

# The Light of Traditional Faith Amid the Shadowlands of Modernity

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*From the invisible He made all things visible, Himself being invisible. (2 Enoch, XLVIII. 5)*

*For such (the faithful), He has written faith in their hearts and strengthened them with a spirit from Himself. (Quran, 58: 22)*

Perhaps nothing highlights more effectively the vast chasm that exists between the traditional and modern worldviews than the irrevocable differences that exist between the traditional and modern understanding of the concept of faith. A faith that can move mountains in the traditional world is considered to be blind, naïve and sentimental in the modern world. A faith that unites sacred sentiment with the essential knowledge of God in the traditional world is considered merely a blind assent or a whimsical desire in the modern world. In today's anti-spiritual environment, a prevailing faith in the validity of a surprising number of scientific principles remains unacknowledged by the scientific establishment. It refuses to admit to the nebulous nature of the "ultimate ground" of its first premises and insists on the pretence that nothing is true until proven with the human mind and bodily senses. How is it possible that the light of faith can mean so much to traditional man and so little to modern man?

Perhaps nothing defines more clearly the role of faith in the modern world than the important role faith plays in both the realization of the traditional knowledge and in the pursuit and acquisition of today's scientific knowledge. The modern, scientific elite deny outright the efficacy—indeed the legitimacy—of a traditional faith without realizing that

they in fact rely on the instinct of faith to initiate a thought process that will lead to the kind of knowledge they desire to uncover. Faith must inevitably be the starting point in any thinking process that sinks its roots into an accepted knowledge, whether it be traditional or modern, spiritual or scientific, thereby drawing upon a “kind” of faith to acquire a “kind” of knowledge. Whatever his worldview, therefore, the concept of faith is a powerpack of implications for modern man that cannot be ignored unless he wishes to deceive himself. Can it be that even within the modern framework, a “kind” of faith exists to commence and move forward the thought processes of modern science in its pursuit of a knowledge of reality, even if that faith is not recognized for what it is?

One of the many dilemmas facing modern man, and perhaps one that effectively highlights the perennial mystery that continues to underscore his entire existence, lies in the fact that he no longer knows the meaning of a traditional faith. Indeed, since the concept of faith during these times has been reduced to the level of a blind wish or a vague and sentimental aspiration, people no longer realize that the face of faith, as portrayed within the various spiritual traditions through the millennia, has many profiles and conveys, in addition to the knowledge of God, many sacred emotions that are both revealing and intimate.

Initially, faith exists as a natural predisposition within man to explain the unexplainable and to bridge the chasm that exists between the sheer physicality of man and the phenomenal world on the one hand and the invisibility of God and the spiritual world on the other. As part of his nature, the human being is never without some kernel of faith that eventually reveals the secret disposition of his inner self. In view of the crucial mystery that exists concerning the origin and true nature of man and the universe, faith manifests itself firstly as a purely abstract idea, a desire, a premonition that seizes the mind of man in order to confront the barrier of inscrutable mystery he faces with its broad avenue of possibility and hope. There arises in the mind the prospect of moving across the isthmus between known and unknown worlds in order to experience the reality as a truth and not just as a speculation. Faith implies a choice and the believer chooses *yes* to the knowledge of the Absolute Reality and to the love of the Supreme Being that is expressed in sacred Revelation, revealed through the symbolic messages of Nature, and personified within man himself.

The face of faith shines as an initial spark of light that can illuminate the inner consciousness of man with the knowledge of God, partly because the knowledge of God resolves the mystery that surrounds the origin and true nature of both man and the universe, and partly as an antidote to the darkness and uncertainty that the life of “this world” embodies when it is understood to be an independent reality of its own. What begins as a presentiment and grows into a flame of light, ultimately becomes a conviction in which we commit ourselves to the principles of a sacred and essential knowledge that defines for us the reality of things. Our imagination alone cannot reconcile the invisible and the visible, the metaphysical and the physical, the Creator and the creation. It is only through the illumination of the light of faith that the mind, heart and soul can see the divine qualities of the visible, the physical, and the creation by acknowledging the inner reality of things that are veiled and embedded within the invisible, the metaphysical and the Creator.

Faith commences as a fundamental assertion to believe in a Divine Reality. Then, it stakes its claim within the mind and heart by setting forth a desire for a complete knowledge of the reality that expresses a certainty and projects a truth. As such, faith is free of the constraints of the dogma and form contained in religion and lives as a purely personal and intimate condition of mind and heart. Faith establishes an attitude of mind that serves as the foundation and backdrop of a person’s active life, lending meaning and purpose to all that life contains. Man can face the existential reality of the world with the armour of a faith that predisposes him to the knowledge of God and to the efficacy of His guidance and mercy. Faith reveals its knowledge in relation to the level of predisposition of the person to incorporate this faith into his or her life as an existential reality. As such, faith becomes a profile of all that is mysterious in life and gives definition to the divine mystery that lies at the heart of earthly existence.

Modern man, in contrast to traditional man, expresses a profound ambivalence toward the concept of faith. He rejects the traditional faith of his ancestors by calling it blind, sentimental, and childish and he considers faith a psychological impulse merely reflective of the fear of the unknown. The true meaning of faith, its power to “move mountains” and its significance as a gateway to a transcending, metaphysical knowledge, escapes him. He doesn’t realize, for example, that faith serves as

the instinctive motivation in the pursuit of a knowledge that can transcend worlds, that a fundamental faith forms the lodestone of all encounters with authentic knowledge, whether it be ancient, traditional, modern, or scientific, and that faith draws its energy from a Source that is the Origin and Final End of all knowledge.

Behind the open face of faith lies the instinctive human impulse to reveal itself as either a spontaneous, holy affirmation or inner impulse without a conscious origin. The pursuit and acquisition of knowledge begins as a fundamental faith that draws on the intelligence<sup>1</sup> and the holy sentiments of the heart because *He has written faith in their hearts* and grows into a certainty because He has *strengthened them with a spirit from Himself* (58:22). The knowledge of faith allows traditional man to see the invisible through the visible, rather than deny the Invisible solely on the evidence of the visible.

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The traditional worldview portrays faith as an instinct that transcends the limitations of “this world” by accepting a framework of knowledge and initiating an attitude of mind that gives shape and coloration to the entire thinking process. As such, faith has traditionally been recognized as the point of departure in the pursuit of a knowledge of self and the world that can be experienced as a reality, indeed as *the Reality*, even though it is invisible and cannot be “seen.” In order to come to terms with the “unseen reality” that is the true reality, the impulse of faith has always aided traditional man to accept a body of knowledge that has descended from above, from across the waters, from beyond the horizon, a knowledge that comes to mankind as a divine revelation, a knowledge that represents the actual word of the Divinity, a knowledge with the power to enlighten and save. Faith’s desire constitutes the first step in a journey of discovery and fulfillment that is based on the knowledge of God. As such, it is a gateway into the frontiers of sacred knowledge and an open door to conscious spiritual experience.

In contrast, the modern, scientifically-based worldview displays an ambivalent if not paradoxical attitude toward the mystery of faith, am-

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1. According to a number of religious traditions, and Islam in particular, the “seat” of intelligence lies in the heart and not in the cerebral faculties of the brain, as in the modern conception.

bivalent because it also relies on a faith of sorts to proceed with its investigation, and paradoxical because faith assumes a belief in the unseen and that is precisely what the scientific mind sets out to disprove. The modern scientific establishment denies faith's power and efficacy while at the same time its very *raison d'être* relies on a faith that has the ability to leap across unbreachable divides in the pursuit of knowledge. Yet, the question arises: What kind of knowledge? Is the answer a speculative knowledge based on observation, experimentation and precise mathematical formulae or a metaphysical knowledge based on revelation, the symbols of nature and the faculty of the human intellect to process that knowledge? Is it a knowledge based on human reason or a knowledge accessed through a transcending faith?

At the heart of the secularist worldview lies the doctrine that there is no reality but the physical reality and that there is no absolute truth beyond what can be quantified and objectified by human reason and the corporeal senses. This is a primary example of a modern-day faith that every scientist asserts in the pursuit of the scientific mandate, because to assert that nothing exists except a physical reality is purely arbitrary, theoretical and, ultimately, imaginary. In such a worldview, there is no place for the aspirations of a traditional faith that is prepared to cross frontiers, explore profound wildernesses, and leap across the isthmus between alien worlds in order to come to terms with the truth and the reality that underlies all existence. In such a worldview, based on what amounts to an empty faith in the validity of speculative truths, there can be no omniscient Divinity, no absolute Reality, and no ultimate Truth to which traditional faith can lay claim.

The difference between the role of traditional faith and a modern faith in scientific principles lies in their respective points of departure. Both starting-points are equally characterized by an unwavering faith in the validity of their beliefs and assumptions and both equally employ the human mind in making deductions from these starting-points. The kind of faith that characterizes the pursuit of knowledge during the modern era, however, is embedded in the scientific premises and hypotheses that jump-start the entire scientific pursuit of knowledge, while the faith of the traditional world is not only the point of departure in man's pursuit of knowledge of the reality, it virtually defines all human spirituality. Without an instinctive and motivating faith in the unseen reality and

without a firm belief in higher levels of consciousness and spiritual experience, there can be no knowledge of God, no spiritual path, no sacred disciplines such as prayer and meditation, no true virtue and ultimately no transcendence.

Faith presupposes a body of preliminary assumptions that amount to being assertions, whether they are metaphysical or merely physical and scientific, concerning the reality of Truth and the true nature of Reality. The faith embodied in these assumptions commences a line of thought that produces all kinds of deductions and leads toward a certain kind of knowledge that is in keeping with the original preliminary assumptions. The faith of both worldviews represents a leap of mind, and a willingness and an affirmation of what one believes to be the categorical imperative of the mind, whether that be the Transcendent Reality or a purely physical reality. Beyond the initial leap of mind that bridges the distance between two alien worlds lies the framework of one's thinking, including the choices one brings to bear in the pursuit of a particularized type of knowledge and the examination of its evidence. Ultimately, each worldview determines the conclusions that are reached as a result of the constructs of its faith.

The traditional mind relies on a firm faith in the Transcendent Reality that overlays the entire manifested creation as an Imminent Reality and provides the seamless whole to a vast universe of infinite possibility as an Infinite Reality. As exemplary and definitive professions of faith, the *credo in unum deum* of Christianity and the *la ilaha illa 'Llah* of Islam articulate in words the essence of the Absolute Truth and announce the impending reality of the Divine Presence. What distinguishes traditional faith and defines its parameters is the belief in the unseen reality of the abiding Spirit, an inner, spiritual dimension that empowers all aspects of the phenomenal world and substantiates it with the inner dimension of the spirit. Faith turns the initial willingness to believe into a reality of the mind.

At the heart of faith's imperative lies the truth that man cannot encounter the Divinity directly. Traditional man did not face the mys-

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2. The veil between man and God is absolute, therefore man will not see God, any more than Moses could see God, and Moses was a prophet. "Ob Lord," *Moses said to God when he reached the appointed place, "show Thyself to me, that I may look upon Thee."* But God replied: "By no means canst thou see Me (directly)" (7:143).

tery implicit within the phenomenal world of the cosmos any more directly than he faced God directly and/or expected to see the face of the Divine Countenance (*al-Wajh*).<sup>2</sup> Traditional knowledge has come to mankind indirectly through enlightened messengers, through revelation, through nature, through symbols, and through human introspection<sup>3</sup>, and not directly between the Divine Being and human being. Traditional man's understanding was synthetic rather than analytic, based on a synthesis of the knowledge that was made available to him, not any knowledge of course, but the essential knowledge that unifies and saves. God teaches man through Revelation, Nature and Man<sup>4</sup> and this creates the condition through which a symbolic and analogical understanding of the true nature of the reality is possible. Modern science too is based on articles of faith.

Contrary to the popular perception that science is based solely on observation, experimentation and clear reasoning leading to logical conclusions, the scientific mind relies on none other than a kind of faith in substantiating its working principles. It commences its journey in search of the truth through a leap of mind that is characteristic of faith, into abstract and theoretical areas of thought that would otherwise be inaccessible. The primordial truths of modern scientific thought, namely its assumptions, theories, and hypotheses, are not subject to the rigors of empirical or experimental verification. They are abstract, arbitrary and purely hypothetical points of departure that lead the way in a particular line of reasoning.

There are any number of such articles of faith that are taken as axiomatic within the scientific community and are simply not challenged by the "establishment" at the risk of being ostracized. They include the belief that the structure of reality is purely mathematical, an assumption that constitutes virtually the cornerstone of the *credo* of the modern scientific worldview. They also include the abstract assumption and hypothetical search for unity underlining the phenomenal universe that completely belies empirical or experimental verification. When asked what proof there was that nature possessed unity, Einstein replied *C'est un*

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3. "Know thyself in order to know God." (Saying of the Prophet (*badith*)).

4. According to the Quran, there are three basic sources of knowledge. "Soon We will show them Our signs on the horizon and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth" (Quran 41:53).

*acte de foi*. Indeed, the very fact that scientists rely exclusively on either empirical evidence or mathematical formulae in order to identify an objective reality is itself a purely hypothetical assumption. Is sense data the definitive medium to obtain objectivity? Are the principles of mathematics the sole criterion that can discriminate between what is true and what is false? The modern mentality may “believe” in sense data and mathematics, but what is the basis of this “faith” and what is the source of its objectivity?

In spite of the high “visibility” of the phenomenal world and the provability of the material world, modern man still has no clear sense of the true nature of reality; therefore he has no idea of the true nature and consequences of his actions in such a mysterious and enigmatic world. Because the fundamental mystery of creation refuses to give up its elemental secrets or betray its mystique, a sense of certainty will continue to elude modern man unless he can achieve both authenticity and certainty through a transcending faith in a body of God-revealed knowledge. The modern scientific elite, who are the high priests of the modern world and who alone have power to speak *ex cathedra* on such questions as the nature of reality and the origin of mankind, have established the fundamental criteria through which modern man understands the nature of reality and the human beings who inhabit that reality. They alone have the right to form the fundamental interrogatives that make up the parameters of the scientific inquiry.

In the scientific worldview, man is regarded as an autonomous entity within the universe. He exists as it were apart from God and apart from any kind of force that could be characterized as spiritual, other-worldly, or beatitudinal. He has not been created by God and he will not return to God, in contradiction to the simple yet eloquent Quranic verse *We come from God and to Him we shall return* (2: 152). He is thought of as being nothing more than an individual and finite creature that has his moment in time and will eventually disappear back into the energy of the cosmos, nothing more. He enjoys a faculty called reason, a faculty that is most notably cut off from both Revelation and the Intellect which belongs to the supra-human level of reality that science denies, yet he believes that his reason somehow illuminates the human mind through a light of its own making. His reason is his god because it is regarded as the sole instrument that can navigate its way through the sea of univer-

sal mystery and that can lead him to a destination he knows not where. Anything that transcends the faculty of human reason is treated quite simply as non-verifiable knowledge or worse, as the sub-product of an over-ripe and misguided imagination.<sup>5</sup>

The modern scientific worldview asserts that life, consciousness, and self-awareness are nothing but manifestations of complex arrangements of inanimate particles that have evolved in a fortuitous way to result in the phenomenon of *homo sapiens*. Modern science proclaims the existence of the phenomenal world that constitutes a universe which is a world unto itself and an independent reality of its own that can be studied and known in an ultimate sense, without any reference to a higher order of reality and without cognizance of a universal Creator. Space, time, matter, motion and energy establish the parameters of the physical world and thus are expressed and believed-in realities that are independent of any higher order of being and are cut off from the power and influence of a Supreme Being. The physical world is portrayed as a mechanical world that is the subject of mathematization and quantification. Anything within nature that does not fall within that rubric and is in essence non-quantifiable is irrelevant to the study of modern science. Faith in the veracity of these suppositions serves as the lodestar for modern civilization and a guiding light for the evolving, modern worldview.

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“Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.” This sacred saying of Christ has as much relevance today as it once had two thousand years ago. Perhaps we will find that the role of faith in the modern world is similar to the role of faith in the traditional world, at least from the spiritual point of view. Faith in the modern world can still provide the means of activating the spiritual emotions and bridging the

5. There are some scientists who would like to reduce man to his lowest common denominator and render him not much more profound than a simple, well-oiled machine. The biologist, Richard Dawkins, an aggressive opponent of “evolutionary tales”, has suggested in his book *The Selfish Gene* that we can think of ourselves as “survival machines”, invented through evolutionary tinkering by ancient replicators, snippets of DNA. In speaking of “genes”, Dawkins has written: “Now they swarm in huge colonies safe inside gigantic lumbering robots, sealed off from the outside world, communicating with it by tortuous indirect routes, manipulating it by remote control. They are in you and in me; they created us, body and mind; and their preservation is the ultimate rationale for our existence.”

gap that otherwise exists between the mind and the will, between our knowledge of the truth and what we are willing to act upon. More over, faith initiates a process of inner inquiry that offers a vision into the true nature of reality and permits people to develop and appreciate a sense of the sacred in all aspects of life.

Faith flows like a river through the being of the faithful person. It transcends both time and place by placing man within his own center and situating him within the eternal moment. Faith has the capacity to lift the veil of the Divine Mystery, to enliven the sacred traditions, and to overlay the symbolic image of the human being with a projection of the perfected being that he is destined to become.

As the point of departure for all spirituality, faith is both a knowledge and a belief. As knowledge, faith represents a modality of mind—an intuition if you will—that can awaken human spirituality by acknowledging the existence of an Absolute Being as the Origin and Source of everything in existence, including the human being who brings to faith his living consciousness. Faith as a basic intuition represents a knowledge of a doctrine whose implicit blessing is the certitude that what one believes is the absolute truth. As a belief, faith represents a modality of will that activates man's free will to believe in God, a Divinity who has created, sustains, and will ultimately save or damn the human soul. As such, faith contains a power that transcends form, a power that can formalize the abstract into a clear image of the Divine, a power that can link outer and inner worlds like a bridge, and a power that can be a veil to protect as well as a key to unlock the dam of spiritual forces that lies at the center of man's being.

Because faith amounts to being a human intuition based on knowledge of the Divine and a desire to turn toward God, man's faith has the potential to become a force that can "move mountains," that permits the faithful to manifest inner realities through visible actions, that reduces the great impasse that exists between matter and spirit to a modern myth, and that shatters the mirror of all earthly illusions and actually begins the process referred to earlier as "lifting the veil" of all cosmic myster-

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6. "The veil is a notion which evokes the idea of mystery, because it hides from view something that is either too sacred or too intimate; but it also enfolds a mystery within its own nature when it becomes the symbol of universal veiling" (Frithjof Schuon, *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, p. 47).

ies.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, faith has the power to raise the human soul onto the plane of realization of immanent and eternal realities.

Faith has become once again a force too powerful to be denied by the “modern” men and women of our time and its significance and implications are too subtle to be summarily rejected or ignored by modern sophisticates. Faith within the context of the modern world can no longer simply be labelled as merely psychological or blind and dismissed by those who deny faith’s possibilities as appropriate only for children, sentimentalists, arcane spiritualists and possibly fools, as though the perennial faith of millions from time immemorial could be passed off by more mature modern minds as a human need to believe in fairy tales.

Faithless men and women of this age have the tendency to explain faith’s dynamic range as being mere childishness or sentimentalism of people with no desire to “think,” but that “thinking” people have no need of, as if the cerebral thinking of modern times could replace faith’s depth and reach. When faith isn’t passed off as a thoughtless sentimentality, then it is labelled as “blind,” a pejorative word intended to imply that faith is nothing more than a sightless vision, or the infamous “believing without seeing” scorned by the scientific community, founded on the basis of a human psychology that needs faith to explain the unknown nature of reality. Simple human psychology suggests, however, that man does need faith, not as a childish alternative to a frightened and unsophisticated psyche, but rather as a pragmatic approach to the unknown, in which the individual overlays his thoughts, emotions, and sentiments, his actions, goals and purpose in life with the power of the knowledge of God that accompanies faith.

The secret of faith, however, lies beyond the “thinking” mind. Men and women of all times and places are faced with a number of unknown factors that demand of the thinking mind a faith either in the existence of a Supreme Intelligence who creates, guides, and sustains their lives or a faith in some credible alternative, what in modern times would amount to a belief in the verity of an evolutionary process that originates somewhere—anywhere—and proceeds along a path of natural selection and survival of the fittest that ultimately promises a human progress that will eventually bring modern man to a superhuman condition, if not an enlightened state of being.

The modern day alternative to faith is nothing short of a faith in reli-

gion's counterpart: a faith in modern science that is based on human reason rather than divine revelation. People during these times cannot escape the impulse of a faith in something—anything—since the unknown factors that continue to haunt modern man force people to retain a faith, if not in God, then in the evolutionary process for example, for neither are provable according to the demands of scientific scrutiny and both require faith with its implicit leap of mind and its broad demands on the imagination. With regard to such an initiating faith, the theory of evolution is no different from religion, as much as modern scientists hate to admit it.

In fact, modern man's commitment to faith can actually be reduced to the level of lowest "incredibility." For example, is it more incredible to believe in God as Divine Being and the Supreme Intelligence than to believe in an evolutionary process in which the human body actually evolved after a complex progression of chance and accidental factors that began with atoms that combined to form a complex grouping of molecules that ultimately became a living cell that built itself into a thinking creature with a consciousness of self? Is it more incredible to believe that man is made in the image of God with a human consciousness of self, a consciousness that can be raised to a height of purity of mind with a pristine clarity that forms the basis of a potential sublimity? Isn't it more incredible that man's consciousness has somehow derived from matter and that it is a sophisticated, refined or somehow highly evolved form of matter?

Perhaps modern man should approach the mystery of faith from the possibilities inherent in these levels of incredibility in order to cross the barrier than continues to exist between faith and disbelief. Only then will he be able to arrive at a satisfactory answer to the contemporary challenge to the efficacy of traditional faith, a challenge that proposes the unbelievable and unreal hypotheses that the higher has evolved from the lower, that consciousness has emerged out of the elements, that life has burst forth spontaneously from matter, and that matter itself could serve as the benchmark and basis of all reality.

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At the heart of this exacting dialectic concerning faith and its implications lies the absolute barrier that exists between matter and spirit,<sup>7</sup> a

barrier needless to say that eventually must be faced by everyone, if people want to articulate to themselves what they believe to be both meaningful and real within the reality of their own existence. The relationship between matter and spirit, between the outer world and the inner world, is virtually transcendental, and cannot be explained fully with words, much less in terms that are purely scientific, rational, and thus non-transcendental. The relationship between matter and spirit lies at the core of man's human dilemma in adequately coming to terms with his understanding of "reality" as such, not as he understands it within his own limited perception, but reality as it is manifested in the cosmic realm, namely as the Absolute Truth.

Matter and spirit are the two dynamic imperatives of life; they shape man's understanding and affect his experience of reality. These two great modalities of earthly existence play on us like the bow on a violin to produce the *andante* or *largo* movement of a great soulful sonata, a melody that cannot be fully described but that is heard and experienced throughout the course of life. Both matter and spirit contain their own mystery, and neither one is ever fully revealed to us as the basis of our lives or as an explanation of reality until they are played out on the strings of our being to become real experiences and truly felt realities. We are condemned to know them only in part and through their consequences on us. The complete significance of matter and spirit forever escapes us.<sup>8</sup>

Even now, as we enter the new millennium and following a century that has witnessed incredible advances in both science and technology, it is still almost impossible to clarify the distinctions between outer and inner worlds. Even the most rational scientist today doesn't exclude the possibility of a complete theory of knowledge that would transcend the

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7. "...The Origin of the Universe is not inert and unconscious matter, but a spiritual Substance which...finally produces matter by causing it to emerge from a more subtle substance, but one which is already remote from principal Substance. It will be objected that there is no proof of this, to which we reply...that there are infinitely fewer proofs for this inconceivable absurdity, evolutionism, which has the miracle of consciousness springing from a heap of earth or pebbles, metaphorically speaking" (Frithjof Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, p. 6).

8. The more physicists explore the inner sanctum of quantum mechanics, the more they realize how intangible and mysterious that realm really is, further compounding nature's secrets rather than revealing her truths through the medium of matter.

purely physical world of matter with the macrocosmic application of some higher law as yet unknown to us. Perhaps the shift back to a focus on the realms of the spirit has already begun to the extent that it is naive now to think solely in physical terms and foolhardy not to leave a crack in the door of perception that leads back toward the unknown mystery of the Spirit.<sup>9</sup>

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Faith is the formal bridge between totally unbreachable worlds: between matter and spirit, body and soul, outer and inner modalities, earthly and celestial realities. As such, faith brings together these two antithetic realities and makes possible the meeting of man and God.

Firstly, faith strikes down the absolute barrier that exists between matter and spirit with its wand of inspiration and insight. Through a body of revealed knowledge to inspire the mind and through a holy yearning of the heart to activate that knowledge, faith bridges the vast distance that separates man from the Sublime. The sacred intuition of faith permits an understanding of unity to be possible between the world of form and the world of spirit, each realm influencing the other in an interactive and harmonious blending of earthly and celestial realities. Because of faith, the physicality of the world of matter does not pre-empt man's perception of reality with its dense materiality; instead the phenomenal world can serve as a symbol of a high knowledge and visualize for mankind a higher reality. Faith allows the believer to understand, if not actually see, the forces of spirit at work within matter. The world of nature is the prime example of form virtually glowing with spirit.

Secondly, faith bridges the great divide that exists between man and God and between man and his own soul. This divide exists on existential levels in which man understands himself to be a living being without explanation and a fragmented being who is equally a mysterious as well as a physical reality. It is as if man projects two personalities out of himself, an outer self personified in the ego that responds to the demands of his body and his immediate environment. The second personality lies further within the individual and runs as a deep undercurrent that emerges

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9. A recently published book by John Horgan, titled *The End of Science* (Broadway Books, NY, 1996), actually speculates upon the possibility that science may have reached the limit of its inquiry in its search for "absolute knowledge."

at moments in life when he can discard his worldly presumptions and preconceived attitudes for a spiritual intuition that projects the best of his inner self into the outer world of people and forms.

Thirdly, as a bridge to inner worlds, faith sets in motion a movement of the spirit that must be activated as part of the spiritual challenge of our time, otherwise it will lie dormant deep within modern man and never surface to illuminate the mind and heart. Through a traditional faith made contemporary by virtue of its timely aspiration, a process of spirituality can begin once again that can make faith a coloration of the soul in which the believer prepares himself, stands firm, opens his being, and puts himself on the line as it were for the discovery of that which cannot be explained in words; but which can create a music of the spirit, a bow on strings, that can articulate for the individual the greatest truth of which he is capable. Faith permits, indeed begins, a dialogue between oneself and the Divine Being, whether He be identified as the Hindu Brahma, the Christian God, the Jewish Jehovah, the Islamic Name of Allah or the Great Spirit of the North American Indians, permitting a clarity of mind, a melting of the heart and an opening of the soul toward the Spirit through the music of one's own being.

Finally, through faith, man assents to his insignificance in the face of the Absolute Being. Based on revelation and activated through his intuition, faith is above all the humble acknowledgement to ourselves and to other members of society of our place within the cosmic design of the Divine Savior. We need faith as a compensation to the unknown mystery and as the key to the compensating knowledge of the unseen reality. Perhaps the time has come, as we terminate the second millennium and face the new demands on mankind that will be inevitable in the 21st century, to abandon our earthly pretensions and adopt once again the humble attitude of faith as the necessary prelude to unknown realms of knowledge and as the "instinctive motive" in activating a life of contemporary spirituality.

We need to approach one another as human beings once again. We need to abandon the superficial mask of our false, modern persona that now "believes" in a process of evolution that actually separates people from each other with its philosophy of "survival of the fittest," instead of bringing them together with a unified and credible worldview. We need to find a deeper expression of self that is based on the eternal verities

and modelled by the great prophets, saints and mystics of recorded history, an expression of spirituality that makes the invisible visible by virtue of the heart and soul invested in humanity. Perhaps we can meet each other once again, not based on a superficial knowledge of matter and form, but on the basis of a faith in a knowledge that transcends the physical plane to reveal mysteries man would not otherwise have access to. Perhaps we can meet each other out of a knowledge that we have truly experienced and suffered and come to realize, a knowledge that inspires a human commitment to transcend our limitations in ways that only faith in the knowledge of God permits.

If faith is to survive in the modern world as a spiritual force that is a viable option for contemporary man, several important factors need to be realized. Firstly, contemporary man must abandon his preconceived notions about faith, notions that have accumulated over the centuries and have now solidified into an attitude toward faith that is both negative and counterproductive, as well as misleading. Secondly, with regard to the dynamic spiritual force that faith contains, man must become once again a *tabula rasa*, in which all his mental projections, preconceived opinions, and unwarranted prejudices can be abandoned for the motivating impulse of faith, whose power and insight can unlock inner doors of perception and higher levels of awareness that modern man has never dreamed possible, much less experienced. Finally, he must realize who he is in his essence: not the pygmy of his true self that now constitutes the portrait of modern man, but the human “image” of the Supreme Being and the *homo spiritualis* portrayed in sacred scripture.

A faith based on the revelatory knowledge of God can become the vehicle of a legitimate interaction among people because it communicates not only facts and statistics, but also part of the essence of the person who passes it on, and because it conveys a sublime and absolute truth that far exceeds the implications of the physical world of matter. Such a faith would represent a knowledge that contains the fragrance of primordial meaning that once existed at the heart of the world as an original faith and that still lies dormant somewhere near the horizon of our time.

Needless to say, there can be no spirituality without faith, modern, contemporary, traditional or otherwise. Faith can be modern insofar as it exists during these times and takes into account the dynamic range of

the 20th century mentality. Faith can be traditional when it is based on a revealed knowledge, which alone has the orthodoxy and the divine power to enlighten and save, and when it is contextualized within the orthodoxy of an authentic religious tradition. Our sacred duty during these times is to activate the revealed knowledge of the religions with the spiritual forces that exist within man himself through his intuition of God and his faith in the power to transcend his own limitations with that knowledge. A formal, traditional religion can become once again a living contemporary religion, just as traditional man can become a contemporary traditional man, with a heightened consciousness and a firm will power made possible through the light of faith and the orthodoxy of the religious traditions.

Man can activate the spiritual forces contained within religion in order to humanize the face of religion through his own spirituality; similarly, religion can activate the spiritual forces contained within man in order to spiritualize the face of man with the knowledge of God and with the faith to internalize that knowledge as a living experience.