THE SPIRITUAL LIFE AS FAITH-COMMITMENT IN THE QUR'ĀN

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The spiritual life refers to a realm of existence distinct from the physical and organic in man. The classical use of spirit points to something difficult to analyze and yet essential to the person — a vivifying element in one's nature. The spirit is that which is most oneself and yet which one cannot dominate. To the biblical writers spirit in the natural man is explainable only by some kind of direct contact with the Creator in his coming to be (Is 42:5; Acts 17. 24f). Scripture also affirms a communication between man's self-conscious, inner life — his spirit — with the spirit of God (1 Cor 2:ff; Phlm 25). On this communication is based the conception of a spiritual life in man — especially of the renewed and redeemed life of Christian belief.

In an inclusive sense the spiritual life is a life concerned with religious values and lived with some intensity. Evelyn Underhill gives a more restricted definition:

... from the human point of view, a spiritual life is a life which is controlled by a gradually developing sense of the Eternal, of God and His transcendent reality: an increasing capacity for Him, so that our relation to God becomes the chief thing about us, exceeding and also conditioning our relationship with each other.1

For the Christian the spiritual life is man's affirmative response by faith to the revelation of God's love in Christ. Through Christ's redemptive action and the gifts of the Spirit one comes to share God's life by His unmerited help given through grace. The "yes"

of biblical faith has two aspects: (1) confidence that involves the whole man and is given to a "faithful" person, and (2) an act of the understanding by which words or signs open the way to knowledge of unseen realities. Faith is thus the source and the gateway of the spiritual life.

Union with God is the goal of the spiritual life. Those who live as morally adult persons become such by a life-attitude or fundamental option to accept or refuse God. For explicit Christians this option is an act of saving faith. But non-Christians also, by God's salvific will, live in a "salvation situation." These too are reached by God's call. If their response is submission to an Absolute by an acceptance of their existential situation, their self-surrender includes divine faith made possible through grace. Their positive answer is a personal commitment to God implying not only belief but also trust and obedience — an implicit Christian faith, incomplete like that of the just of the Old Testament. Their ancestral religion can help to develop in them the dispositions which prepare them to make a positive fundamental option. Evangelization, where this is possible, will remove the disagreement between their explicit outlook on life and the implicit reality of Christian grace operative in them.2

Even a superficial reading of the Qur'ān makes it clear that God is conceived there as a transcendent being, the living God of Abra- ham, Isaac, and Jacob. Passages that teach the basic virtues of con-trition, hope, detachment from material things, and love of God appear on almost every page and have in the past inspired high spiritual ideals in Muslims. The Qur'ān continually inculcates faith, the foundation and source of the spiritual life, as the most necessary and demanding of all virtues. It repeatedly describes faith as "life" and its privation as "death," so that in practice the spiritual life, as the Qur'ān conceives it, is identified with the life of faith.

In particular, six passages promulgated in the latter years of Muhammad's sojourn at Mecca and in the early years at Medina show faith to be a higher kind of God-given life:

(57th)3 20. 15-16/15-17 The Hour (of Final Judgment) is coming....


3. The present order of suras or chapters in the Qur'ān is not chronological. Here the ordinal preceding the number of the sura gives the approximate sequence
So do not let him who does not believe in it turn you aside from (belief in) it, so that you die.  

(62nd) 36. 10-12/9-11 It is all the same whether you warn them or not; they will not believe. You will warn only him who follows the Remembrance (the Qur’an) and who fears the Merciful in the Unseen. . . . It is We who bring the dead to life. . . .

(69th) 27. 80f/82f You will not make the dead listen nor will you make the deaf hear the call . . . nor will you lead the blind out of their error. You will make deaf only those who believe in Our signs. They are the self-surrendering ones. (See also (76th) 30. 52f/51f)

(88th) 35. 18-22/19-21 . . . you warn only those who fear their Lord in the Unseen and accomplish the (ritual) prayer . . . . The blind and the seeing are not alike, nor the darkness and the light . . . nor the living and the dead. . . . You will not make those in the tombs to hear.

(91st) 6. 122 Is one who was dead and whom We made to live like one . . . in darkness from which he does not emerge? So to disbelievers are made to seem fair the works they were doing.

These six texts clearly regard the faith-commitment as life and the state of disbelief as death. In contrast to Muhammad’s inability to produce faith in the “dead,” that is, the disbelievers who reject the Qur’an, 35. 22/21 speaks of those to whom God wills to give spiritual hearing. The Muslim commentator Tabarî understands the “one who was dead and whom We made to live” in 6. 122 as one to whom God grants faith and guides to Islam. In 20. 16/17 the death that would result from the skeptic’s persuasion is the death of disbelief. The other three passages, 27. 80f/82f, 30. 52f/51f, and 36. 10ff/9ff, all contrast the death of disbelief with the

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of the sura according to the calculation of Régis Blachère, based on the work of the Muslim commentators and that of several European Islamists. Verse numbers preceding the diagonal are those of the standard Egyptian edition of the Qur’an; those following are the numbers of Flügel’s edition.

| 1st-48th | First Meccan Period | 610-11 and 615-16 |
| 49th-70th | Second Meccan Period | 616-19 |
| 71st-92nd | Third Meccan Period | 619-22 |
| 93rd-116th | Medinan Period | 622-32 |

The Qur’an has 114 suras, but Blachère numbers 116. He comes to this figure by making Suras 74 and 96 into four suras, numbering Suras 73 and 76 as 34 and 34 bis, and omitting the 54th place in his ordering. See Régis Blachère, Le Coran: Traduction selon un essai de reclassification des sourates (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1947-51) 2, xv.

life of faith which only God can bring about.

The symbolism that runs throughout these passages is Scriptural. The New Testament portrays faith as life-giving, while disbelief is equivalent to spiritual death.

... the Son of Man must be lifted up, that ... whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life ... he who hears my word and believes him who sent me ... has passed from death to life. And you were buried with him (Christ) in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith. ... And you, who were dead in trespasses ... God made alive together with him. ...

The Bible also associates faith-life with light; the life lived in and by faith is strengthened and guided by heavenly light (Rom 13:11f; Eph 1:15-18). On the other hand, blindness and deafness symbolize hardness of heart and refusal to believe (Is 6:9f; Mt 13:13ff; Acts 28:26f). By self-inflicted darkness people become spiritually blind (Acts 26:18; 1 Jn 2:9ff; Jn 9:39) and finally spiritually dead.

Eight passages in the Qurʾān identify disbelief with deafness and blindness in various combinations. All these texts except three (21. 45/46; 25. 73; and 43. 40/39) occur in contexts that date from a year or two before or after the Hijra or Emigration of Muhammad from Mecca in the year 622, and Bell puts even the three exceptions around the same time. During these years the Qurʾānic pronouncements showed the influence of materials drawn especially from Jewish and Christian sources, less from the Bible and more from extracanonical writings like the Haggadah and the Apocryphal Gospels transmitted orally.

(63rd) 43. 40/39 Can you make the deaf hear or guide the blind or him who is in evident error. (See also (93rd) 2. 171/166; (89th) 7. 198/197; (86th) 10. 42f/43f; and (68th) 25. 73.)

(97th) 8. 21f Do not be like those who say, "We hear," but they do not

7. 2. 171/176; 6. 50; 7. 198/197; 8. 21f; 10. 42f/43f; 21. 45/46; 25. 73; and 43. 40/39.
hear. Indeed the worst of animals in God's sight are the deaf and the mute, who do not understand. (See also (67th) 21. 45/46.)

(91st) 6. 50 . . . I (Muhammad) follow only what is revealed to me (by God). Say (to the disbelievers, O Muhammad): Are the blind and the seeing man to be held equal? Will you not reflect?

In Sacred Scripture life is often associated with light, while darkness represents indifference to the truth or active resistance to it. Similar notions are common in the Qur'ān where deafness and blindness are linked with darkness to confirm the gravity of the sin of disbelief.

(91st) 6. 39 Those (disbelievers) who accuse Our signs (the Qur'ānic exhortations) of lying are deaf, dumb, and in darkness. . . .

(92nd) 13. 16/17 . . . Have the blind man and the seeing man become equal or have darkness and light become the same? . . .

The opposition between light and darkness is in fact by far the most common representation of faith versus disbelief in the Qur'ān as it is in Scripture. This opposition appears especially in suras which, like those comparing disbelief to deafness and blindness, date from around the Hijra. It is perhaps in this respect too that the Qur'ān most resembles the Bible in its positive portrayal of faith.

The symbolism of light is linked closely with the whole of biblical revelation. Light represents God, seen as the fulness of rational and moral truth. Knowledge of Him is the light of men and so darkness stands in opposition to both revelation and truth. It is God who brings mankind from darkness into light and from ignorance and moral depravity into truth and right guidance. Darkness that is self-inflicted can blind men to the truth and, if persisted in, can condemn them to eternal loss.

The Qur'ān, especially in the suras proclaimed at Medina, repeatedly stresses these ideas. It identifies faith in the Qur'ānic proclamation with light and moral guidance and associates disbelief with darkness and moral abandonment.

(93rd) 2. 257/258f God is the patron of those who believe. He brings them out of the darkness into the light. As for those who disbelieve,
their patrons are the idols (of Mecca) who bring them from light into darkness. They (the disbelievers) are the dwellers in hellfire to remain there forever. (See also (78th) 14. 1 and 5; (105th) 33. 43/42; (101st) 57. 9; and (103rd) 65.11.)

(116th) 5. 115f/18 People of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), Our Messenger (Muhammad) has already come to you. He will explain to you many things in Scripture which you have been concealing. He will also eliminate many (things). There has now come to you a light from God and a clear Book (the Qur'ān). By it God will guide in the ways of peace those who seek His good pleasure. He will bring them forth out of the darkness into the light by His decree and He will direct them to a straight path.

(107th) 24. 39f The works of disbelievers are like... the darkness on a vast and deep sea... He to whom God does not give light has no light at all.

(93rd) 2. 17f/16f They (the disbelievers of 2. 13/12) are like those who lit a fire. When it brought light to everything around, God took away their light and left them in darkness where they do not see. Deaf, dumb, blind, they do not withdraw (from their errors).

These texts give a brief but vivid picture of faith working in men's souls. God brings believers out of the darkness of disbelief into the daytime of faith. Satan, by leading them to idolatry, brings them out of the light of belief into the night of disbelief. Faith in the Qur'ānic proclamation brings peace, light, and God's good pleasure. Disbelief disrupts and obscures, leaving its victims adrift on a stormy sea clouded in hopeless darkness.

Even after they have been enlightened by faith, God may withdraw this gift from the unworthy and may leave them in the darkness of infidelity and error. The Muslim commentator Rāzī, in discussing elsewhere (in 27. 80/82f) those who blind themselves by disbelief, says that their condition comes from refusing to pay attention to any kind of proof. By their attitude they set themselves against the dispositions of submission and personal commitment which, with those of trust and obedience, are basic to the concept of Qur'ānic as well as Christian faith.

While Islam stresses the believer's personal commitment by obedience, it also exalts God's transcendence. Its official teaching makes God inaccessible and so commands the faithful believer to love God's law and His beneficence but not God Himself. Yet the
trust and fidelity that the Qur’ān sets up as ideals make it clear that God Himself is to be loved. The Qur’ān clearly proclaims this truth and the lives of many of Islam’s great ascetics and mystics have let it be seen in practice. As was true of faith, so the Qur’ānic texts that inculcate trust and loving obedience are to be found in suras promulgated in the latter years of Muhammad’s life.

(93rd) 2. 165/160 Some men choose idols instead of God and love them with a love like that due to God. Only believers love God more fervently. . . .

(93rd) 2. 186/182 When My servants ask you (O Muhammad) about Me, indeed I am near. I will hear the prayer of the suppliant when he cries out to Me. So let them make response to Me in faith that they may be led aright.

(99th) 3. 31/29 Say (O Muhammad): If you love God, follow me, and God will love you and forgive you your sins. God is forgiving and merciful.

(116th) 5. 54/59 O believers! Should any of you abandon his religion, God will raise up other people (in his place) whom He will love and who will love Him. . . . They will fight in God’s cause, not fearing any blame.

It is true, then, that the Qur’ān depicts reciprocal love between God and man. But this must be understood in the light of the general portrait which it draws of God. Then His love is seen as the fond feeling of a great Master or Owner of power (1. 4/3) for a loyal and trusted slave. The duty of love that man owes to God is discharged, in the opinion of orthodox Islam, by extolling Him and faithfully submitting to His will. The emotive depth of the Great Commandment of Deuteronomy 6: 5 and of the New Testament, to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might,” is absent from the Qur’ān and from orthodox Islamic practice.

8. The Arabic word used for love in these passages, habba (with the nominal form hubb) is that denoting spiritual affection. The term for erotic love or love based on sexual desire is ‘ashīqa (n. ‘ishq). It does not occur in the Qur’ān.