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The Nature and Arguments of Faith

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Faith is the conformity of the intelligence and the will to revealed truths: this conformity is either formal alone or else essential, in the sense that the object of faith is a dogmatic form and, behind this, an essence of Truth. Faith is belief when the volitive element predominates over the intellectual; it is knowledge or gnosis when the intellectual element predominates over the volitive. But there are also certitude and fervor, the latter being volitive and the former intellectual: fervor gives belief its spiritual quality; certitude is an intrinsic quality of gnosis. The term "faith" could not mean exclusively belief or fervor, nor exclusively knowledge or certitude; it cannot be said either of belief that it is all that is possible in the way of faith, or of knowledge is not faith at all.

In other words, faith, on whatever level it is envisaged, has an aspect of participation and an aspect of separation: of participation because its subject is intelligence which as such participates "vertically" in the Truth, and of separation because intelligence is limited "horizontally" by its plane of existence, which separates it from the divine Intellect. In the first respect faith is "certitude", whether its object compels acceptance through material or rational proofs, or whether it reveals its nature in pure intellection; in the second respect, faith is "obscurity" because the believing subject is existentially separated from the object of belief. Neither crude reason—that is, reason deprived of suprarational illuminations due to our fall—nor *a fortiori* the body, can behold the celestial mysteries.

Intellection appears to the exoteric outlook to be an act of the reason wrongly claiming freedom from obscurity and falsely independent with regard to Revelation. In reality, obscurity in intellective knowledge differs from obscurity in the reason by the fact that it is linked, not to intelligence itself, but to the ego insofar as it has not been transmuted by spiritual realization; intellective vision, in fact, does not imply a prior integration of our whole being in the Truth. As for Revelation, intellection lives by it, for it receives thence its whole formal armature; thus

intellection cannot replace the objective, prophetic, lawgiving and traditional manifestation of the divine Intellect. One can neither conceive a Saint Augustine without the Gospel, nor a Shankaracharya without the Veda.[1]

This leads us to consider that there is a faith which can increase, just as there is one which is immutable: faith is immutable through the content and number of its dogmas, as also through the metaphysical immutability of the truth, or again, in the firmness of personal belief or in the incorruptibility of knowledge; as for the faith which may increase, it can be trust in the absolute veracity of Revelation, or fervent faithfulness to it; but, according to the point of view, this faith can also be the spiritual penetration of dogmas, namely gnosis.

Some people will doubtless point out that to use the word "faith" as a synonym for "gnosis" is to rob it of all meaning, since "seeing" is opposed to "believing", which is to say that faith requires both obscurity of understanding and the merit of free adherence: but this distinction, which is legitimate on its own level, where it reflects a real situation, involves the disadvantage of limiting scriptural terminology to the exoteric point of view; this latter point of view cannot determine the scope of the divine Word, although, inversely, the divine Word is crystallized with a view to the necessities of exoterism, whence its universality. Faith, as we have said, is the adherence of the intelligence to Revelation; now, if exoterism reduces intelligence to reason alone, while replacing the intellect—the suprarational nature of which it cannot conceive—by grace, which it sees as the sole supernatural element, this restriction, though opportune, cannot change the nature of things nor abolish the intellective faculty where it exists; the concept of "faith" thus necessarily keeps its inner limitlessness and its polyvalence, for there can be no question, in a religious civilization, of denying faith to those whose intelligence transcends the ordinary limits of human understanding.

The matter could also be expressed in this way: exoterism is not, and cannot be, aware of the existence of an intellective "paracletic" faculty, but on the other hand it cannot admit that intelligence should, by its own nature, be contrary to faith. Now not to exclude reason from the realm of faith is implicitly not to exclude the total intelligence, for the limiting of intelligence to reason alone is merely accidental; the total character of faith thus involves an implicit acceptance of the intellect. What matters here is not that "faith" is distinct from "science", but that it is the

[1] It is this *a priori*—and not *a posteriori*—dependence of intellection with regard to Revelation which is so well expressed by Saint Anselm's saying *Credo ut intelligam.*

total adherence of the intelligence as such to transcendent Truth. The concept of faith is traditional, and the intellect exists; consequently, this concept must have, besides its literal and as it were collective meaning, the quality of a pure symbol; it must remain valid at all possible levels.

Now if faith, being an adherence of the intelligence, is necessarily identical in its center with knowledge—to say that the blessed no longer have faith means that they have knowledge where ordinary mortals have belief—it is obvious that knowledge is not identical with faith in the general sense of this term, for the "lesser" can symbolize the "greater" but not the converse; the existence in the scriptures of the word "gnosis" must moreover have some a sufficient reason. However that may be, the human groups which lie outside the field of the Semitic dogmatisms have no reason to include—or to envelop—the universal concept of knowledge in the particular concept of faith: adherence to a Revelation has not everywhere the same character of merit that it possesses among Westerners, including here Moslems, and the question of freedom of adherence does not arise everywhere as it does in the case of the Western religions. We do not think we are going too far in saying that the necessity for a dogmatic faith answers to a collective tendency to deny the supernatural in accordance with a mentality which is more passional than contemplative and thereby riveted to "bare facts", whence a philosophy which makes deductions from the sensory to the Universal, instead of starting from the latter in order to understand the former; it is not a question here of passion as such, which is a general human fact, but of its intrusion into the field of the intelligence. In the East, except among Moslems, there are no dogmas properly speaking, for ideas are considered there as points of departure which are more or less provisional—although absolute on their respective planes—so that what is true on a given plane ceases to be so on another; in these conditions, faith could not be affectively centered on a *credo*, or in other words, conviction is less the complement of a doubt than a quasi-existential axiom. For a Hindu the psychological equivalent of the Judaeo-Christian faith will above all be fervent attachment (*shraddhā*) to a given path (*mārga*), to a master (*guru*), to a given aspect of the Divine (*ishta*); this kind of faith, which is a "manner of being" rather than a "belief", is indeed indispensable to all spiritual life, Western as well as Eastern. In the *jnāna-mārga*, it is ultimately necessary to go beyond this fervor, for it too is only illusion; in a general way, a Hindu will not

bring knowledge into relationship with faith, since for him gnosis does not have to be fitted into a traditional framework exoteric in form.

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Apart from the imponderable factors of grace, it is by virtue of its proofs that dogmatic faith compels acceptance: such proofs may lie either in the field of facts, or in that of ideas; in the first case, proof lies in miracles or prophecy, and in the second, in a sort of intellectual self-evidence. These two kinds of proof never exclude one another, but one of them will be predominant; when it is miracle that predominates—the supernatural fact, the intervention of the Celestial in the terrestrial—the intellectual side of faith will appear as obscure, it will be essentially "mystery"; when it is evidence—the metaphysical idea, the irresistible force of Truth—which predominates then the existential side of faith, the sacred facts, will appear as relatively secondary, being subordinate to the Truth which determines them in advance and prevents them from becoming the culminating points of a religious "mythology". In other words, one faith is distinguished from another, not only by its contents, but also by its subjective structure depending on whether it is centered on the persuasive force of the sacred fact or on that of the revealed idea; herein lies the fundamental difference between the Christian and Islamic perspectives. Every religion comprises both outward proofs and inward evidences; the difference which we are speaking about is a question of emphasis and predominance, not of exclusive principle.

The element "miracle" and the element "truth" are as it were the two poles of Revelation: grace is wrought by the miracle, while intellectual certitude is engendered by the truth; grace is a kind of passive intellection, while intellection is an active or participative grace. We could also say this: Revelation and intellection are the poles of faith, one being objective and macrocosmic, the other subjective and microcosmic: but Revelation also has an aspect of intellection, and intellection for its part an aspect of Revelation. Indeed, Revelation is as it were the intellection—or the intellect—of the collectivity, in the sense that it compensates for the absence of intellectual intuition, not in an individual, but in a human collectivity subject to given conditions. By contrast, intellectual intuition is as it were Revelation within the individual; that is to say, that

which is Revelation with regard to "a humanity"[2] will be, analogously, intellection for an individual, and conversely. If every man possessed intellect, not merely in a fragmentary or virtual state, but as a fully developed faculty, there would be no Revelations, since total intellection would be a natural thing; but as it has not been like this since the end of the Golden Age, Revelation is not only necessary but even normative in respect to individual intellection, or rather in respect to its formal expression. No intellectuality is possible outside the language of Revelation, a scriptural or oral tradition, although intellection can occur, as an isolated miracle, wherever the intellective faculty exists; but an intellection outside tradition will have neither authority nor efficacy. Intellection has need of occasional causes in order to become fully aware of itself and be exercised unfettered; therefore in milieus that are practically speaking deprived of Revelation—or forgetful of the sapiential significances of the revealed Word—intellectuality exists in general only in a latent state; even where it is still affirmed despite everything, perceived truths are made inoperative by their too fragmentary character and by the mental chaos which surrounds them. Revelation is for the intellect like a principle of actualization, expression, and control; the revealed "letter" is in practice indispensable in intellectual life, as we have already said.

Allusion was made above to the respective positions of Christianity and Islam: the great extrinsic arguments of Christian faith are, "in time", the prophecies, and "in space", the miracles; the coming of Christ is itself the miracle par excellence. By contrast, the arguments of Moslem faith are, first of all the evidence[3] of the transcendent and creating Unity and secondly the normative and universal character of the unitary Revelation; this Revelation is normative because it rests on the natural properties of things with a realism that puts everything in its place and avoids confusing realms and levels; and it is universal because it seeks to teach only what has been taught for all time. "In space", it might be said, the argument of Islam is its character of being a norm, which in its way embraces all the religions, since it retraces their essential

[2] Every Revelation is addressed, in principle, to man and so to humanity as a whole; but in fact, it concerns only "one humanity", because of the segmentation of humankind and the mental incompatibilities which result from it; this partial humanity takes the place of the totality of humankind.

[3] The French word *évidence* is often translated as "evidence" in this and related passages; but it is necessary to have in mind that in such contexts the word comprises the two meanings of "evidentness" (or self-evidence) and "testimony" (Translator's note).

positions, and "in time" the argument is the continuity or invariability of the Message, that is to say the fact that every preceding Message, from Adam to Jesus, is none other than submission (*islām*) to the One (*Allāh*). "In space", Islam appears thus as a polyvalent pattern; "in time", it presents itself as a restoration of what has been before it, since the creation of man. Let us note that altogether analogous formulations could be made, *mutatis mutandis*, taking Christian gnosis as the starting point: the mystery of the Word in fact embraces every possible Revelation, every truth is necessarily manifested in terms of Christ and on his model; this perspective is nonetheless more veiled than the corresponding perspective in Islam by reason of the predominance of historical fact; it is true that Muhammad, too, appears as such a fact, but the unitary perspective of Islam comprises an extrinsically "leveling" character which greatly diminishes the terrestrial uniqueness of the Prophet.[4] The "unification" (*tawhīd*) contained in Islam is accompanied by a "leveling" in time and space; as Unity determines and absorbs everything, no fact can be "absolutely unique".

We could also say that for Islam God—intrinsic Reality and universal Cause—"has always been" God; and the intelligence—principle and organ of faith—"has always been" the intelligence; in other words, the Truth—the reflection of God in the intelligence, or the latter's participation in God—"has always been" the Truth, so that no religion can be "new". It is this idea or this sentiment which gives the Moslem his quasi-organic conviction of the sureness of his religion's foundations, while the analogous sentiment for the Christian is based on the divine character of Christ, as well as on the fulgurant intelligibility of his work of redemption. In Christianity, everything depends on recognizing the saving efficacy of the divine "lifeline" attaching oneself to it with all one's being and despite the world; in Islam, everything depends on opening one's eyes to the unitary light and following it everywhere: in the accidental, where it puts everything in its place, and in the essential, where it transforms and liberates. The difference as regards "original sin", is that Christianity identifies man with his will, whence the absolute

[4] Thus the attestation that "Muhammad is the Messenger of God" (*Muhammadun Rasūlu 'Llāh*) embraces, according to Moslem theology, the attestation of all the Messengers; on the other hand, however, the fact that the Prophet is the last of the line and the "Seal of Prophecy" (*Khātam an-nubuwwah*) introduces into Islam something of that "uniqueness of manifestation" which is characteristic of Christianity, and which must be found in every religion to some degree or other, religion having by definition a "central" character. If Islam attenuates and neutralizes the absoluteness of the Prophet by accepting a series of preceding and equivalent prophets, the same is true and even more so of the avataric doctrine in Hinduism and Buddhism, which admits a plurality or even a multitude of "incarnations".

and hereditary character of Adam's fall, whereas Islam identifies man with his mind—the intelligence which raises man above the animal—whence the relative nature of the "fall"; "infidelity" comes from the intelligence being submerged by the passions, and it is the predisposition to this decadence which is hereditary, and not the state of submersion. Christianity grasps the fall in its cause, which belongs to the will, Adam having betrayed his intelligence by his corruptible will, whence the crucial function, in this perspective, of sacrifice. Islam, by contrast, considers the "fall" only in its effects—the passions, which may exist or not exist—putting the accent on the incorruptibility of intelligence as such: the latter, in fact, cannot be corrupted in its true nature, but it can be buried beneath the passions, which come of a corrupted will; now unitary faith canalizes and neutralizes the passions "from without" by the Law (*sharī'ah*), and dissolves them "from within" by the Path (*tarīqah*) or by Virtue (*ihsān*), which implies detachment with regard to the (idolatrous) "associations" of this world.[5]

It should be noted in this connection that Islam combines the Mosaic law of retaliation with the charity of Christ, the latter concerning more particularly what is immortal in man, and the former the earthly collectivity. Islam, like Judaism, recognizes the divine element in the "law of the jungle": this law of the strongest is the expression of the biological equilibrium of species, hence of the vital economy of nature; and as man incontestably has an aspect of animality since he has a body and reproduces himself, multiplying and eventually degenerating, the "law of the jungle"—or rather "natural selection"—necessarily governs him to some extent, and especially

[5] The fact that Islam "avoids" the "original sin" aspect, basing itself on that which defines man and which thus gives him a "relatively absolute" character, namely intelligence or responsibility—this fact appears clearly in a rite such as ablution: it seizes original stain, not in its cause, since Islam does not take this into consideration, but in its effects, the physical impurities of fallen man (*bashar*); the original stain is thus neutralized through the contact with God, but its definitive elimination belongs to knowledge (*ma'rifah*). This neutralization is brought about through the medium of water—sometimes through sand or a stone—because the elements, being simple, are incorruptible; the rite restores to them, for the time being, their Edenic and purifying reality. Christianity, which takes the original stain as being essential in man since he is considered in his volitive nature—the intelligence then becoming secondary, except in gnosis where it is an emanation of the Word—Christianity, we say, takes sin from the point of view of its very intentionality, thus in its cause and in its center, and does so through the medium of confession, which in principle purifies the soul definitively. If we may speak without euphemism, but also without intending censure, we would add that a certain kind of Christian mysticism is not far removed from seeing in unintelligence, ugliness, and uncleanness something like spiritual values, evidently connected with love, suffering, inner purity, heroic humiliation; but since this way of seeing things is clearly not exclusive, it is not surprising that other perspectives, for example that of Islam, should adopt a different point of view and deliberately lay stress on intelligence and beauty, as also on cleanliness, in this case ritual cleanliness; this point of view cannot fail to be affirmed also in the climate of Christianity.

in his collective life;[6] to deny this would be to confuse the earth with Heaven and to attribute to men the status of angels. But this law, precisely because it reflects on its own level the nature of things and exists only by reason of the collectivity, could not by itself obstruct the spirituality of the individual,[7] and all the less so since tradition always leaves doors open for certain vocational liberties—hermits, pilgrims, and monks live outside society—and since the quality of *homo sapiens* or of "rational animal" combined with the virtue of charity can and should compensate the rigors of biological fatality. As for the apparent injustices in the latter, it must not be forgotten that in a world still traditional[8] though already chaotic, spiritual superiority definitively prevails over simple force, so that the law of "vital economy" is compensated by a law of the spirit.[9]

To sum up, the Islamic—or more precisely the Sufi—path presents itself as a reduction of diversity to Unity or of form to Essence, just as, on an outward plane, Islam appears as the coordination of a chaos around a center or as the transmutation of a disordered movement into a rhythm. Christianity, for its part, is essentially the entry—or the descent—of the Principle into the cosmos, the Divine into the human, with a view to deification, namely the reintegration of the human into the Divine. The Christian mystery is "incarnation" and "crucifixion": sanctity is like

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[6] It may be observed that there are certain tribes of noble character who live partly by plunder and people feel indignant at this moral contradiction, as if these tribes were alone in appropriating other people's goods, which they do moreover not without some generosity. Brigandage is the imperialism of nomads, just as imperialism is the brigandage of large nations.

[7] This is shown for example in the teaching of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, which is contemplative and warlike at the same time, and above all in the case of saintly monarchs.

[8] We say "in a world still traditional", an all-important reservation, because in the modern world the equilibrium between the "normal forces" has been broken, so that the aggressive use of force no longer retains any aspect of relative legitimacy; the "jungle", the creation of God, is replaced by the "machine", the creation of man; the "tacit understanding" between the jungle and the spirit is abolished in favor of an iconoclastic and hypocritical materialism, which seeks to justify itself by a humanitarian, but worldly and anti-spiritual idealism. From another standpoint, it is obvious that the law of the strongest, which is always relative and conditional, cannot provide the least excuse for baseness, perfidious lying, and cowardly treachery; the jungle offers no examples of these specifically human possibilities.

[9] The victory of Judaeo-Christian monotheism over the Greco-Roman and barbarian worlds, and that of Buddhism and Islam over the Mongols, not forgetting the spiritual resistance of Hinduism against the Moslem potentates, prove that the victors "according-to-this-world" always end either by being absorbed, or by being neutralized, as the case may be, by forces which are not "of-this-world". In the case of the opposition between Hinduism and Islam, the latter appeared only in its quality of conquering power, at least to the extent that Hinduism still possessed sufficient vitality, and apart from the spiritual radiation of the Sufis with respect to the Vishnuites. What is disconcerting from the Christian point of view in the person of Muhammad, is that the Prophet incarnates at one and the same time both the law of the spirit and that of the "jungle"; we could say the same of the Jewish Prophets, but in this case the Christian point of view would hold God responsible for the "jungle", which from the Moslem angle would obviously seem to be an inconsistency.

unto the incarnation of the Word in the body of the Virgin, who prefigures the soul in the state of grace; it is the "Christ liveth in me" of Saint Paul. But the ego is crucified, it expiates the darkness of the world, therefore the injunction to "resist not evil" (Matt. 5:39); this crucifixion is death to sin—to idolatrous desire[10]—and the birth of God within us. And this is important: whereas Islam places itself at a viewpoint according to which the world is in God in such a way that man is never cut off from God by a quasi-existential disgrace, the link being in the nature of things and not in some condition which may or may not be, Christianity, for its part, on the contrary envisages the cosmic drama from the angle of the "moral" fissure between God and man—an "infinite" fissure—so that the repairing intermediary is everything. But there can be no watertight partitions between the different "rhythms" of the Spirit; the forms which Truth may assume are so many mirrors reflecting one another.

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According to Ibn Hanbal, any man who maintains that the whole of faith is created is an infidel; the uncreate element in faith reappears in the gnosis of Christianity, and also, though in objective or "separative" mode, in grace as understood by the Orthodox. For the Salimiyah—a school founded by the Sufi Sahl At-Tustari—wisdom is identical with faith: "God is Faith", that is to say Wisdom or Intellect; the perfection of faith—union—consists in becoming conscious of the divine "I", a perspective which rejoins that of the Vedantists. In the same order of ideas, but on a more external plane, certain Moslem theologians do not hesitate to assert that faith is valid only on condition that its intellectual proofs are known,[11] which shows that faith here has its roots in

[10] Crucifixion also symbolizes the oppression of the Intellect by the passions: it is God in us who is martyred by our downfall. Let us recall in this connection that Christ, being the wisdom of the Father—or the "consciousness" of the divine Being—represents the Intellect in the three respects of the metacosmic, the macrocosmic, and the microcosmic: the pure Intellect, which enlightens man, is a "Christic" mode just as is the universal Intellect which enlightens and sustains the world, and as is *a fortiori* the divine Intellect, which is the intrinsic light of God; the macrocosmic and the microcosmic rays are "created" and "uncreate" at one and the same time, just as Christ is "true man and true God". The perspective of gnosis is centered on the Intellect: "God is Light", says the Gospel and "I am the light of the world"; "the light shineth in darkness"; "this is life eternal, that they might know thee".

[11] We might speak here of "rational proofs", but it is necessary to take account of the following: just as, in Catholic theology, the intelligence is "accidentally" the reason owing to a collective situation, so too evidence, in Moslem theology, is "accidentally" rational owing to the very plane of exoterism. According to Abu Abdallah As-Sanusi

evidence,[12] in the inward pole, not in the historical fact. However, the "obscurity" of faith is still maintained here by the fact that it is *a priori* a matter of exoterism: "No imagination attains it, no reason grasps it, no creature resembles it", says the famous theological treatise of Ahmad At-Tahawi, and: "He who desires to know what is closed to him and whose reason is not satisfied with a state of resignation is, by his very desire, separated from union with God, from pure knowledge and true faith; he oscillates between infidelity and faith. . .".[13] This is not a denial of gnosis, for a distinction must be made between "understanding" what the Intellect reveals and "wishing to understand" what it does not reveal. The whole distinction here is in the gap between "understanding" and "willing" or, provided a sense of proportion is preserved, between an attitude that is "prophetic" and one that is "promethean"; one can be forbidden, not

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(who is not to be confused with the much later founder of the Sanusi brotherhood), "intellectual judgment operates essentially according to three modes, in conformity with its objects: the necessary, the impossible, and the possible. The necessary is that of which the absence is inconceivable; the impossible is that of which the existence cannot be conceived; the possible is that which, according even to natural intelligence, may either be or not be. Now every man subject to the duty of faith (that is to say every human being who has attained the age of reason) also has the duty, according to the divine Law, of knowing what must be affirmed on the subject and finally what (being possible without being necessary) can be said of God (in such or such a respect)" (*Aqīdat ahl at-tawhīd as-sughrā*, "Little Catechism"). A later authority, Muhammad Al-Fudali, expresses himself thus: "Every Moslem must know fifty dogmas, each with its general and (even) particular proofs; according to authoritative opinion, the general proof is enough. When, for example, someone asks: What is the proof of the reality (the 'existence', *wujūd*) of God? The answer will be: creatures. Do these latter prove the reality of God by their contingence or by their becoming in time? Now if the man who is questioned does not indicate this distinction but is content with the reference to creatures, his proof will be general, which is enough from the point of view of the Law. Faith according to the authority (of another) is to accept the fifty dogmas without knowing their general and particular proofs. Some (the Asharites) have held the opinion that faith according to authority (alone) discloses a (legally) insufficient knowledge of the (revealed) faith, for example, Ibn Al-`Arabi (the jurist, not the Sufi) and As-Sanusi (the theologian); in their view, faith according to authority (alone) amounts to infidelity (*kufr*)" (*Kifāyat al-awwāmmi fīmā yajibu 'alayhim min 'ilm al-kalām*, "Sufficient Catechism"). Further on in the same treatise we find the following declaration: "By understanding (of the proofs of God) the (sane-minded) Moslem leaves the bonds of the faith by authority; he who has only this (blind) faith falls into everlasting fire, according to the doctrine of Ibn Al-'Arabi and of As-Sanusi". It is not the divergence of view on the subject of hell which matters to us here (the rigorists are right about the cases where ignorance of canonical proofs is a matter of voluntary negligence due to indifference and pride), but what is important is the unanimous disapproval of blind faith. Nevertheless, this faith by authority (*īmān al-muqallid*) is considered sufficient for the simple by the Hanafite and Malikite theologians.

[12] The intellectual—and thereby the rational—foundation of Islam results in the average Moslem having a curious tendency to believe that non-Moslems either know that Islam is the truth and reject it out of pure obstinacy, or else are simply ignorant of it and can be converted by elementary explanations; that anyone should be able to oppose Islam with a good conscience quite exceeds the Moslem's power of imagination, precisely because Islam coincides in his mind with the irresistible logic of things. Within the same order of ideas, it is significant that some Moslem theologians consider that Christianity corresponds to sentiment and Islam to reason.

[13] In the same way Abu Zayd Al-Qayrawani teaches in his *Risālah*: "Among these obligations is faith with the heart, and testimony with the tongue, concerning the truth that God is a unique Divinity: there is no divinity outside Him; he has no like, no equal, no son, no father, no companion, no associate; he has neither beginning nor ending; the essence of his qualities escapes the description of men; human reflections cannot contain him. Those who reflect derive a teaching from his signs (*āyāt*, the symbols of nature); but they cannot penetrate his Essence, nor understand anything of is Knowledge beyond what he permits".

indeed to know, but to seek to discover by processes of reasoning what reason is incapable of attaining by its own means. The rights of intellection remain imprescriptible: a *hadīth* in fact teaches that "God has created nothing better than the intelligence, nothing more perfect, nothing more beautiful; the blessings that God grants are due to it (since it determines freedom of choice); understanding comes from it, and the wrath of God strikes him who despises it".[14]

Christianity puts the emphasis on grace without however excluding the help of reason, since the latter exists, whereas for Islam reason has a position necessarily connected with faith and in its way prefigures the intellect. For Christianity, the blessed in Heaven have faith no longer, since they have the beatific vision: believing is essentially accepting without seeing. Islam, while clearly admitting this definition—but in the sense of an earthly accidentality—insists rather on the content of faith and on our relationship with it: since neither this content, nor our union with this content ceases in the hereafter—quite the contrary—faith is common to those who dwell on earth and in Heaven. Here below it is "acceptance" and "conviction", and it increases or diminishes, not as regards its content but solely from the point of view of certitude; acceptance is dogmatic and static; conviction is spiritual and dynamic, it is not subject to any religious restriction. "There is but one (sole) faith: the faithful are equal in principle (through the acceptance of the truth); pre-eminence among them depends only on sincerity (of conviction) and (consequently) on mortification of the passions" (At-Tahawi). The word "sincerity" (*ikhlās*) here means the tendency towards the most inward and purest truth (*haqīqah*); the opposite of this sincerity is hypocrisy (*nifāq*). Just as sincerity is synonymous with intellectual and mystical profundity, so is hypocrisy synonymous with superficiality and lukewarmness, and that is why a man is called a hypocrite (*munāfiq*) who professes an opinion which indirectly infringes the doctrine of Unity; in other words, the hypocrite is the man who is morally or intellectually "inconsistent", sincerity being the "sense of consistency", but in depth.

[14] "Faith and intelligence are brothers (masc. in Arabic); God does not accept one of them without the other". This saying of Sayyidna Ali is characteristic of the perspective in question, which puts the emphasis on the intellective element of faith rather than its volitive element. "Abu Bakr said: When I see a thing I see God before it. Omar replied: When I see a thing, I see God behind it. Othman said: When I see a thing, I see God in it. And Ali: When I see a thing, I see God". This tale refers again to the intellective side of faith, and the degree expressed by Sayyidna Ali corresponds to the realization of gnosis; the other points of view indicate the different intellectual junctions between the relative and the Absolute, or the various possible procedures of thought and intuition.

Moslem faith embraces in its own way what Christianity calls the "theological virtues",[15] as also virtue in action, for acts of virtue are then being connected with faith in the sense that they increase it—in respect of "conviction" or "sincerity", not in respect of dogmatic "acceptance"—while acts of disobedience diminish it.[16] There is no faith (*īmān*) without submission (religious submission, *islām*)—says Abu Hanifah—and no submission without faith". According to a *hadīth*, "the most excellent faith is to love him who loves God, to hate him who hates God,[17] to use the tongue ceaselessly in repeating the Name of God, to treat men as you would wish them to treat you and to reject for others what you would reject for yourselves". Now what makes faith most excellent is virtue (spiritual virtue, *ihsān*): it is thanks to virtue that faith results in the "knowing" which is "being", at the "Oneness (or indivisibility) of Reality" (*wahdat al-Wujūd*).

The fact that a religious proof seems to be addressed *a priori* to reason does not mean that it is therefore purely rational, or even rationalist, which is to say that its conclusion has no transcendent factor to guarantee it. The canonical argument, if it is addressed in the first place to reason, since it must take account of all degrees of understanding, is nonetheless guaranteed in its intrinsic truth by two properly "supernatural" factors, namely the Revelation which authenticates it, and the intellection from which it proceeds; these two factors are universal and not individual, the first in an "objective" manner in relation to the human microcosm, and the second in a "subjective"—or inward manner—in relation to the dogma, which comes "from above". Profane philosophy is ignorant not only of the value of truth and universality in Revelation, but also of the transcendence of the pure Intellect;[18] it entails therefore no guarantee

[15] Faith, hope, and charity. Faith has for its subject primarily intelligence and secondarily the will: it concerns God insofar as he is the author of grace (here below) and of glory (in the hereafter). Hope and charity have the will as subject: hope is concerned with God insofar as he is our beatitude, and charity is concerned with him insofar as he is perfect and lovable in himself.

[16] "It is necessary to believe that faith consists in testimony by word, in purity of heart, and in actions of the organs (of sensation and of action); that it increases or diminishes in proportion to works, for they are capable of impoverishing or enriching it; that oral testimony of faith is perfect only when it is accompanied by acts; that every word and every action are of value only through their intention; that words, acts, and intentions are of value only if they conform to traditional practice" (*sunnah*, teaching and example of the Prophet) (The *Risālah* of Al-Qayrawani).

[17] In the sense—which is moreover the Gospel sense—of a "lesser charity" or a "conditional charity". Charity imposes no obligation to love error or vice; one must love men as such but not insofar as they are bad, that is to say insofar as they hate God. The Gospel demands the "hating of parents" with a view to loving God alone, although, in another respect, it clearly requires that they should be included in love of the neighbor by reason of the love God has for man.

[18] For example, the Cartesian *Cogito* is neither conformable to Revelation, nor the consequence of a direct intellection: it has no scriptural basis, since according to Scripture the foundation of existence is Being and not some experience or other; and it lacks inspiration, since direct intellective perception excludes a purely empirical process

of truth on any level, for the quite human faculty which reason is, insofar as it is cut off from the Absolute, is readily mistaken even on the level of the relative. The efficacy of reasoning is essentially conditional.

The traditional proofs of dogmas are irrefutable within the framework of the mentality to which they are addressed; but they lose their sufficient reason, either entirely or partially, outside this mentality and the dogmatic formulations which correspond to it. It should be noted that a collective mentality does not always coincide with an ethnic group,[19] but that it depends also on certain psychological and spiritual conditions which may occur in the most diverse races having no apparent link between them; it is these psychological conditions—whatever their causes—which determine the "mental style" of a human group. This style is characterized, among other things, by some particular need for causality; also, the traditional dialectic is addressed not to the problems posed by an individual, but to the natural mentality of a collectivity, that is to say to a need for causal explanations which will be "acceptable to God" because it is "natural" and not artificial.

When we affirm that a proof of God is intrinsically irrefutable, we take no account, of course, of its apparent vulnerability, for it is clear that an artificial process of reasoning can contradict anything; but in this we are not interested in the least, any more than in the physical possibility of throwing a sacred book into the fire. There are three essential points which must never be lost sight of: firstly, that a truth is true not because it can be demonstrated, but because it corresponds to a reality; secondly, that there is no possible demonstration which can satisfy every need of causality, given the fact that such need can be artificial; thirdly, that someone who will not be satisfied by a doctrinal demonstration can always claim that some truth—which for him will be a hypothesis—has not been demonstrated, or that it is false in itself, and so on. But every demonstration of a truth is in principle accessible to the man who knows this truth in a

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of reasoning. When Locke says *Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu*, the statement is false in the same two respects; firstly, Scripture affirms that the intellect derives from God and not from the body—for man, "made in the image of God", is distinguished from animals by the intelligence, not by the senses—and secondly, the intellect conceives of realities which it does not discern *a priori* in the world, though it may seek their traces *a posteriori* in sensory perceptions.

[19] The mental conditioning of Christianity or of Islam is much less ethnical than that of Judaism or of Confucianism, although the racial heritage no doubt never quite disappears; Europe has been "Judaized" by Christianity just as part of Asia has been "Arabized" by Islam, but these racial influences were possible only in function of psychological conditions far more generalized.

direct way, even if the dialectical contingencies belong to a system of thought other than his own.

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An example of the relative or conditional character of canonical proofs is the following text of Fudali: "God makes no use of an instrument in any activity. He is the Independent One (*Ghaniy*) in the absolute sense. The proof (of the divine Oneness) shows moreover that there is nothing outside the divine which can be really causative, for example the burning of fire . . . it is rather God who creates the burning in the object seized by the fire, even on each particular occasion. . . . He then who believes that it is the fire which causes the burning by virtue of its nature is an infidel (because he denies the uniqueness of the divine Cause by associating another cause with it). . . . And he who believes that the fire causes the burning by virtue of a particular force which God created in it, is astray and a hypocrite,[20] since he has not grasped the proper meaning of the doctrine of the Oneness of God". We have here a striking example of the spirit of alternatives characteristic of the Semitic and Western mentalities: in order to be able to affirm one essential aspect of truth, other aspects must be denied, although they would in no way derogate from the principle to be demonstrated. The Islamic theory of causative Oneness is entirely right in its positive content, but its theological formulation would be unacceptable to a Christian or a Hindu: to the former because his religion, based on the Trinity, has no need to insist on the causative Oneness, quite the contrary, and to the latter because the Western spirit of rigorous alternatives does not affect him. But the pure Semite must always guard against the danger of divinizing natural forces and thereby excluding ontological Unity.

Another example: "The fourth quality which of necessity pertains to God (God being, firstly real, secondly without origin, thirdly without end) is otherness in relation to temporal (created) things. . . . If God resembled a temporal thing in some particular point, he himself would also have to be as temporal as that thing: for what is said about one of two things which coincide in kind is valid also for the other. . . . Since the temporal condition is denied for God,

[20] Let us recall that "hypocrisy" is synonymous with superficiality and is the opposite of "sincerity"; the attestation of Unity (*lā ilāha illā 'Llāh)* is deemed to oblige the "sincere" believer (*mukhlis*) to see things in the light of Unity.

His otherness in relation to temporal things is affirmed. Consequently, there is no similitude, in any point, between God and temporal things. This is the general proof which it is a religious duty for every Moslem to know" (Fudali). Here again the spirit of alternatives appears distinctly: the idea that God as such, as Essence, is absolutely other than the world, here excludes the idea—which is nonetheless just as true, though independent of the unitary perspective—that things can, or even must, resemble God in respect of his Qualities, for it would otherwise be impossible to affirm, as does the Koran, that "God is the Light of the Heavens and of the earth"; a Hindu would even go so far as to say that visible light "is"—on a given level of manifestation—the divine Light. Of course, the canonical proofs of Islam are all that they ought to be, since they are addressed to a particular collective mentality; of necessity they are so formulated as to avoid such errors as are possible given the mentality under consideration. The metaphysician, for his part, will easily find the complementary and corrective aspects of the proofs in question, basing himself on the very formulations of the Koran; the sacred texts are never fundamentally at the mercy of mental contingencies, for being divine they are of necessity universal.

It cannot escape the theologians that the very existence of symbolism—which is by definition based on real analogies between the divine and cosmic orders—contradicts the exclusive aspect of the proof quoted; their reply to this objection would be that physical luminosity is of a totally different nature from divine Light; this suffices for the simple but it resolves nothing, since the terminology itself proves that there is analogy, hence "relative identity". To say that God is Light, but that light in no way resembles God is pure and simple contradiction; however, it can be said that divine Light differs absolutely from created light, whereas created light resembles divine Light, an elliptical formula which logically appears absurd, but which contains a doctrine all the more profound. In any case, the use of one and the same word to designate both a created quality and an uncreated quality proves that there is not a total difference in every respect; it might perhaps be possible to do justice to all shades of meaning by negation and saying that if the sun is luminous, God will be "non-dark", a subtlety which is far from useless for him who understands it. Dialectical precautions always become necessary where the level of understanding is too rational; if one were speaking to men of the Golden Age, one could say without hesitation that "the light is God", one could even "worship the sun", or at least seem to do so.

But let us now consider an example drawn from Christianity: “If any man says that finite things, be they corporal or spiritual, or at any rate spiritual, have emanated from the divine Substance, or that the divine Essence, by its manifestations or evolutions, becomes all things, or finally that God is the universal and undefined Being who, in determining himself, constitutes the totality of things which are divided into genders, species, or individuals, let him be anathema” (Council of the Vatican I, *De Deo*. can. 3 & 4). Here again we see the restrictions of the spirit of alternatives, that is to say the inaptitude of reason for bringing together antinomic truths, whence the choice of the most important aspect—or the most opportune—to the detriment of secondary or inopportune truths. In reality, the fact that the world is in no way the divine Substance as such by no means prevents the cosmic substance from being in its own way a modality of the metacosmic Substance, without the reverse holding good: the Substance of God is in no way affected, either in the sense of extension or reduction, by the substance of the world; which substance is “in a certain way” something of the divine Substance, but the latter is in no way the former. The pot is of clay, clay is not the pot; only the doctrine of the degrees of Reality can account for this play of metaphysical relationships. But the chief consideration for theology is to prevent reason, to which it is generally addressed, from following its natural limitations in the face of mysteries and attributing to the world a directly divine quality; reason, by its nature, has no simultaneous vision of realities which go beyond its range, so that antinomic expressions easily lead it into error. Reason obtains knowledge like a man walking about and exploring a countryside by successive discoveries, whereas the intellect contemplates the same countryside from a mountain height—an image inadequate in several respects, but nonetheless instructive as regards the essential point. Reason is capable of combining divergent perspectives within its own field, the natural or the general, but incapable of so doing beyond this level; now theology cannot presuppose direct intellection; it is always determined by three factors: dogma, from which it is derived, reason, to which it is *a priori* addressed, and the collectivity, whose spiritual interest is its own.

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Now, if a given form of evidence—not evidence in itself—cannot be polyvalent, human receptacles being providentially diverse, the same can be said of the persuasive value of an argument drawn from the historical and miraculous object of faith; we mean that the superhuman and perfect character of the God-Man does not furnish an absolute argument against the sacred doctrines belonging to another perspective, any more than does the evidence of the Islamic testimony of Unity.[21] Indeed, a distinction must be made, in the case of the God-Man, between superhuman nature and terrestrial form or function; the function of Christ having been the Redemption, and therefore sacrifice, it was impossible for him not to suffer, although, from the Buddhist point of view, for example, in which suffering essentially is the ransom for the imperfection of existence, this capacity to suffer appears as an imperfection. This in no way means that Buddhism excludes an understanding of the express function which suffering, and therefore passibility, assumed for Christ, but solely that the Buddhist perspective starts from a truth for which the human position of Christ does not *a priori* present itself as being an intelligible aspect of perfection.[22] The converse is equally true, and that by the force of things: for the Christian perspective, the position of the Buddha has an aspect of imperfection, because of the apparently "rational" and "empirical" character of the Buddhist path, and despite the impassive serenity of the Blessed One, which here will seem like philosophical stoicism. Analogous comments could be applied to each of the great Messengers, notably also to the Prophet: from the Christian point of view he seems too "earthly", whereas this aspect, to the extent that it corresponds to a reality and so loses any pejorative sense, results from the particular character of the mission of Muhammad, which consists in reintegrating the human into the universal rather than exclusively in introducing the divine into the human. If Islam does not misinterpret Christ as Christians misinterpret the Prophet, this is because the Person of Jesus has

[21] Jews and Christians will say that they possess the same evidence, but what is at issue here is the function that this evidence assumes in their spiritual perspectives. Judaism emphasizes the covenant between the unique God and his chosen people, while Christianity veils Unity in the Trinity; but in neither case is the metaphysical comprehension of Unity in question.

[22] Meister Eckhart somewhere remarks that the movements of the soul in Christ and the Virgin were in no way contrary to impassibility, this not being a state of inertia. As an example, holy anger is a movement of concentration and not a going outside oneself; it is like an "incarnation" of the divine Wrath in the human microcosm, which must therefore be free from passionate anger. The inner criterion of holy anger is precisely calmness, whereas passionate anger carries away the entire being and brings forgetfulness of God; it has no center, that is to say it is entirely peripheral and dissipated. Holy anger exists only by virtue of a motionless center, an implacable truth which determines it; when driving the moneychangers from the Temple, Christ was impassible.

a place in Moslem dogma; however, while Christ is venerated in Islam as "Spirit of God" (*Rūh Allāh*) and "Seal of Sanctity" (*Khatām al-wilāyah*), he does not appear in this perspective as "God", and from the Christian point of view this amounts to a fundamental denial. But it is not our purpose to enlarge on these divergences; the essential point is to take note of a certain aspect of "non-perfection"—and there is no common measure between this aspect and human imperfections—which appears, from metaphysical necessity, in the outward function of the *Avatāra*. This truth can be illustrated as follows: if we start from the idea that the circle is the perfect geometrical figure, but that at the same time there must be different forms of perfection, we must conclude that no one of them can be another—otherwise they would not be different—and that, consequently, none of them can be the circle; however, each of the simple geometrical figures is perfect, without restriction, in relation to complex and asymmetrical figures, which here represent ordinary men. Let us say then that each *Avatāra* is intrinsically the circle, but that he is manifested by the force of things as a less perfect form; this form will nonetheless express circular perfection in the sense that each fundamental geometrical form—cross, square, triangle, spiral, pentagram—can be inscribed in a circle and manifests the circle's truth in its own way.

A distinction has been made above between the persuasive force of miracles as compared with intellectual evidence. These two positions, let us repeat, far from being mutually exclusive, always to some degree go hand in hand; it could be said, for example, that the objective or outward fact of Revelation is to the collectivity what the subjective or inward vision of intellection—in cases where it occurs—is to the individual. Thus both positions are true, each in its own way and within the framework of its ontological premises; and they are necessarily related, since on the one hand the sufficient reason of a miracle is to release an evidence, and on the other hand the miracle appears to intellectual certainty like a projection of itself onto the plane of facts and symbols.

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It is important to understand that dogmas possess, besides their doctrinal significance, a mystical or "alchemical" function, so that dogmatic divergences—insofar as it is a question of intrinsic

orthodoxy—correspond in a very broad sense to differences of spiritual method;[23] dogmas confer not only ideas, but also—and essentially—"ways of being". Certainly our comparison of different dogmatic systems—which are so constructed as to exclude one another and to avoid one another insofar as they are formal crystallizations—has something humanly "abnormal" about it, although doubtless it is inevitable in our times of universal intermingling and of cataloging all values. Indeed, man is made to know one sun alone and to live by it, and not to experience each of the innumerable suns of the galaxy and of other nebulae; Providence has enclosed man in one traditional system just as she has enclosed him in one solar system. But that does not alter the fact either that the diversity of spiritual systems is metaphysically as necessary as that of the cosmic systems, or that there are situations in which man cannot but be aware of this.

[23] It is important not to confuse religious antagonisms with the clashes between the old civilizations and modern ideas which are so wrongly charged against Christianity. How can one not see, in the following passage from the Gospels, a prophetic allusion to a religious proselytism which, imbued as it is with the illusions of our times, spoils with one hand what it gives with the other: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matt. 23:15).

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