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The Experience of Revelation in the Islamic Religion

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Abstract. The concept of revelation is the fundamental basis of the great belief systems, being articulated and proclaimed within them. This manifestation of divinity then becomes the basis of authority in the religious realm. Religious authority refers to the divine right to introduce or impose upon people a system of beliefs, practices, or values. Islam claims its origins in the Abrahamic tradition and claims to preserve the true faith that Abraham professed. Islam states that it is based on the Abrahamic tradition and that it aims to preserve the true faith that Abraham professed. In this context, Islam aims to establish an authentic monotheism, excluding later developments of doctrine that might affect the original Abrahamic monotheism.

Keywords. Islamic Religion, revelation, God

At the foundation of the great belief systems that are articulated and proclaimed is the concept of revelation¹. By revelation is meant the divine manifestation to the human being so that he can acquire knowledge and enter into relationship with the divine.²

This act of self-disclosure later becomes the foundation of authority in religion. By religious authority is meant the divine right to introduce or impose on people a system of beliefs, practices or values. Islam claims to be based on Abrahamic roots and claims to preserve the true faith that Abraham professed. In this view, Islam aims to establish an authentic monotheism, eliminating later doctrinal developments that could compromise the original Abrahamic monotheism. From the perspective of Islamic intellectual and esoteric thought, Islam is seen as the result of a filtering of influences from Judaism and Christianity and is considered to be beyond duality. This religion has its origins in the last ten years of the life of the Prophet Muhammad, who lived until the year 632.

Muhammad was born around 570 AD. in Mecca, a city that is now in Saudi Arabia. In pre-Islamic Arabia, society was structured into tribes, and membership of a tribe and clan was of crucial importance. Muhammad's family was part of the Quraysh tribe, one of the dominant tribes in Mecca. Within the Quraysh tribe, Muhammad's family was part of the Hashim clan, which was respected and influential in Mecca.

Clans had a responsibility to ensure the protection and security of their members. They held a significant social and political role in the Arab community, and clan leaders exercised

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Christian Book Ed., Oradea, 1995, p. 137.

² *Ibidem*, p. 214.

authority and influence over tribal affairs and major decisions. Although Muhammad's family of the Hashim clan was not one of the wealthiest in Mecca, it held a certain position of prestige and respect in local society. This social position influenced Muhammad's experience and influence in the Arab community during his lifetime and later impacted the development of Islam as a religious and social movement in that region.³

The Islamic faith centers on belief in one God, called Allah, in the presence of angels and in the role of prophets, the most important being Muhammad. It also involves belief in the revealed holy books, the afterlife, the rewards for good deeds and the consequences of bad actions, and the existence of heaven and hell. Muhammad strongly conveyed this call for a return to natural religion, claiming that the divine message was communicated to him through the angel Gabriel. All praise and honor be to Allah, the Creator of all creation, of the heavens and the earth, master of light and darkness. I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah, the one and without partner. I acknowledge that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of Allah.⁴

I pray that the blessings and peace of Allah be upon Muhammad, who is considered the last and most important of all prophets and messengers. I also ask blessings and peace upon his family, his chosen ones, the members of his household and his high-quality companions, and upon all those who followed his teachings and lived in harmony with them until the day of judgment⁵.

The fundamental belief of Islam consists in the expression of faith by the formulation: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His prophet".⁶

The essence of the Islamic faith is found in the legal system known as Sharia, understood as "the right way".⁷

This is partially recorded in the Koran, the sacred text of Islam. When the Qur'an does not provide explicit guidance, the sunna principles are resorted to, which try to provide solutions consistent with the example left by Muhammad. These principles are recorded in hadith (tradition), and interpretation is also based on community consensus and analogy.

The Qur'an is considered to be a direct revelation, transmitted literally by the angel Gabriel to the prophet Muhammad. This text is seen as representing a perfect and final revelation, which replaces and at the same time preserves within itself elements of the Torah, Psalms and Gospels. The Koran comprises a total of 114 chapters, called "surahs". In the Qur'an it is stated: "In the Messenger of God you have a good example for anyone who believes in God and the Last Day and mentions God frequently." (XXXIII, 21). Thus, the figure of Muhammad quickly became a model, and his teachings, actions, and even his silences served as precedents on which to base the legitimacy of Muslim behavior in various situations. Starting from the information revealed in the Qur'an, the various Muslim theological schools reflected on the essential aspects of God: his uniqueness and internal unity. God's uniqueness is emphasized to distinguish him from the gods of polytheism and to differentiate him from the

³ Dominique Sordel and Janine Sourdell Thomine, *The Civilization of Classical Islam*, vol. I, translated by E. Filotti, Ed. Meridiane, Bucharest, 1975, p. 47.

⁴ Jean Delumeau, *Religions of the World*, Translated from French by: Angela Pagu, Carol Litm, Rodica Buburuzn, Bogdan Budeş, Dinu Luca, Florentina Vşan, Iulia Waniek, Toader Saulea, Carmen Stoea, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2014, p. 258.

⁵ Mahmud Shaltout, *Islamic Beliefs and code of Laws*, in "Islam - The straight Path", New York, 1958, p. 112

⁶ M. Dexter, *Islam*, Parallel 45, Bucharest, 2005, p. 61.

⁷ G. Filoramo, M. Masserzio, M. Raveri, P. Scarpi, *Handbook of the history of religions*, trans. By Mihai Elin, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p. 218.

God of Christians. In reality, the Qur'an, while emphasizing the importance of the prophetic mission of Jesus, rejects the concept of him as the Son of God, because it would threaten the oneness of God (in addition, the teaching of the Trinity will be firmly rejected).

Belief in God is the fundamental core of Islam: this religion is individualized by its radical theocentrism and, for those who convert, by its unconditional submission to God and His will. "There is no other god but God": in this formula the Islamic creed is essentially condensed.⁸ Muhammad repeats this statement constantly, emphasizing its centrality.

As is typical of a religion with an emphasis on juridical aspects, in which divine revelation tends to regulate a wide variety of aspects of daily life, the "tradition" accumulated in the sunna focuses on the entire complexity of the believers' lives, starting from their very sphere of religious practice. The Sunnah indeed focuses on the various aspects of cultural life. This includes details of methods of ritual purification (ablutions) and, to a wider extent, all aspects of ritual purity, which is essential to ensure proper observance of religious precepts. Through revelation, it is argued that the divine reveals itself to humanity, thereby enabling humanity to understand and enter into a relationship with it⁹.

This self-knowledge will later become the foundation of authority in religion, religious authority being understood as the divine right to introduce or impose upon people a system of beliefs, practices or values.¹⁰

Self-Revelation acquires meanings of an authoritative-normative nature through direct and tangible interaction with humanity, manifested in the form of a divine-human entity (such as Jesus Christ, God incarnate), a divine-human text (such as Holy Scripture) and of a divine-human institution (the Church). It is important to emphasize that divine revelation must be absolutely authentic and have universal authority, and to meet these criteria, it must be an independent, sovereign act of God and unaffected by the conditions existing in the created world.¹¹

Similar to Christianity, Islam claims its religious authority on the basis of divine revelation. The supreme entity (Allah) revealed himself through a human figure (Muhammad), and this revelation was recorded in a text that became the source of authority and norm for religion (the Qur'an). Since Islam perceives itself as the holder of an authentic revelation in which the most complete conception of Divinity is found, it builds its discourse related to society on the basis of the doctrinal foundations that outline all structures in this spiritual domain. Since in Islam it is not the messenger but the content of the message which reveals the divine truth that is considered to be the essential element, the importance is focused on the message itself, because from the Islamic perspective it possesses the intrinsic ability to support society and guide its progress towards worthwhile achievements.

Islamic universalist and esoteric thought conceives Islam as a filtered result of Judeo-Christian influences, placing itself in a context of unity, outside of duality.

⁸ Soheib Bencheikh el Hocine, *Introducing Islam*, in Philippe Gaudin (editor), *The Great Religions. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism*, translated by Sanda Aronescu, Bucharest, Orizonturi Publishing House, 1995, pp. 124-125.

⁹ George Fry, *King James, Islam: a survey of the Muslim faith*, Ed. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1981, p. 72.

¹⁰ Emilian Vasilescu, *History of Religions, Didactic and Pedagogical Ed.*, Bucharest, 1998, p.160.

¹¹ Mircea Eliade, *History of religious beliefs and ideas (vol III)*, Ed. Universitas, Chisinau, 1994, p. 69.

Islam rejects both the "evolution" of Jewish teachings and the "deviation" from Christian teachings.¹² It claims to have been born through the direct intervention of divine Will, which generated monotheism, and Muhammad's attitude was to rediscover Abrahamic monotheism¹³.

It is well known that Islam attaches special significance to Muhammad, even though it considers him to be just an ordinary man. It is true that the biblical information about Muhammad was limited and confusing, so it is possible to state that most of the content of his message was the result of approximations and confusions. However, it is evident that Muhammad's religious ideas gradually crystallized around the concept of a single Creator of the visible and invisible worlds, borrowing elements from both the Christian and the Judaic message.

Islam recognizes that the turning point for its beginnings is revelation, the moment when Muhammad, in meditation, perceives that he has received a special revelation from the Creator. This message contains a fundamental truth that Islam will consider essential throughout its history: „In the name of your Lord who created man from a clot of blood. Read! For your Lord is the Most Merciful, He taught us to write with the pen. He taught man what he did not know."¹⁴

The moment of "revelation" coincides with that moment when, according to Islamic tradition that mentions the presence of the angel Gabriel, Muhammad receives the first information about the Creator and creation. Once Muhammad becomes convinced that God is speaking to him, he asserts before his contemporaries that he is the messenger of God, authorized to revitalize the religion of Abraham and propagate the belief that the only God is Allah, addressing the "ignorant" and unbelievers.

It is well known that Muhammad's beliefs gradually turned towards a form of absolute monarchical monotheism, which was distinct from Jewish and Christian monotheism. The ideal he believed he had to preach was based on the idea that he was the authentic bearer of the monotheistic tradition, modeled on Abraham, and that the essence of this tradition was obedience and unconditional obedience. The sermon emphasizes the call made by God to people and especially highlights the divine generosity by which the conviction is suggested that, in contrast to any ephemeral form of existence, the Creator is eternal. This is because: "Everything that exists on the surface of the Earth will disappear. But the glory and majesty of the image of your God will remain."¹⁵

At the beginning of his sermons, Muhammad explicitly affirms the oneness of God. Only one formula seems to support the acceptance of one God: "Thou shalt not set other gods beside Him."¹⁶

By declaring "there is no other God but God", Muhammad aims to convince the Arabs of the necessity of worshipping Allah. Before Islam, the Arabs recognized Allah as the creator of Heaven and Earth, and guardian of fertility; they turned to him in times of crisis and danger and took solemn oaths in his name. Allah was, in fact, the master of the holy Kaaba¹⁷. In one of

¹² F. Schuon, *About the transcendent unity of religions*, Edit. Humanitas, Bucharest, 1994, p.126.

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 127-128.

¹⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam. Perspectives et réalités*, translated by H. Crès, Paris, Éditions Buchet/Chastel, 1975, p. 72.

¹⁵ Qur'an (the Koran), translated from Arabic by George Grigore, Kriterion Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000., XCVI,21

¹⁶ The Koran, LV, 26-27

¹⁷ The Koran, LI,51

the oldest surahs, Muhammad exhorts his tribe to worship the master of this sanctuary, stating that he has provided them with food, kept them from hunger, and removed their fears.¹⁸

The Qur'anic verses emphasize the challenge facing Muhammad and the need to demonstrate to his contemporaries the unique validity of his prophetic mission. He will highlight the authenticity of his prophetic calling through an experience of spiritual ascension, similar to those experienced by the prophets of the past in the Semitic sphere, aiming to bring the Qur'an. Through this action, Muhammad will ground Islam in its doctrinal development and will perceive himself as the ultimate and perfect holder of the teachings regarding the Divinity. Because it is based on the "revelation" received by Muhammad from Allah, Islam maintains its authoritarian attitude towards the other monotheistic religions. Through the central affirmation of their faith (shahadah), a fundamental truth is expressed: "la illah illa Allah"¹⁹-- there is no god but Allah.

The Qur'an, as an essential pillar of the Islamic faith, contains passages intended to emphasize the exclusivity of Allah as the only Deity, which is the essence of the faith of any Islamic believer. An oft-quoted passage formulates this choice in the following way: "He is God, besides whom there is no other God; He knows what is hidden and what is open, He is the Merciful, the Merciful. He is God, besides Whom there is no other God, the Holy King, the Bringer of Peace, the Faithful, the Protector, the Mighty, the Great, the Exalted... He is God, the Creator, the Shaper, He who gives form; The most sublime attributes are His. The heavens and the earth praise Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise."²⁰

This passage reveals that in the relationship between God and man, man represents the relative, while God represents the absolute. This is the foundation upon which Islam builds its perspective on the incarnation; according to Islam, no religion can fully express the transcendent character of God, who is absolute and infinite in his attributes. Thus, qualities such as intelligence and will are understood by Islam as attributes that God empowers humans and that inevitably return to Him.²¹

The absolute transcendence of God precluding the possibility of a direct connection or relationship between the Creator and the creation, because the emphasis is on the uniqueness of God and His transcendental unity, making it difficult to conceive of a connection between Him and any form of creation.²²

Islam claims to recapitulate the original Christian and Jewish concepts of God. Islam's starting point is that salvation can be attained by "anyone who recognizes that the Absolute Transcendent is the only absolute and transcendent, and who at the same time accepts the implications of the will of this position."²³ Islam is perceived as an original synthesis and harmonizing factor compared to Judeo-Christianity, as it aims to overcome the antagonism between Judaism and Christianity by returning to Abrahamic monotheism. In this sense, Islamic thinkers consider it an Abrahamic reaction to the integration of monotheism into Christianity and Judaism. Their argument is that both monotheistic religions conceived of God distinctly, limiting Him to conceptualizations that distorted the impenetrable divine character. Islam

¹⁸ Mircea Eliade, op. cit., p. 71.

¹⁹ Koran, XXXVI,, 22

²⁰ The Koran, LIX,22-24.

²¹ Nadia Anghelescu, Introduction to Islam, Encyclopedic Ed., Bucharest, 1993, p.17.

²² Gardet Louis, l'Islam, Desclee de Brouwer, Paris, 1970, p. 58.

²³ Frithjof Schuon, Understanding Islam. Introduction to the spirituality of the Muslim world, translated by Anca Manolescu, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1994, p. 43.

considers itself to bring an authentic revelation and corrects these slips by a "purification" of the traditional monotheistic.²⁴

Creation cannot be considered the reality through which we can analogically understand God, because outside the context of faith, any attempt to understand God is limited by constraints. For this reason, Islam asserts that revelation is not exclusive to Bible-based religions. Islam emphasizes the absolute uniqueness of God, which is manifested not only in relation to the created world, but also in communication with man, becoming a partner in receiving His messages.²⁵

A significant discrepancy between Christianity and Islam is related to the doctrine of the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of the Savior. Muhammad states that the Logos or divine Word does not manifest itself in a human body, in a human person, which is why he does not ascribe this function to himself, but remains as a prophet, the last in the line of prophets who received revelations

The Qur'an takes over the function that the Word has in Christianity, and the mysterious nature of the Christian mystery is the source of the Islamic reaction against Christianity. The fact that Islam rejects the idea of a historical salvation through Christ is due to the concept that Christ's death would have been universal for all people, while the Islamic revelation is universal in itself. Instead, it is understood that He suffered for the benefit of those who were and will be blessed by His grace, continuing to carry forward His work of salvation. Therefore, the difference that Islam traditionally maintains regarding the Christ mystery is constantly reflected in its rejection and the assertion that the possibility of salvation is limited to the Islamic sphere and revelation.

In Islamic doctrine, the positive representation of God is forbidden, and this is why Muhammad is firm in his preaching when it comes to images. This is because such representations can lead to associating other things with Allah. Thus, confusion can be created regarding the one reality it represents, as well as the dependence of existence on Him. By refusing to represent the divine in images, Islam rejects the idea of the incarnation of divinity in humanity.

The Islamic perspective focuses exclusively on Revelation and its possible modes, explaining why Islam does not place importance on mystical mirages as in Christianity²⁶. Traditionally, Islam recognizes the triad of el-iman (Faith), el-Islam (Obedience, Law) and el-ishan (The Way, Virtue). All three aspects intersect and activate in el-ishan, with the culmination represented by the experience of "remembering God".

The reality of Allah's existence dominates the entire spectrum of Islamic religiosity. The road to perfection is traveled by relying on the power by which this idea penetrates the religious consciousness. Since the only authentic reality is that of God, and perfection is His essence, all imperfect things cannot be the foundation for the attainment of perfection. In this sense, deeds, as a present aspect in the journey to perfection, must be endowed with the necessary qualities to be worthy before God.

The belief that God is the source of good and allows evil to exist demonstrates that man possesses true revelation. A strongly sanctioned attitude in Islamic monotheism is the fear of

²⁴ Georges Anawati, *Études de philosophie musulmane*, Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 1974, pp. 256-257.

²⁵ Remus Rus, *Islamic Philosophical History*, Encyclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, p. 94.

²⁶ Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, p. 89.

evil and the expectation of good from someone other than God, which suggests belief in sources other than Him.

Generally speaking, God is perceived as unique, Creator, Omnipresent and Almighty in Islam. From this perspective, Islam considers that stating these attributes about God describes him in a correct and adequate manner. Even if initially in the Islamic sermon there were references to various deities worshiped within the framework of pre-Islamic Arab religiosity, the fundamental purpose was and remains the same²⁷.

From the beginning, the assertion of the presence of other entities besides God, who is perceived as unique in creation, was considered as real impiety and in contradiction with the rigid idea of Islamic monotheism. Therefore, both the original Islamic thought and the one that evolved later firmly supported the idea that "there is no deity but God and Muhammad is His messenger".

The statement about divine oneness is specifically formulated by stating two essential pieces of information: "There is no other deity except the one Divine (Absolute)" and then, followed by the second piece of information declaring that "Muhammad (the Glorified) is the Messenger of Allah"²⁸

These statements reveal two distinct levels of reality: God and the world. God becomes the author of all forms of reality and gives the true believer freedom and greatness. The denial of divine oneness is an act of absolute impiety and is considered an unforgivable sin. This sin consists in violating truth and logic, which require the confession of God's existence and His singularity. At the same time, this sin represents a lack of piety and discernment. To accept association and mediation in the relationship with God is to explicitly deny the oneness of God.

Islam is in harmony with the idea that man is not really tasked with actively seeking truth and goodness. Instead, he must adopt a passive attitude, opening himself to truth and good, either through philosophical and rational exploration in the encounter with the singular active intellect, or through the religious approach of submission to the revelation transmitted through the Qur'an.

For Islam, the concept of divine oneness, known as the doctrine of "tawhid," represents the most important doctrine, because through it the idea of God as He is: omnipotent and infinite can be maintained. Even though traditionally, Islam expresses its conception of this uniqueness using concepts taken from Islamic philosophy influenced by Hellenistic thought, the wording "tawhid" is accepted as it was stated and transmitted by Muhammad in the Qur'an.²⁹

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²⁷ Philippe Gaudin, Great Religions, Ed. Leader, Bucharest, 1966, pp. 160-161.

²⁸ Frithjof Schuon, Understanding Islam..., p. 45.

²⁹ Dominique Sordel, Janine Sourdél Thomine, op. cit., p. 57.



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