

God is most clearly revealed to humanity through scripture. Discuss

Revelation is defined as 'God revealing himself to people'. What is often discussed is whether God something we discover in our own experiences or is does he discloses himself to us through other sources. Religions such as Christianity claim that God has freely chosen to disclose himself to us. Religious believers would believe there are two ways in which God has chosen to reveal himself to humanity this is by general revelation and special revelation. General revelation refers to the truths that can be known through God's nature, this might be through observing the creation of universe which shows us Gods power and existence. This is shown in Bible passage, Psalm 19:1-4 reads 'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge'. Special revelation is how God has chosen to reveal himself through miraculous means for example through Christ, visions and experiences and the Bible itself. The Bible has many records of god appearing in the physical form, God speaking to people through dreams and being seen in visions. What is often questioned though is whether the Bible is Gods word or is symbolic.

Knowing what is true has been debated by many philosophers, Plato believed we should follow our reason, Aristotle believed experience would give us truth. While Judeo Christians believed revelation was the key to knowing what is true. In this essay I will first look at revelation. Revelation can be recognized through revealed theology and natural theology. Revealed theology is based on religious experiences and scripture. While natural theology uses reason and ordinary experience. A famous example of the latter was put forward by William Paley in his theological argument for the existence of God. He describes an analogy of a watchmaker.

At one end of the spectrum there is a propositional view of revelation this view that that the Bible contains the word of God and is completely literal The scripture has been divinely dictated and the writer, possibly with some supernatural assistance or guidance such as 'verbal inspiration', writes it as best they can. Because the text originates from God, it is completely inerrant. this view is mainly believed by conservative Christians.. A Propositional view would consider the Bible as factual and the events being real in history. Roman Catholics and Protestants both believe the bible was 'written under divine inspiration and that the scripture is completely without error this is shown within an example from the Bible, Second Epistle of Peter claims that "no prophecy of Scripture ... was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:20–21)

However Roman Catholics and Protestants differ on their beliefs in authority. Roman Catholics believe God is their authority, while Protestants believe that scripture alone is authority. The fact that a propositionalist believes the bible is completely the word of god gives strong reason for us following the guidelines presented in the Bible without question. A Propositionalist would therefore agree with the view that God can be revealed most clearly through Holy Scripture.

In a number of passages in the Bible it seems to claim divine inspiration for itself. For example in the New Testament, Jesus treats the Old Testament as authoritative and says it "cannot be broken" (John 10:34–36). It is shown that we should give direct authority towards the Bible within examples such as Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correction and training in righteousness"

In comparison, a non propositional view is generally believed by liberal Christians and is the view that the Bible is seen not as a source of infallible information provided by God but inspired writings produced by human beings trying to make sense of their encounter with the divine. Bible and Holy writings are valued as sources of insights that may help people enter a fuller and deeper experience of life. Non-Propositionalists believe we should interpret the stories within the bible to properly understand them as they are often written with symbolism and maybe metaphorical. This view point for some might hinder the authority of the Bible as the bible then does not have strict guidelines but its guidelines can be interpreted with relevance to society now. Some people might then claim that this is a way of simply 'picking and choosing' what to take literally and what to interpret how we like. But as humans I don't think our mind can passively just take in information from the bible instead we interpret it how we understand it to make sense to us.

A fundamental problem with a non prepositional view is that it is difficult to know which bits in the Bible should be taken literally as the word of God and which bits we should reinterpret. People also may interpret the scripture differently as for example now with greater understanding it is difficult for us to just accept parts of the Bible like the world being created in 7 days, the harsh condemnation of homosexuality etc. It is important to note that the writers of the Bible were writing within that era and environment when ideas like homosexuality being unacceptable were around.

A propositional view of revelation as said by Mel Thomson is rather dangerous as many religious fanatics may carry out acts of terror and then justify their actions by believing they have 'divine authority' as the scripture is the word of God. For example Palestine has become a war zone on the basis of such biblical claims. A criticism of propositionalist belief in revelation is sometimes it may seem that a religious believer is following blindly rules that are in the Bible purely because

they are in the Bible, which may seem rather idolatry. Especially since they ignore the fact that the authors of the Bible did write this whether 'divinely inspired' or not, in a completely different era.

John Hick rejected a propositional view of revelation on many accounts as he was puzzled with the idea that if Bible did contain the word of God, where would this leave other religions? He believed that revelation also contradicted the need for epistemic distance between God and people. He believed like Kant that there is a phenomenal world, in which we see the world as we experience it and the noumenal world, which is the real world itself. Kant believed we could not see the world as it actually is. Revelation for Hick is not just a declaration from a divine being but the response or awareness of that individual towards the divine being. Here Hicks epistemology does not seem compatible with direct propositional truths from God. This approach is also similar to Rudolf Bultmann (1844-1976) who also stresses the approach of human response to the divine initiative.

Philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) believed we should examine any accounts of what is supposedly religious experience with the same critical eye we would any other claim. Hume believed we should proportion out belief to evidence we have for it. The more unlikely an event that comes to us through scripture, the more likely we are to assume that the account is wrong and has either been misunderstood or exaggerated. Unlike Hume, Kierkegaard believed that much of revelation is our response towards it, which makes it revelatory.

Revelation as scripture relates greatly to the religious language used within it. Logical positivists believe that scripture cannot be revelatory as they only believe language is meaningful when it can be justified with evidence. However, this for me is a rather unconvincing belief as I think you can not, not believe something to be true just because you do not have evidence for it as we don't have evidence for many things in the world.

Revelation through religious experience such as miracles often draws a person closer to God and the person feels enlightened and if experienced probably reveals more about God than any scripture ever will. This religious experience will likely hold huge significance to the person but the experience is often hard to explain and describe and this leaves it less influential to other people.

Richard Swinburne came up with two ways for proving the experiences to be evidence of Gods action. Credulity, which is that we should accept what appears to be the case unless we have good reason not to. Testimony, This is whether it is reasonable to believe the account gives testimony and trustworthiness. If these can be accepted then the account should be accepted and it according to Swinburne should be counted as revelatory. On the other hand David Hume an

empiricist believed we could not class miracles as revelatory and that miraculous events should be measured against available evidence.

In conclusion I do not believe that miracles or experiences are more reliable than scripture but I do believe they have a lot more significance for the individual and if a miracle has happened to someone they are likely to hold this above any scripture they have read in terms of revelation. For the wider and for those who have not experience a miracle such as myself are likely to believe the most reliable account of revelation being the Bible. I do believe that the Bible should be interpreted though as I believe it contains a lot of metaphorical language that is not literal for example the Genesis story, I don't personally believe the world was created in 7 days and I believe the language used in the Bible is different to how some might interpret it solidly. As to us 7 days are 7 24 hour days but in Biblical terms this could mean any length of time depending on the definition of the word 'day' then.