

# The Two Certitudes

By Timothy Scott

In his book, *Understanding Islam*, Frithjof Schuon observes that the doctrine of Islam hangs on the two statements of the *Shahādah*: ‘There is no divinity (or reality, or absolute) outside the only Divinity (or Reality, or Absolute)’ (*Lā ilaha illā ‘Llāh*), and ‘Muhammad (the “Glorified,” the Perfect) is the envoy (the mouthpiece, the intermediary, the manifestation, the symbol) of the Divinity’ (*Mubammadun Rasūlu ‘Llāh*).<sup>1</sup> Schuon recognises these as affirmations of the “two certitudes,” the two levels of reality: the Absolute and the relative, Cause and effect, God and the world. ‘The first of these certainties’ remarks Schuon, ‘is that “God alone is” and the second that “all things are attached to God.”’ Schuon offers a vision of the *Shahādah* envisaged as the heart of Islam; the heart that contains the entirety of the religion—‘My earth and My heaven contain Me not, but the heart of My faithful servant containeth Me.’<sup>2</sup> Schuon’s exposition is summarized thus: ‘All metaphysical truths are comprised in the first of these Testimonies and all eschatological truths in the second.’<sup>3</sup> The religion of Islam is contained in the *Shahādah* with all essential formal elements of the religion being but extensions of these two certitudes. This then is the basis of Schuon’s book, in which he considers Islam, the Qur’an, the Prophet and the Way.

The articulation of the two certitudes is by no means limited to Islam. We might say that all Scripture—if not all religion—is built upon this unfolding of the two realities. In Judaism the essential statement of

<sup>1</sup> Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, Unwin Paperbacks: London, 1976, p.16.

<sup>2</sup> *Hadīth qudsī* in Ibn al-‘Arabi, *Lubbu-l-Lubb (Kernel of the Kernel)*, tr. I. H. Bursevi, Roxburgh: Beshara Publications, 1981, pp.16; 42.

<sup>3</sup> Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, p.16.

faith is the *Shema*: ‘Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One’ (Deut.6:4), proclaimed together with the *V’ahavta*:‘And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (6:5). These testimonies then extend to the *Asereth ha-D’bbarim* (the Decalogue; Ex.34:28[7] & Deut.10:4[8]) and the Torah itself. Christ, in turn, declares the *V’ahavta* to be the first of the two great commandments: ‘Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets’ (Matt.22:37-40). My current intention is to consider these central statements of faith, in both Judaism and Christianity, in terms of the manner in which they express the two certitudes.

To set the scene let us rehearse Schuon’s exposition of the *Shabādah*.

...it could also be said that the first *Shabādah* is the formula of discernment or “abstraction” (*tanzib*) while the second is the formula of integration or “analogy” (*tashbib*): in the first *Shabādah* the word “divinity” (*ilāha*)—taken here in its ordinary current sense—designates the world inasmuch as it is unreal because God alone is real, while the name of the Prophet (*Mubammad*) in the second *Shabādah* designates the world inasmuch as it is real because nothing can be outside God; in certain respects all is He. Realizing the first *Shabādah* means first of all<sup>4</sup> becoming fully conscious that the Principle alone is real and that the world, though on its own level it “exists,” “is” not; in one sense it therefore means realizing the universal void. Realizing the second *Shabādah* means first of all<sup>5</sup> becoming fully conscious that the world—or manifestation—is “not other” than God or the Principle, since “to the degree that” it has reality it can only be that which alone “is,” or in other words it can only be divine; realizing this *Shabādah* thus means seeing God everywhere and everything in Him. ‘He who has seen me,’ said the Prophet, ‘has seen God’; now everything is the “Prophet,” on the one hand in respect of the perfection of existence and on the other in respect of the perfections of mode or expression.

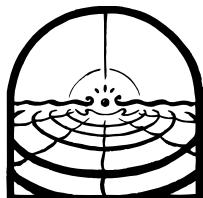
‘All metaphysical truths are comprised in the first of these Testimonies and all eschatological truths in the second.’

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<sup>4</sup> Because this *Shabādah* includes the second in an eminent degree.

<sup>5</sup> “First of all” meaning in this case that in the final analysis this *Shabādah*, being like the first a divine Word or “Name,” in the end actualizes the same knowledge as the first by virtue of the oneness of essence of the Word or Names of God.

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