

Philosophy of Religion (Christianity)
5. Religion, reason and revelation

Revelation

- Christians believe that God can reveal himself directly to them.
- Many Christians claim to have had a personal experience of God.
- This personal revelation may be through:
 - Prayer
 - Pilgrimage
 - Meditation
 - Reading the Bible
 - Sense of awe and wonder

General Revelation

- General revelation is sometimes known as natural revelation.
- The idea is that someone is able to understand God through creation in the same way you are able to know something about a painter by looking at a painting
- In the same way by looking at creation we can know something about the Creator

The heavens declare the glory of God;
 The skies proclaim the work of his hands.
 Psalm 19:1-4

Since what may be known about God is plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities... have been clearly seen ...so that men are without excuse.
 Romans 1:19-20

Special Revelation

There are four ways Christians believe that God has specially revealed himself:

- Bible
- Jesus
- Church
- Saints (the lives of other people)

Special Revelation through the Bible

- Christians believe that God has revealed himself in the Bible.
- God made a covenant (promise) with Abraham that he would become the father of a great nation.
- God made a covenant with Moses and the Israelites:

“You will be my people and I will be your God”
 Exodus 6:7

- God made a new covenant through Jesus to include the whole of humanity.
- Christians believe that the Bible is the ‘Word of God’

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”
 2 Timothy 3:16

Own point of view and different points of views

- In order to get full marks on the last 12 mark question it is necessary to give another point of view, your own point of view as well as references to Christianity in your answer.
- Other religions have their own scriptures e.g. Islam believes that the Qur'an is the word of God as dictated to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel, Hinduism has the Bhagavad Gita and the Vedas, Sikhism has the Guru Granth Sahib, Judaism has the Tanakh.
- Atheists would argue that the fact that there are so many different claims of revelation from God which contradict each other, they cannot be true.
- A more liberal approach might be that the different revelations is evidence of a deep longing in humanity for the spiritual.
- Non-believers might argue that people who argue that nature reveals God's nature often ignore the ugly side of creation.

Special Revelation through Jesus

- Christians believe that God is perfectly revealed in the person of Jesus.
- They believe Jesus is God incarnate.

Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”
 John 14:9

- Christians today, especially Evangelical Christians, talk about having a personal relationship with Jesus
- Christians know Jesus through:
 - The Gospels
 - Prayer
 - The Church
 - Christian love (agape)
 - Conversion Experience

Special Revelation in the Church

- Christians believe that God continues to reveal himself through the Church.
- Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church believe that God continues to reveal himself through the sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, Reconciliation, Marriage, Holy Orders and Extreme Unction).
- Roman Catholics believe God is revealed in not only in the scriptures but also in the tradition of the Church.
- Catholics believe that the Church has authority in its teaching.

Special Revelation - Lives of the Saints

Some Christians believe that God continues to reveal himself through the lives of the saints e.g.

- St Augustine
- St Francis of Assisi
- Mother Teresa of Calcutta
- Oscar Romero

Revelation and Conversion

- Conversion for Christians means when a person becomes a believer
- St Paul's (Saul) conversion on the road to Damascus is often seen as a model for Christian conversion.
- Saul persecuted the Early Church. He was knocked off his horse by an encounter with the risen Jesus. Saul changed his name to Paul and became a missionary, converting Gentiles (non-Jews) to Christianity.
- Today Evangelical Christians see conversion as the beginning of faith.
- Some Christians who practise believers Baptism (e.g. The Baptist Church and Pentecostal Church) think it important for new a Christian to make a declaration of faith about their own personal religious experience and conversion.
- Evangelical Christians call this being ‘born again’ or ‘saved’ where someone accepts Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.
- Non-believers might argue that there are psychological explanations for such things.

Charismatic Worship

- Some Christians (e.g. Pentecostal and Evangelicals) look to the Early Church and experience of Jesus' disciples on the first day of Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus' resurrection.
- Before the day of Pentecost the disciples were afraid:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 2: 1-4

- Some Christians today believe it is possible to experience the same gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues (glossolalia), prophesy and healing.
- Pentecostal and Charismatic prayer meetings are often uninhibited with singing, dancing, clapping and waving their hands in the air.

Prayer and Meditation

- Prayer – raising of one's mind and heart to God
- Jesus gave his disciples the ‘Our Father’ (Lord's Prayer) as an example of how to pray.
- Prayer can be divided into different types:
 - Praise or Worship
 - Intercession / Petition
 - Asking Forgiveness
- Catholics sometimes use a set of Rosary Beads to help them pray. A Rosary consists of the Hail Mary, Our Father and the Glory Be
- Christian meditation is the peaceful focus on God or contemplation
- A Christian might focus on a particular passage from the Bible and try and listen to what God is speaking to them.

Person of Jesus

- Christians believe that God is fully revealed in the person of Jesus.
- St Paul describes Jesus as:

‘He is the image of the invisible God...For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him...’

Colossians 1: 15 – 20

- The gospel writers portray both Jesus' humanity and divinity.
- The Gospels also contain a record of Jesus' teaching e.g. the Sermon on the Mount.

Authority of the Bible

- Christians believe that the Bible is the Word of God.
- Among Christians there is a spectrum of belief about how the Bible is God's word:
 - Literalists – it is literally God's word e.g. Creation took place in six days
 - Fundamentalists – it contains God's truth
 - Conservatives – it need interpreting for today
 - Liberal – it needs interpreting and some parts are no longer relevant for today.

Significance of the Bible

- The Roman Catholic Church believes that the Christian faith, and all that is necessary for salvation is handed down by scripture and tradition e.g. the sacraments and teaching of the Church
- At the Protestant Reformation Martin Luther argued that the Bible contained all that was necessary for salvation – *sola scriptura*