

**Revelation is all about the unknowable made known by the unknowable.**

The content of Christian revelation is:

- God is the Creator of the Universe and our Creator
- God loves us
- We have been given a special role in His creation
- Our prime ancestor forfeited the opportunity to be united with God, and the effect of their actions was to exclude us from that union as well
- We have been given another chance to achieve that intended union (salvation)
- Jesus is God's son
- Jesus is our source and means of salvation.



But revelation is not just God telling us facts. It is an **event**, the coming of Jesus Christ. In fact, the world's **ultimate revelation** is person-centred on the God-Man, Jesus:

**Jesus must be understood as the sum of all revelation.**

Christian revelation is essentially different from that of other religions because of the Jesus event, God-made-human for our salvation.

Of course, other religions, like Islam, reject that claim. For them, Jesus was a great prophet but no more, and further revelation was given to Mohammed (pbuh). Both views can not be correct. We believe that our faith is the true one, our revelation is the complete one. This is where belief and faith are required, but both should be held in the spirit of tolerance of another's faith. After all, in all honesty, what do you think your beliefs would be if you had been brought up as a Muslim instead of as a Christian, seeing Mohammed (pbuh) as God's supreme messenger and not Jesus, and revering the Koran and not the Bible?

## Scriptures

The word 'scriptures' refers to the **written** records of any religion that are accepted by that religion as being divinely inspired.

The problem with revelation is how to pass it on accurately, hence the need to write it down. Each religion has its own views about how their scriptures came to be recorded, how they are to be interpreted, and what is meant by the words **inspired** and **inerrant** when used to describe them.

For example, in Islam, Mohammed (pbuh) heard his revelation and dictated it to a scribe to ensure an accurate record of what he heard. By contrast, the Bible was produced in a different, more complicated way over many hundreds of years.

# Understanding The Bible and Our Faith

## 1.

### God, Revelation, Scripture

*What do we really mean when we use these words?*



## Questions for Reflection

1. Has the image of God been created by Man?
2. How can we distinguish revelation from God from what might be a psychological disorder?
3. What is so special about the Bible compared with the scriptures of other religions?

## What is Meant by the Word 'God'?

In the ancient world there was never any issue over the existence of gods and their reality was assumed. However, they were not seen as spiritual in our present sense of the word. In general, they were just more powerful beings who had a certain degree of control over nature and the lives of humans. However, there certainly were issues over the specific nature of the gods.



In the Old Testament, many gods were known but Yahweh was accepted as the God of the Hebrews because of His special revelation to them. He was seen by them as the most powerful God because they understood Yahweh as the Creator of the world, with power over it.

For much of the Old Testament, God was not seen as spirit in the way we now understand it, because they had no such conception. Their use of the word spirit was used only to emphasise the gulf between Yahweh and His creation. It was only in the inter-testamental period that the notion of a separate spirit world developed. Although this development is reflected in the New Testament writings it varies in meaning and emphasis and did not have the full connotation it now possesses.

Although there was, of course, a generally accepted view of the nature of God, many aspects were not defined for many hundreds of years e.g. that Jesus was both God and Man (at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D.). In fact, there was not a specific definition about the particular qualities of God until the First Vatican Council (1870). God is there described as Creator, mighty, eternal, incomprehensible, infinite in Intellect and Will, in all perfection, and one unique spiritual substance.

All the other main religions of the world, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, acknowledge God as being Creator, transcendent (beyond our understanding) and supernatural, that is, outside the physical world and, therefore, outside the laws of physics. God only becomes immanent, that is, known to us and amongst us, by revealing Himself and His Will to us.

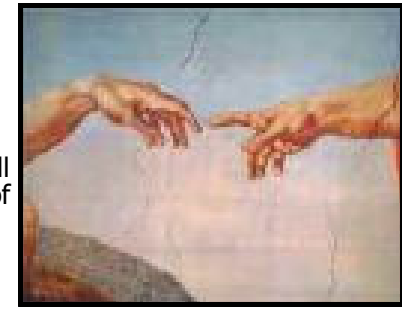
For most Christians, the word God also means a Trinitarian God, three persons, Father, Son and Spirit. However, this is not directly proclaimed in the Bible, although indirectly many New Testament passages indicate the three-fold work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity was defined as an article of faith at the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD.

## God's Qualities

The qualities of God listed at the First Vatican Council are those attributed to Him by the Tradition of the Church at different times prior to then. They are based primarily

on the acceptance of God as Creator of the whole universe, implying great intellect, power and purpose.

From this base, Greek Platonic ideas about the existence of perfections were transposed to God. Therefore, God now became the epitome of all good perfections, in particular, all-powerful, all-loving and all-knowing. This is all part of the traditional definition of God, and we have all grown up with it. But what do these qualities actually mean?



If God is all-powerful, does it mean His power is limitless? No, it does not. God can not do things that are mutually exclusive, He can not change the laws of mathematics, He can not change His very nature. In addition, if God permits free-will, really genuine free-will, then surely He can not prevent its outcome, however unpleasant this outcome is.

If God is all-loving, does that mean His love is never ending (quantity) or without limit (quality) or both? If we readily accept God's love is never ending, what are the implications if we also accept it is without limit? Does this mean Satan will be forgiven, does it mean no-one will ever go to Hell (however we define Hell)?

If God is all-knowing, does that mean that He knows what we are going to do before we exercise our free-will? If so, have we really got free-will, and if God already knows what everyone will do in the future why doesn't God judge us all now?

If God is the perfection of all qualities, why not the negative ones? Is God all-consuming rage, absolute hatred, unknowable terror? Most believers would say absolutely not, although it could also be argued that God is just like that if people reject Him totally, and are sent to 'Hell' when they are judged after death. But even then we somehow do not perceive it that way. It is fair to state that we see God only reluctantly sending people to Hell (whether Hell is a place or a state). In effect, we create for ourselves a modification of our 'perfection' definition of God.

Essentially, to a large extent, an image of God has been created that is based on our image of what God should be. We should be more humble and say that we can not possibly know, beyond what He has revealed about Himself. That is the essence of God's transcendence, the fact that He is beyond our unaided knowledge.

If we accept this, then we won't put God on trial every time something evil occurs in our lives or in the world. The conflict we create about God when we think of Him as having absolute power, infinite love, and complete knowledge of the future, is not God's conflict but **ours** alone.

## Revelation

Christian revelation is two-fold: It is God informing us about who **He is** and who **we are**.