

## Revelation and the Human Condition: Faith, Reason and Mystery

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### Abstract

### Review Article

This article seeks to explore the complex relationship between revelation, faith, reason and mystery in shaping the human condition. It examines how Revelation as a divine disclosure offers insights into the transcendent, despite that, it remains intertwined with inherent mystery. The article argues that mystery is not simply the absence of knowledge but a crucial element that defines our understanding of revelation and its relevance. It delves into the interplay of faith and doubt, hinting that doubt can be a catalyst for deeper faith. The role of reason in interpreting revelation is also considered, acknowledging its limitations in the face of the divine. By analyzing these interconnected concepts, this article aims to shed light on the perpetual human quest for meaning and the enduring significance of revelation in navigating the uncertainties of existence.

**Keywords:** Revelation, Faith, Reason, Mystery, Doubt, Human Condition, Divine, Transcendence, Spiritual Quest, Meaning, Belief, Theology, Philosophy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Human beings have dwelled in the realms of what we can call the “Wonders”- the never ending infinite, the never ending time and space and the never ending search for something which is other than itself but it has the power to unite with itself. The different disciplines of the world would name it differently, but man in the midst of a never unending search calls it a 'search of life'. In this way, religion finds its way to human being and calls it a 'spiritual quest'; one that a person longs for a divine unity and something that completes and sustains the thirst of living life. Revelation as an event offers human an insight towards something which gives meaning to life and living. Revelation, therefore, refers to the divine disclosure of truths which involves a dynamic human process and in this manner the hiddenness of the Divine is revealed to humans in various ways. Most major religions in the world believes that God 'speaks' and 'acts'. Accordingly, religious texts or scripture are believed to be revealed texts which contain what God speaks or does. Subsequently, religious doctrine, dogmas and creeds have their roots in Revelation. In other words, religious affirmation and assertions are derived from Revelation. What acts as an

object of revelation or more than calling them object they are the essence of divine revelation? Faith always refer to human response and by human response we are not to understand that faith is only subjective as it has no object outside it. The term 'belief' refers to the object of faith insofar as it captures language and concept.<sup>1</sup> Different philosophers have understood faith differently. Faith is often used synonymously with words like belief, commitment, trust and so on, however, is faith all about how a human being feels and believe? Is faith all about human response only or is there a different way to understand it. If not Faith, then is it reason which is source and foundation of all revelatory experiences? Reason is justifiable belief based on evidences. Are revelatory experiences justifiable at all? If not these become mystery and revelation as such is a matter of the hiddenness that lies in all these experiences and are well understood in the unveil. The article will navigate the human condition at how faith, reason and mystery encapsulate the meaning of the divine.

### Revelation the quest for the Unknown

The purpose of living is to find meaning in the becoming. The becoming, however, questions the purpose of life, death and what is beyond death. Does our

<sup>1</sup> Roger Haight, S.J., Dynamics of Theology (Claretian Publications, 2002). P.19

suffering have meaning? By its very nature Revelation is not something that human alone can make it meaningful. Revelation stands as a connection towards something which is complete in itself but the question arises why is something which is complete needs human response and justification? Why something higher and supreme needs a human connection? How can we make something unseen compatible with the seen? These are certain questions that concerns us when it comes to revelation and whether it is still relevant with human being finding their purpose in science and technology only.

Different theistic religions of the world describe revelation as a moment whereby the divine meets humanity through language, symbols or visions and in some God showed to them through nature. Revelation in this way it is through the material and the non-material. It is not that one is subordinated to the other but it is about the impression that it creates on the individual and with the amount of force. The nature of inspiration is what drives the non-material to become certain and true, however, the material has within it a lively impression on an individual. For example, when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush the event here is through material and it is concrete. In whatever form revelation is received it is considered as a sweeping change for one that stirs the life of the individuals that touches each and every aspect of his life. Faith as a human response of what is received is often taken as a positive way of reacting to revelation, it is a trust and a confidence in something beyond the seen. Faith does not align itself with reason and is limited by it. In the Christian context faith is more about relying and trusting in God. For example, the trust that Abraham had on God when he was asked to sacrifice and kill his only son Isaac. Abraham never doubted God even if he doubted himself. For the Hindus, on the other hand, faith is more about dedication to a way of life or belief system (the belief in Karma and Dharma) duties and actions over anything. It becomes an object of revelation and it is dynamic in nature in a sense that progresses. Does faith builds revelation or revelation builds faith? Does faith depend on revelation or revelation depends on faith? At this point of time we can say that belief was the only possibility with revelation we can say that faith was polished and it became the object of revelation providing a meaningful interplay of everything. In the act of revelation when the Divine reveals itself to the receiver it eliminates the barriers which conceals the truth that is higher than any other believes. Revelation, in this sense is a communication of truth which is of a higher aspect one that can reveal and transform the entire life of an individual. The existential crisis in human being often arises because of the alienation with the self or the other. Theologian like Paul Tillich, sees the human deprivation of the divine is because of the traditional system of beliefs that locates

God somewhere where we cannot see and feel. Paul Tillich opines and sees that the problem of dichotomy between the subject and the object lies on the very fact that God is estranged from the very being and existence of human being.

Tillich states that the God of theism has “deprive me of my subjectivity because he is all-powerful and all-knowing. I revolt and make him into an object, but the revolt fails and becomes desperate. God appears as the invincible tyrant, the being in contrast with whom all other beings are without freedom and subjectivity. He is equated with the recent tyrants who with the help of terror try to transform everything into a mere object, a thing among things, a cog in a machine they control. He becomes the model of everything against which existentialism revolted. This is the God Nietzsche said had to be killed because nobody can tolerate being made into a mere object of absolute knowledge and absolute control.<sup>2</sup> For Tillich the desire to draw God into Subject and Object is an insult to the divine holiness.<sup>3</sup>

From this aspect it can be argued that what is revealed cannot be subject and object but what is revealed is more than the distinctions, it in fact is the very ground of being and the existence of human being which can be understood as a God who is part and parcel of the life of individuals not something which is alien, separable but instead is the ground of being and existence itself. Paul Tillich did not eliminate religious and theological beliefs but rather he tried to do away with the conventional way of limiting God who is up there, but for him God is a God who partakes in the existence and the very being of human. All these understanding of what God is reveals that God’s revelation is also more than what God is understood to be.

However, the question now arises. Is revelation as a quest of the unknown a final stage of revelation.? Revelation is a continuous process it becomes more meaningful in the becoming and therefore its purpose lies in the ongoing. The ongoing search for the spiritual leads human being to seek and yearn for fulfillment in their life. Other than a divine fulfillment revelation can also resolves moral dilemma and existential questions.

In The Bhagavad Gita recounts an incident where Krishna appears to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra and imparts teachings related to Dharma.

Krishna questions Arjuna about how he has succumbed to delusion in such a critical moment, emphasizing that it is not fitting for an honourable person and does not lead to higher realms, but rather to disgrace.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Tillich, *Courage to be*, (Yale University Press, 1952). P. 185

<sup>3</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol 1 (University of Chicago Press, 1951). P. 272

There has never been a time when I, you, or any of these kings did not exist, nor will there be a time in the future when any of us will cease to be.

Oh Parth, fortunate are the warriors who are presented with such opportunities to defend righteousness without seeking them, as they open the path to celestial abodes.

However, if you reject to engage in this just war, forsaking your societal responsibility and reputation, you will undoubtedly commit a wrong.

Fight for the sake of duty, considering happiness and distress, loss and gain, victory and defeat equally. By fulfilling your duty in this manner, you will never commit a wrong.

Up to now, I have given a detailed explanation of Samkhya Yog, which is the analytical understanding of the soul. Now, Parth, pay attention as I disclose Buddhi Yog, which is the Yog of Intellect. When you work with such understanding, you will be freed from the bondage of karma. (Mukundananda, 2014).

It can be said that the knowledge that Krishna imparted on Arjuna is a revelation of one's act of what is right and wrong. Revelation is not just about unity with the Divine but it is also about clearing doubts through something which has been revealed. Rather Krishna words here appears as a source of divine wisdom that connects with Arjuna on how to lead one's life in times of tribulation and suffering. Revelation occurred at an intersection of human vulnerability and divine wisdom. In the context of Krishna and Arjuna it can be said that revelation communicates divine truths not just about who God is but what the moral ideal and law is all about.

### Faith, Reason and Mystery

Faith is a human response towards what is revealed. Revelation as an experience involves certain kind of human response like *acceptance, participation and obedience* and all these aligns with what faith is. Faith is about accepting what is given and what is given can be both abstract and concrete. For example, the different religious scripture is believed to be the 'Word of God'. Most Christians believe that both the Old Testament and the New Testament was inspired by God. In Hinduism, Vedas are considered "Apauruseya," not human compositions and are supposed to have been direct and thus are called 'sruti' (that is, 'what is heard')<sup>4</sup>. Hence, revelation is not just an encounter but also consists in the unveiling or representation of the Divine or God through some medium and this medium becomes

a content of faith. Hence, there are other experiences how content of faith like salvation, liberation, afterlife, miracles, mystic experience all these contents involve faith as the means to process them and to deepen faith itself. For Thomas Aquinas, faith is midway between knowledge and opinion. Faith resembles knowledge in so far as faith carries conviction. Faith denotes the believer's fundamental orientation towards the Divine.<sup>5</sup> For Aquinas, Reason and Faith are complementary. Reason cannot comprehend everything about the Infinite it is there that faith makes itself a room for understanding the mysterious nature of the Divine.

Many thinkers believe that the opposite of faith is doubt. However, faith as a process involves not just belief and trust but also doubt on the nature of what is given. One of the central philosophical challenges to faith, particularly when grounded in revelation, lies in the realm of epistemic justification. How can we know that a particular revelation is genuine? Sceptics argue that faith, by its very nature, lacks the empirical or logical evidence required for genuine knowledge. If revelation is the foundation of faith, how can we verify the foundation itself? Doubt arises from this very lack of verifiable evidence, questioning the certainty upon which faith is built. Doubt is often intertwined with existential anxieties – questions about meaning, purpose, and mortality. If revelation is supposed to provide answers to these questions, doubt suggests that those answers may not always be satisfying or sufficient. Some argue that faith is precisely a way of coping with the inherent uncertainty and anxiety of human existence.

Reason is the faculty by which human seek to understand, interpret and make sense of the world. When applied to matter of faith and revelation, reason does not stand in opposition but rather is compatible with it. Natural Theology appeals to human reason and empirical observation as the sources of authority, emphasizing the capacity of human intellect to discern religious truths through rational inquiry and reflection on the natural world. Natural Theology explores religious truths through rational inquiry and observation of the natural world, seeking to discern the existence and attributes of God based on empirical evidence and philosophical reflection. Reason supplies us with thoughts and these thoughts are made reasonable by our will and so in revelation when a thing is revealed or let known it often is contemplated by the receiver. Reason can never be opposed to revelation in a sense that everything which has been revealed is thought about and contemplate. Reason is not just a faculty that verifies and justifies but it is a faculty that thinks and contemplates and it is here that revelation becomes justifiable in a sense that every

<sup>4</sup> Vaman Shivaram Apte, The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary, 4<sup>th</sup> revised & enlarged ed., (Motilal Banarsidass, 1965). P. 887

<sup>5</sup> "Faith (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy)", December 9, 2023  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=faith>

human being conditions himself not to just mere thinking but reflection about the deep meaning of life and existence and about the role of these content in making living life possible. What reasons lacks, faith completes in a sense that cannot be seen, trusted or accepted. Faith supplies human being with contents that does not only make life meaningful and complete but it also provides them with a promise that life is much more worth living and finds its fulfilment in life after death. Therefore, faith makes revelation continuous and relevant with a blend of reason and knowing.

What makes revelation more interesting is its emphasize on the mysterious. The mysterious, however, is a question of importance in a sense that it might lie in the hidden or the unveiled. The more something is revealed the more it is hidden in a sense that the revealed has with it so much of the unknown that knowledge itself is not enough to reveal everything. However, what is not given is mysterious in itself and that proves the limitation of human understanding to grasp everything in the universe. A transcendental reality which surpasses beyond human comprehension and nature itself. The mysterious nature of revelation is what makes religious experience open for interpretation and comprehension in that no experience in itself is all that it is but it is vast. Mysticism as a religious experience is whereby a person draws itself into wonder, amazement, and awe emphasizes the transcendence and ineffability of God, asserting that the divine surpasses human comprehension and language. Any kind of mystic experience will never be able to describe or be beyond expression. The experience progresses towards a completely non-experience of anything, and the person remains in bliss. Mystery, in the context of revelation, is not simply the unknown waiting to be discovered but it is something more profound, a sense of the transcendent that lies beyond the grasp of human intellect. It is the awareness that even in moments of perceived divine disclosure, something remains veiled, hinting at a reality that surpasses our capacity for full comprehension. This "more" is not a deficiency in the revelation itself, but rather an intrinsic characteristic of the divine, a recognition of the limits of human understanding in the face of the infinite.

In revelation the human conditioning of life is not different from how life is itself, there is a search for meaning and this search is not something new but it is about seeking to be one which is other than the self or the self itself. This kind of longing is an attempt to find the truth about life whereby the purpose is revealed in the process of finding.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the human quest for meaning is an ongoing dialogue between the self and the

transcendent. Revelation, as a purported unveiling of the divine offers glimpses into this realm but these glimpses are always intertwined with mystery. It is within this interplay of revelation and mystery that the human condition is most profoundly explored. The search for meaning, the yearning for connection with something beyond the self, drives the spiritual quest. Revelation, whether through scripture, experience or the natural world provides potential pathways, yet it never fully dispels the inherent mystery that surrounds the divine. Faith, the human response to revelation, is not simply blind acceptance but a dynamic process that involves belief, trust, and even doubt. Doubt, rather than being the antithesis of faith can be a catalyst for deeper understanding, pushing individuals to grapple with fundamental questions and arrive at a more authentic faith. Reason, while playing a crucial role in interpreting and understanding revelation ultimately reaches its limits in the face of the infinite. It is here, in the realm of mystery, that faith takes over allowing us to embrace the unknown and to dwell in the presence of the divine without demanding complete comprehension. The ongoing search for spiritual fulfillment, the yearning for meaning in the face of life's uncertainties is itself a testament to the enduring relevance of revelation. It is a journey of becoming, a continuous striving to understand our place in the universe and to connect with the transcendent reality that both beckons and eludes us. The whispers of the divine, though often veiled in mystery continue to resonate within the human heart, prompting us to seek, to question and to believe.

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