detriment of contingencies and historical events—different from a scientific inquiry, which begins with the comparative study of historico-genetic diffusions. This is why a comparative study of esotericism in the three great religions of the Book should begin with reciprocal influences, and once this is accomplished, move on to the emergence of innovations—new thoughts, ideas, practices—relatively independent but founded on a logic proper to monotheism and the religions of the Book, and not on the postulate of a mysticism that would be common to them.[16]

The propensity of the mind to amalgamation must incite us to vigilance. To take an example of deviation among others—none at least are to be found in Henry Corbin, a serious researcher—for centuries there has been no lack of enthusiasts to see in ancient Egypt and its "mysteries" an esotericism that would be present under its symbols, initiations, hieroglyphs, and so on. Yet, even supposing that they are sometimes seeing rightly, what they are describing would never be but one form of religiousness among others, and there is no reason to call it "esotericism," unless one considers that the word can mean anything. It appears, on the other hand, more pertinent and fruitful to study the forms of Egyptomania or Egyptophilia proper to Westerners themselves, for if there is Egyptian esotericism, it is primarily in our modern imaginary that it is to be found. Whether or not, since about the sixteenth century, this reflects what ancient Egypt really was does not concern the historian of Western esoteric currents, unless very indirectly. It would rather concern the Egyptologist.

What, in regard to the quest for similarities, I earlier called "religionism" is one of the three perspectives represented within the university world in the field of Religious Studies, in a proportion that varies greatly according to the country. One consists, as we have seen, in making a history of religions starting from a personal religious standpoint. Another perspective, known as the reductionist, consists in positing from the start that the religious is meant to "be dissolved" in "explanations," whether economical, political, sociological, or psychological, which would bring out, it is believed, the illusory

nature of all transcendence, of anything sacred. The third, known as empirical, is ours. The article by Wouter J. Hanegraaff, previously cited and partly devoted to the presentation of my own methodological approach, is entitled precisely "Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism."[17] This empirical method, as he describes it, corresponds exactly to the attitude of laicity (*laïcité*) in the positive sense that this word has finally taken on in France, where it characterizes the spirit in which one studies religious sciences in the public institutions created for this purpose.

Whether it bears on the considered religions as a whole or on the esoteric currents in particular, empirical research is first characterized by the rejection of metaphysical premises to establish scientific knowledge. It thus implies a "criticism of ideologies" that severely restricts the area in which science can legitimately speak with authority. By the same token, this empirical research posits that its access to "the religious" is limited to the study of human events that unfold in space and especially in time: it is a matter of working based only on the consciousness that believers have of a meta-empirical reality expressed in an empirical manner (by words, images, behaviors, etc.). This means that as empirical researchers we consider that we do not have access to the meta-empirical, whence our recourse to a "methodological agnosticism"—to take up the expression of Jan Platvoet and Wouter J. Hanegraaff.[18] We do not limit ourselves to empiricism because this would be the only reality, but because it is our sole access to the investigation.

Inversely, religionism and reductionism in equal measure "have shown a characteristic tendency to impose 'immutable' laws and principles on their material, and this often at the expense of historical contingency (feared by both because of the relativist implications of this contingency)." The "terror of History" in Eliade appears to be one of the most obvious religionist examples.[19] Indeed, it is certain that, especially in the study of esotericism, the religionist position has been little favorable to a critical undertaking and a classificatory theory, because religionists naturally have the tendency to insist on trans-historical unity to the detriment of differences, too readily dismissed by them as "secondary." They are more interested in the essence than in the manifestation. "Esoterism" is a convenient term for the perennialists, above all concerned with rediscovering the "transcendental unity of religions" dear to Frithjof Schuon. They employ this substantive in a metaphysical sense, while, for us, it refers to specific historical currents—and it is not by chance that they have almost always been superbly ignorant of most of these currents. Whence the necessity to establish the study of esotericism on solid academic bases, of fixing clear demarcations from the perennialist point of view.[20]

As Wouter J. Hanegraaff recently brought to my attention,[21] the empirico-historical approach is of a nominalist type, and not (contrary to the perennialist perspective) of a realist type—in the broad sense of these two terms. And this,

simply because *truth is not a historical category*. He compares the constituent elements that I have proposed to an empirical description of the properties of gold (color, substance, weight, etc.): it by no means signifies that whatever metal exhibiting the said properties of gold is genuine gold. As for the chemist, of course, he has at his disposal the means to identify real gold, but we, as historians, cannot know what can in fact be the "true esotericism." There is not, for us, any esotericism sui generis. Each of the component elements of the form of thought that it has been agreed to call esoteric presents itself only as a theoretical generalization starting from empirical data (under the circumstances, starting from concrete historical ideas).[22] I do not claim, for example, to know what the "true nature" of the correspondences would be, while a "realist" claims to know what it is or what it should be and, starting from that, sets himself the task of constructing, or reconstructing, esotericism as a category in itself. This is not our purpose, and if we study esotericism it is not so as to ensure its propagation.

These four (or six) constitutive elements serve to make us sensitive not only to the existence of a form of thought, but also to differences, to changes, through time. They are like many receptacles, communicating but specific, in which various types of experiences and imaginaries come to be distributed. In Western esotericism, one finds as many hierarchical views, of a Neo-Platonic type, as nonhierarchical views of a neo-hermeticist type (for example, God is as much in a grain of sand as anywhere else); emanationist theories of creation as creationist views; belief in reincarnation as well as its rejection. One fails to grasp the nature of this form of thought by exhausting oneself in seeking what would be the "beliefs," or professions of faith, that would qualify it. Likewise, the esoterologist does not have to attempt to "define" his or her sector starting from the various manners in which esotericists have themselves attempted to codify it; that would be to start from sectarian presuppositions bearing on what it "should" be, as some do today who appeal to its authority with the purpose of placing their own parish above those of others.

Just as an approach of a doctrinal type[23] would be totally inadequate to our field of research—there are almost as many doctrines as there are currents or even authors—so a thematic criteriology could not account for its nature. Certainly, esotericism as we understand it indeed has its favored themes, such as angeology, androgyny, sophiology, the World Soul, and so on. But none of them belongs to it exclusively, because as elements of mythologies it is to the mythic in general that they refer. The presence, alone, in a work, of a theme or an identifiable archetype by no means implies that these must be classed as "esoteric." Unless some wish to monopolize the research of others, the esoteric field does not coincide with that of the anthropologist nor with this new discipline which is the imaginary,[24] and this despite an actual

proximity. As a corollary, a phenomenon such as the New Age, so interesting today to the sociologist, the psychologist, the historian of religions, belongs to the study of new religious movements, now also a specific discipline in the area of academic research. Similarly, parapsychology, sorcery, ceremonial magic—sectors with often obvious relationships to modern esoteric currents—are not intrinsically part of them. There also exist institutions, such as Freemasonry that, in some respects only, belong to esotericism; it largely depends on the nature of the ritual.

Better than doctrines, themes, or archetypes, the notion of "family resemblance" can be revealed as operative. Employed by A. O. Lovejoy in his book *The Great Chain of Being* (1936), the expression "unit-idea" serves to distinguish families of key ideas closely related to one another, whose historical courses and reoccurrences can be analyzed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff has drawn attention to the relevance of this notion to the study of our esoteric field.[25] Its point of reference is mental habits. For example, the idea of immutability, or the "monistic pathos" (a feeling that one is part of the universal Unity: "All is one!"). Or that of a "chain of beings," to which is devoted Lovejoy's best-known work. From a single "unit-idea," which can be expressed in ideologically or doctrinally contradictory forms, one can study the varying manifestations in works either inside the same field, such as esotericism, or in fields different from one another—theology, law, literature, art, and so on.[26]

Similarly, writes Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "an esoteric tradition, on its foundation, can be defined as a historical continuity in which individuals and/or groups are demonstrably influenced, in their life and thinking," by the four (or six) component elements that I have enumerated and which "they use and develop according to the specific demands and cultural context of their own period." It is then incumbent on the researcher to carry out a genetic work, that is, "to trace the filiation of ideas over time, not with the prior intention of demonstrating their trans- or metahistorical similarity or unity, even less with the intention to demonstrate historical 'anticipations' of cherished ideas, but with the intention of clarifying the complex ways in which people process—absorb, (re)interpret, (re)contruct, etc., the ideas of the past accessible to them," and to trace the map of migratory routes followed by them[27]—with the understanding that by "ideas" we do not mean elements of ideologies or abstract concepts, but essentially forms of the imaginary.

The study of traditions and esoteric currents, their reinterpretations and reconstructions, indeed, also implies that of their migrations in art, literature, music, and even science—fields whose specialists, conversely, should not be unaware that ours exists. These migrations constitute a rich terrain of investigation on the multi- and interdisciplinary levels. But the very form of esoteric thought itself can be considered to be of a transdisciplinary nature par

excellence. Indeed, while multidisciplinary thinking remains horizontal, and interdisciplinarity consists in identifying, in bringing to light, certain possibilities of transfers of method from one discipline to another, transdisciplinarity answers to three criteria, each independent but in interrelationship: the idea that several levels of reality can exist, the activation of forms of logic that are not classical (nonbinary); finally, the idea that the subject is to be found placed in the very center of his or her own research.[28] The form of esoteric thought corresponds well to these three criteria. Its existence in no way springs from a method aspiring to scientific neutrality—in contrast to transdisciplinarity—but researchers of a transdisciplinary vocation could conceivably find in the esoteric corpus something to nourish their thinking; and, reciprocally, historians of esotericism could be equally open to transdisciplinarity. Our discipline would not thereby incur any risk of being dissolved into neighboring sectors, as soon as it succeeds in proving its own specificity, in laying out its beacon lights, both fixed and floating.

Rather than present a "history" of modern esoteric currents,[29] the nine essays that follow (just as those published in *Access to Western Esotericism*) aim merely to clarify certain aspects of it. They have been grouped into three broad sections:

Theosophies. There did not exist, to my knowledge, any historical survey of the Western esoteric current (end of the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries). Whence my essay of periodization (in the sense of dividing and discussing this current in developmental periods). It is completed by two other studies: one analyzes the works of Bernard Gorceix relative to the emergence of this current in baroque Germany; the other treats a specific issue—theosophical discourse as a presence in the debate on the death penalty.

Exercises of the Imagination. As explained above, the creative or active imagination is one of the constituent elements of esotericism as a form of thought. *Magia, imaginatio, mundus imaginalis* are as many key notions around which the three studies of this second part are articulated.

In Terms of "Tradition." In esoteric discourses, mention is often made of "Tradition," but not always in a precise or appropriate manner.[30] To ask how certain esotericists are situated in relationship to one or more of the traditions from which they or others claim authority can serve to clarify this notion. The inquiry focuses on three examples widely separated in time: the authors of the proto-Rosicrucian texts (beginning of the seventeenth century), and two of our contemporaries, Valentin Tomberg and Raymond Abellio.

Access to Western Esotericism contains an extensive section entitled "A Bibliographical Guide to Research" (pp. 297–348), to which readers may refer. The bibliography at the end of the present book is meant to complete that section with titles which have mostly been published since 1994.

NOTES

1. Let us nevertheless not neglect the permanences, because without them one would fail to understand the changes, the breaks, the reinterpretations, and become open to making such misinterpretations as the one Wouter J. Hanegraaff recently pointed out: two sociologists studying contemporary occultism—astrology in particular—presented this as a deviation from truths generally accepted by the ambient culture, that is, as an antimodern phenomenon, while this occultism is much rather testimony to the permanence of traditions that greatly precede the culture of modernity (Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1995, p. 119. Articles criticized: Edward A. Tiryakian, "Toward the Sociology of Esoteric Culture," in *On the Margin of the Visible: Sociology, the Esoteric, and the Occult*, New York, 1974, p. 265; and Marcello Truzzi, "Definitions and Dimensions of the Occult: Towards a Sociological Perspective," in ibid., pp. 245 ff.).

2. Cf. notably J. G. Herder, vol. XV of *Sämtliche Werke*, published in Berlin by Bernhard Suphan, 1877–1909. A. Court de Gébelin, *Le Monde primitif*, Paris, 1773–84, 8 vols. "Ésotérisme" appears in Jacques Matter, *Histoire critique du gnosticisme et de ses influences*, Paris, Levrault, 1928, p. 83 (mentioned by Jean-Pierre Laurant, *L'Ésotérisme chrétien en France au XIXe siècle*, Paris, L'Âge d'homme, 1992, pp. 19, 42). The volumes of *Kleiner Wunderschauplatz der geheimen Wissenschaften, Mysterien, Theosophie* [. . .] appeared in Stuttgart, published by J. Scheible, 1849–60.

3. George Robert Stow Mead was a very active publisher of periodicals, including *Lucifer*, *The Theosophical Review*, and *The Quest*, as well as Alexandrian hermetic texts. Arthur Edward Waite was author notably of *The Occult Sciences*, London, Kegan Paul, 1891. William Wynn Westcott was also one of these erudite occultists. Auguste Viatte, *Les sources occultes du Romantisme: Illuminisme-Théosophie (1770–1820)*, Paris, Champion, 1928. (Many facsimile reprints, same publisher.) Vol. I, *Le Préromantisme*. Vol. 2, *La Génération de l'Empire*. Will-Erich Peuckert, *Pansophie. Ein Versuch zur Geschichte der weissen und schwarzen Magie*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936. New edition, Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1966. Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and the Experimental Science*. 8 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984. (First edition, 1923–58). W.-E. Peuckert, *Die Rosenkreutzer. Zur Geschichte einer Reformation*. Jena: Diederichs, 1928. Rpt. Das Rosenkreutz. Introduced and presented by Rolf Christian Zimmermann. Berlin: E. Schmidt, 1973.

4. Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, Midway Reprints, 1979. First edition: London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964. François Secret, *Les Kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance*. Paris: Arma Artis and Milan: Archè, 1985. Illustrated (new expanded edition). First edition, Paris: Dunod, 1964.

5. Ernest Lee Tuveson, *The Avatars of Thrice Great Hermes: An Approach to Romanticism*. London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1982. Massimo Introvigne, *Il Cappello del Mago (I nuovi movimenti magici, dallo Spiritismo al Satanismo)*. Milan: SugarCo, 1990. Abridged French edition: *La Magie (Les Nouveaux Mouvements Magiques)*. Paris: Droguet et Ardent, 1993.

6. For the bibliography of these authors, see "A Bibliographical Guide to Research," pp. 297–348 in Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, Albany, SUNY, 1994.

7. For the periodicals cited, cf. ibid ., p. 342–346.

8. On libraries, cf. "A Word About Libraries" in ibid., pp. 346–348.

9. For more details on that Group, cf. Antoine Faivre and Karen-Claire Voss, "Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion," in *Numen*, vol. 42, Leyde, Brill, 1995, pp. 75 ff., n. 42. At the 17th Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (Mexico City, August 1995), a Group directed by Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff was focused on "Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion" (proceedings published under that title, Leuven, Belgium, ed. Peeters, "Gnostica" series, 1998). Also an IAHR Group "Western Esotericism and Jewish Thought" (directed by W. J. Hanegraaff and Jan Snoek) is announced for the Congress of 2000 in Durban (South Africa). At the Amsterdam Summer University, August 1994, a Congress (directed by Roelof van den Broek and W. J. Hanegraaff) was devoted to "Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times"; the proceedings are published under that title (Albany, SUNY, "Western Esoteric Traditions" series, 1998).

10. W. J. Hanegraaff. "Empirical Method . . . ," art. cited, p. 122, n. 46. See also his contribution "On the Construction of 'Esoteric Traditions,'" p. 11–69 in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, op. cit., where he discusses and differentiates "pre-esoteric universalisms," forms of "anti-esotericism," and "historical constructs." And his major work: *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1996 (distributed by SUNY).

11. The *Dictionnaire critique de l'Ésotérisme* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1998) is the very example of the confusion generated by the two reasons mentioned here. It is divided into nineteen sectors, each one being the responsibility of a person in charge, and the whole book is supposed to cover all eras and areas, including those of the Australian aborigines, pharaonic Egypt, sub-Nigerian Africa, and China—without any definitional or methodological consensus having been reached among those responsible for the sectors (this consensus was, moreover, not desired by the publisher or the editor). A number of sectors thus contribute to make this volume a sort of dictionary of religions and myths. However, other sectors bear witness, in contrast, to a praiseworthy exigency of specific methodology. It is not, all the same, irrelevant to note that work on this dictionary began in 1990. Now, considering that since that date the esoteric field has, more than ever before, been established as a discipline in its own right, it seems likely that such a dictionary, had it been initiated today with the same publisher, would have rested on more secure foundations, indeed, entirely different ones. Work on another dictionary, limited to the western world, and for which those responsible are striving to avoid such hazards, has been in progess since 1997 (*The Dictionary of Gnosticism and Western Esotericism*, to be edited by Jean-Pierre Brach, Roelof van den Broek, Antoine Faivre, and Wouter J. Hanegraaff; Leiden, E. J. Brill).

12. Notably in *Access to Western Esotericism*, op. cit., pp. 10–14, and in the entry "Occident Moderne," *Dictionnaire critique de l'Ésotérisme*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1998. About this, and the other meanings of "esotericism" (as mentioned at the beginning of this Preface), see my contribution "Questions of Terminology proper

to the Study of Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe," in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, edited by Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Leuven (Belgium): Peeters, Series "Gnostica," 1998, pp. 1–10.

13. "*Dass ich erkenne, was die Welt / Im Innersten zusammenhält / Schau' alle Wirkenskraft und Samen*" (vv. 381–383).

14. Pierre A. Riffard, *L'Ésotérisme: Qu'est-ce que l'ésotérisme? Anthologie de l'ésotérisme occidental*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1990, cf. pp. 311–364.

15. Cf., for example, "Allocution d'ouverture" by Henry Corbin, in the Cambrai Colloquium (20–22 June 1965), *Jérusalem, la Cité spirituelle, no. 2 of Cahiers de l'Université Saint-Jean de Jérusalem*, Paris, Berg International, 1976, p. 9. But on several other occasions as well, Henry Corbin strongly supported the idea of a comparative study of esotericism in the three great religions of the Book. For a discussion of this idea, see my forthcoming article, "Le problème de l'ésotérisme comparé des religions du Livre," in *Henry Corbin et la Spiritualité Comparée*, edited by Antoine Faivre and Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron, Paris: Archè, series "Cahiers du Groupe d'Etudes Spirituelles Comparées," 2000. See also Hanegraaff, "Empirical Method . . . ," art. cited, p. 123. On the notions of gnosis and gnosticism, cf. also W. J. Hanegraaff, "A Dynamic Typological Approach to the Problem of 'Post-Gnostic' Gnosticism," pp. 5–44, *A.R.I.E.S.*, no. XVI, Paris, La Table d'Émeraude, 1992, and by the same author, "Esoterie, occultisme en (neo) gnostiek: historische en inhoudelijke verbanden," pp. 1–27, *Religieuze Bewegingen in Nederland*, no. 25, 1992.

16. W. J. Hanegraaff, "Empirical Method . . . ," art. cited, pp. 122 ff.

17. The historian of religions, Jan Platvoet, has differentiated these three perspectives with great precision, notably in his article "The Definers Defined: Traditions in the Definition of Religion," pp. 180–212, in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 2/2, 1990. Let us note that the word "reductionism" is not always employed in this sense: it also sometimes means "methodological reductionism," that is, not necessarily implying an axiomatic agenda; cf., for example, Ivan Strenski, *Religion in Relation (Method, Application and Moral Location)*, Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1993, chap. III: "Reductionism and Structural Anthropology"—where the word "reductionism" is employed in a sense compatible with what Platvoet calls "empirical." For discussions on the criteriology I have tendered, see, besides Hanegraaff's studies quoted here, his contribution "On the Construction of 'Esoteric Traditions,'" in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion* (op. cit. *supra* note 12), pp. 11–62. And the recent important article by Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, "Esoterik im 18. Jahrhundert - Aufklärung und Esoterik. Eine Einleitung," in *Aufkärung und Esoterik*, edited by her, Hamburg: Meiner, 1999, Series "Studien zum achtzehnten Jahrhundert," pp. 1–37.

18. W. J. Hanegraaff, "Empirical Method . . . ," art. cited, p. 103, n. 10.

19. Ibid., p. 104, n. 13, where the author cites K. Rudolph, "Mircea Eliade and the 'History' of Religion," pp. 7 ff., *Religion*, no. XIX, 1989.

20. W. J. Hanegraaff, "Empirical Method . . . ," art. cited, p. 110. A dossier on perennialism was published in *A.R.I.E.S.*, no. XI (1990), nos. XII–XIII (1990–91), no. XIV (1991). See also William W. Quinn Jr., *The Only Tradition*, Albany, SUNY, 1997.

21. Letter from W. J. Hanegraaff to the author, 17 March 1995.

22. W. J. Hanegraaff, "Empirical Method . . . ," art. cited, p. 121.