

## **Revelation: God revealing himself to religious believers.**

Nature of God - What God's character is like.

Atheist - a person who believes that there is no god.

Agnostic - A person who believes that we cannot be sure whether God exists or not.

Theist - A person who believes in God.

Polytheism - belief in more than one God.

*Hindus believe that there is one Supreme Spirit Brahman who is unknowable. Brahman can be known through different gods and goddesses. These represent aspects of the supreme spirit. Ganesha for example is the god of wisdom and Shiva the god of destruction and recreation. Hindus worship different aspects of God so they can relate to God.*

Monotheism - Belief in one God. Muslims believe that Allah is one.

Personal - (when applied to God) is the belief in a conscious individual or person with whom people are able to have a relationship or feel close to. Christians believe that they can pray to God in a personal way e.g. Father

Impersonal - (when applied to God) means that the believer does not think that God has any 'human' characteristics. God is unknowable and mysterious. God is regarded more like an idea or a force rather than a person.

Immanent - to believe that God is present in the world and involved with life on earth and in the universe. Christians believe that God is active in the world through the Holy Spirit and was active in the world through Jesus, healing people.

Transcendent - is to believe that God is outside time and space. God is beyond and outside life on earth and the universe.

*Muslims believe that there is only one God, Allah. Allah is unknowable and beyond our understanding. Our minds cannot comprehend Allah's nature.*

Supremacy - means God is the best and most in everything. Supreme power or authority.

Omnipotence - refers to God's complete powerfulness, beyond anything we can know.

Omniscience - refers to God's total intelligence, beyond anything we can know or copy.

Benevolence - goodness, being all loving.

Compassionate - one of the qualities of God; showing concern for the sufferings of others; literally 'suffering with'.

Merciful - a quality of God that stresses God's willingness to forgive the wrongdoer.

Muslim beliefs - One God Allah who is eternal and unchanging. Has no equals, is beyond understanding. A limited understanding of Allah can be known through his 99 beautiful names as revealed in the Qur'an. E.g. all-merciful, the sustainer.

Christian beliefs - One God who can be seen through three different aspects, the Trinity—Father, Son and Spirit. Father—Creator, the eternal mighty God, Son—came to earth in the form of Jesus, Spirit—God as he works in the world.

God as One: less confusing for the worshipper, do not worship an aspect of God but God as a whole so understand the fullness of God, do not worship or make an idol of an aspect of God, Muslims believe God is one and has no equal - God's vast nature is grasped.

God as many aspects: God can be both transcendent and immanent at the same time, personal and impersonal as seen through different aspects of the same God. Can relate to an aspect of God because God is so vast and unknowable it is impossible for our human minds to comprehend but perhaps we can comprehend one aspect. Christianity - 3 aspects to the 1 God. Hinduism—gods and goddesses as aspects of Brahman—means can focus on the aspect that you have a concern about e.g. Ganesh—wisdom.

General Revelation - God making himself known through ordinary, common human experiences. Available to all. Indirect experience.

Special Revelation - God making himself known through direct personal experience or an unusual specific event.

Evidence - Facts that can indicate whether something is true.

Prayer - words of praise, thanks or sorrow etc offered to God. Communication with God. People pray to ask for forgiveness, to thank God and to pray for God's help. A person might feel that their prayer is answered or they might be filled with a sense of deep inner peace or wonder.

Miracles - Amazing events which can't be explained by the laws of nature. Jesus was renowned for his miracles and people claim that miracles still occur and bring people to God. They show God's power and presence. (special)

Nature - God can be known through the world around us because he created it. E.g. design of a flower shows that God is a creator and designer, Thunderstorm that God is powerful. (General)

People - God can be revealed through other people, e.g. Mother Teresa. She showed God's love and care for those others had rejected in Calcutta. (General)

Conscience - the inner feeling you are doing right or wrong. Makes you feel guilty if you do something you really believe is wrong. For some religious believers the conscience is evidence of God (General)

Reason - Thinking through the factors in your own mind and coming to a decision based on the consequences. For some our ability to reason tells us about God (General)

Holy Books or Sacred Writings - Writings which are believed to originate from God or a god. E.g. Bible or Qur'an. God's/ Allah's word. (General)

Evidence - Facts that can indicate whether something is true.

Conversion - When a person becomes a member of faith, often following a dramatic change of heart, for example Saul before he became St Paul on the Road to Damascus, Jesus blinded him and spoke to him. He converted to Christianity and was healed. He then completely changed and went around preaching about Jesus. (Special)

Dream - Images, ideas, emotions that occur during sleep. E.g. Jacob

Types of Worship (Special or general—depending on whether God has made himself known directly or indirectly)

Charismatic—Highly enthusiastic form of Christianity, filled with and led by the Holy Spirit. Gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues or visions given. Can learn that God is immanent and is active in the world and that God is loving. Protestant Christianity  
Meditation—Contemplation on religious matters, focusing on God. Can learn that God listens to them and if focusing on an aspect of nature that God is a designer and creator. May bring about visions. Could be inspired by prayer, reading sacred writings or fasting.  
Corporate Worship—worship performed together as a congregation.

Sacramental ritual—rights that accompany the giving of the sacraments (Catholic Christianity) For example The Eucharist, bread and wine. Remembering the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Can learn that God is forgiving and that God is with them.

*Both Christians and Muslims would argue that God reveals himself in lots of different way. People may not recognise him or may not be looking for him. They may feel that God does answer their prayers but it might be over a long period of time or through other people.*

*Religious believers would argue that a person can relate to God through Revelation e.g. prayer, (talking to God - conversation so God answers their prayers) worship (understand the nature of God— may feel God has revealed something of his nature of teachings to them during worship) and reading their holy book (understood to be the word of God—can reveal God's nature.*

Strengths of General Revelation—indirect and available to everyone, available at all times to everyone in all places, continuous and on going so can up-date as new issues arise and conscience is available to all religious believers.

Strengths of Special Revelation—discloses the whole of what God wants people to know, direct and often has a stronger and more immediate impact, people who experience Special Revelation have an authority and confidence that enable them to lead others.

*Many Religious believers would argue that you need both as proof of the existence of God.*

Power of Revelation—Proof of God's existence. Help to start off the religion. Helping people to know what they must do to live as God wishes.

Impact of Revelation—Conversion. Way a person lives their life (way they behave, eat, drink, dress, treat others). Way a person worships God. Becoming a monk or nun.

Illusion—a false belief; something wrongly believed to exist, deceptive appearances, 'all in the mind'.

Reality—what is real or actually exists.

Religious experiences: reality or illusion? Some people argue are an illusion because there could be alternative explanations or there is no empirical evidence that the experience happened. Others argue that you cannot prove they did not happen and that the person who experienced it has enough evidence to believe it is real. They also may point to any changes that have happened as evidence of the event.

Evidence to support the reality of any revelation—religious people might look at - does it correspond to what can be seen in the real world? Does it fit with earlier Revelations? Does it convert people? They may accept it because of : the effect on individuals or groups, no reason to doubt the person if a trustworthy person, common core of beliefs found in any revelation because it matches scientific observations.

Why atheists consider any revelation to be an illusion - false experience (may be the result of drugs, alcohol or mental illness.) The mind can play tricks, wishful thinking, conflicting revelations, ordinary events interpreted as revelations, cases of fraudulent revelations, conscience is not from God—Freud argues result of upbringing and social influences.

Case Study: Ellen G White (see RE book)

Problems with Revelation: Conflicting claims to truth from different religions (Christians and Muslims disagree about the nature of God), conflicting claims to truth within same religion (e.g. Qur'an and how women dress—whether they should cover their faces.) Different perspectives on revelation (e.g. worship—general and special?)

Responses to Problems - may believe that their faith is right (e.g. Islam and true revelation found within the Qur'an) Some believers may say that their faith is one of the ways of becoming close to God.

### **Sample Questions Revelation: Those in your book and the following:**

- 1i) What is meant by 'revelation'? (1 mark)
- (ii) Give an example of revelation. (1 mark)
2. 'God can only be known through faith.' Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer, showing you have thought about more than one point of view. (6 marks)
3. Explain, using examples, the difference between 'general' revelation and 'special' revelation. (4 marks)
4. Explain what effect a special revelation might have on a person's life. (4 marks)
5. Explain what Christians believe about the nature of God. (5 marks)
6. Explain what religious believers learn about God through revelation. (4 marks)
7. Give two ways in which people claim to have experienced God (2 marks)
8. 'Only fools think they can see God' What do you think? Explain your opinion (3 marks)
9. 'General revelation is better proof of God than special revelation' Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer, showing that you have thought about more than one point of view (6 marks)

## **Science and Religion**

Evolving, Changing Truth: The idea that what is considered true changes as new knowledge becomes available or circumstances change.

Experiment-a scientific way of checking and proving hypotheses.

Faith-a commitment to something that goes beyond proof and knowledge, especially about God and religion.

Fundamentalist-a person who believes in the basics of a religion, particularly believing that what is contained in a sacred text is an accurate, almost factual, record that cannot be questioned.

Hypothesis-an idea, based on known facts, that is yet to be proved correct

Natural Selection-the animals or plants best suited to their environment survive, and those that are not suited or do not adapt die out.

Proof-something that shows that something else is fact.

Theory-a hypothesis that explains facts that are widely accepted or well-tested.

Ultimate Questions-questions about the nature and purpose of the Universe.

Scientific truth-based upon observation, hypothesis, experiments and repeated testing. Something is proved true based on these things. They are objective. Scientific truth is constantly changing because observation and experiment may result in new evidence that proves earlier scientific theories untrue or inaccurate. It is conditional, true when based on the conditions in which testing/observation took place. For many people scientific truths are the most trustworthy because of the painstaking evidence used to support them. Science answers the what and how questions - function and process.

Religious truth-truth established from religion e.g. from holy books. We read it, are taught it and for some people they are told it by God. It gives answers to Ultimate questions: Does God exist? Why are we here? Religion answers the why questions-purpose and meaning. The evidence they use to support a particular religious truth involves experience, belief, trust and faith. They may refer to evidence from religious authority revealed through sacred writings, their conscience, religious experience, the history of religion and observation from the natural world. The main source of evidence religious believers refer to to support the truth of their religion is their faith. Religion and holy books can be open to interpretation but their words don't change. The truth of religion is considered to be absolute-unchanging and relevant for all times.

Historical Truth-Historians use evidence from the times they are researching to discover the truth about an event. E.g. objects, documents written by people living at the time, film or sound recordings. Some historical facts can be evidenced but a historian has to explain why things happen and different historians may come to different conclusions based on the same evidence. Historical truths are therefore subjective.

Absolute Truth-fixed, unalterable facts, something that is true for all times and in all cultures.

Evolving Truth-varies depending on the knowledge and understanding of the time. As information and circumstances change, what is understood to be true may also change.

Authority-something or somebody accepted as having the power to expect obedience.

*Whether or not something is accepted as the absolute truth depends on the reliability of what is accepted as the authority. The main source of authority for people is themselves (what they personally believe to be true), this means that truth is subjective.*

Creation-The view that only accepts that God created the Universe, Christianity teaches in Genesis the Bible that it took 6 days and God rested on the 7th day. 1- light, 2-heavens (sky) 3-land and plants 4-sun, moon stars, 5-fish and birds, 6-animals and birds and then humans in his image, 7-God rested. Some Christians (fundamentalist view) believe that this means that it was made in 6 x 24 hours. Others believe that it was made in 6 stages over millions of years. They point to the Hebrew word *iom* which means stream of events but has been translated as day. Some Christians believe that it is the order that makes sense (non-literal view) and because the story was told thousands of years ago it was told the only way it could be, using the language and knowledge of the time. Other Christians understand it to be a *myth*, a story that tells us that God made the world not how he did it.

Big Bang-Scientific theory that the universe began with an enormous explosion. (a singularity exploded) From this explosion all the matter that makes up the universe came into being. (Still have the question what caused the Big Bang.) Evidence: universe is expanding and back ground microwave radiation.

*Big-Bang and Genesis can be compatible if a non-literal view is taken or creation is understood as a myth, they are not compatible if a fundamentalist view is followed. Atheists would not find them compatible.*

## **Cosmological Revolution**

Medieval world-view-believed that the earth was the centre of the universe, science was based on the Bible account in Genesis.

Everything was created by God and what mattered was getting into heaven after death. The earth was flat and everything above the moon in God's realm moved in perfect circles around the earth. Everything happened for a purpose which was explained in religious terms, all knowledge controlled by the Church

Cosmological Revolution-development of scientific ideas that challenged religious belief in the late Middle Ages, e.g. that the earth is round and the sun is the focal point of the Universe. The change in understanding of the layout of the Universe. E.g. belief that the world was central to the creation. Earth centre, Heavens were perfect -**Copernicus**-sun centred universe, earth moving round the sun. Science relied on God as an answer to problems -**Newton**-set up rules for science. Laid the foundations of science. **Galileo** -

*established the practice of observation to find answers, he also saw that the heavenly bodies were neither perfect nor spherical. He also proved the Sun-centred view.*

**Challenge of the Cosmological Revolution**-Challenged the idea that God had a special relationship with humans, Christian faith no longer had control over science, religion became the explanation for those things still not understood by science, God not regarded as the controller of everything. Questioned God's immanence.

## **Evolution**

Before Darwin people believed that humans were exactly as God had created them, in the C16th Bishop Ussher calculated that the earth was created in 4004BCE (6000 years old) using the dates in the Bible. Fossils were believed to have been created by God as a test of man's faith (they didn't have carbon dating)

**Evolution**-Scientific belief that life forms changed over time, developing from simple to complex creatures. The animals or plants best suited to their environment survive, and those that are not suited or do not adapt die out. This is called Natural Selection. This means that animals adapt and evolve and could mean that they were not designed on purpose. If this is the case then there is not designer and the design of the world is not evidence for the existence of God. In *Origins of the Species* Darwin asks were the intelligence in nature, the complexity and interdependence came from - he puts this down to God - God created original life forms with the ability to adapt and change. (Design via intelligence and adaptability) He later had doubts about the Bible, God and Christian faith.

**Lamarck**-believed that organisms change to meet the needs of their changing environment. Concluded that the organs that a life form uses the most to survive grow bigger and get stronger. Changes that are useful for the life forms survival are inherited by their offspring.

**Darwin**- concluded that the world is a place of change and the huge variety of creatures and species is the result of thousands of years of change and adaption (see Evolution above) In the 1860's Darwin's research caused him to reject the evidence for God in nature and ultimately to doubt the Bible, God and Christian faith. Concluded that humans descended from apes

**Challenge of Evolution**-living things developed in small steps and were a result of chance. If Natural selection is the result of random chance- rejects the work of a designer God, life forms change to suit their environment-conflicts with Genesis where God made the environment for benefit of living creatures.

**Religious reasons for rejecting Darwin's theory**-Humans made in the image of God-cannot have evolved from another species, humans have a spiritual soul which other creatures do not have, gaps in the fossil records-there is no conclusive evidence that evolution took place, no absolutely clear fossil evidence to link apes and humans, the advance to a higher life form would require careful selection of variations rather than random chance.

**Religious reasons for accepting Darwin's theory**-Some think that you can accept evolutionary theory as well as religious belief. Evolution-process through which God's creation took place, it shows the power of God and God's design for the development of humanity. Are huge and sudden 'jumps' in evolution, resulting in unexplained changes- these are a part of God's plan.

## **Other arguments:**

**Design Argument**: God designed (made) the Universe because everything is so intricately made in its detail that could not have happened by chance. Intricate interdependence is evidence of this. (I.e. bees and pollen) Paley used a watch to argue this. He argued if we found a watch we would know it had been designed for a purpose. If we look at nature then we can see evidence of design. He concluded it had been designed and that this designer is God.

**First Cause**-The belief that God created the Universe. Everything has a cause, so God must be the cause of the Universe. (Aquinas) If we apply this theory to the Big Bang, could argue that God is the First Cause, the cause of the Big Bang.

**Intelligent design**-an alternative to both creationism and the Darwinian theory of evolution that some Christian scientists adhere to. Supporters of intelligent design believe that living things are too complex to be solely accounted for by the theory of evolution, and that a designer must therefore be ultimately responsible.

*Many religious believers argue that it is possible to accept Big Bang and evolutionary theories without rejecting their faith—they were the processes through which God's creation took place. Religious beliefs cannot be proved in a scientific experiment, but science can give people a sense of wonder at the natural world that supports their faith. Whether someone accepts both science and religion depends on how they interpret the scriptures and teachings of their religion.*

*Pierre Laplace thought that once all the laws of nature were discovered there would be no place for religion, but Einstein's theory of relativity and the theory of quantum mechanics have shaken the confidence of scientists in establishing facts about the reality of the world. Scientists such as John Polkinghorne are turning to religion for answers to what cannot be otherwise explained.*

*Many religious believers and scientists argue that the modern world needs both science and religion. Science explains facts but the spiritual needs of people have to be catered for. Recent research, people who have religious beliefs are healthier and less likely to suffer from stress.*

## **Sample exam questions: Science and Religion**

1. 'Evolution proves that God exists.' Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer, showing you have thought about more than one point of view. (6 marks)
2. Give **two** types of evidence on which scientific proof is based. (2 marks)

3. Explain the Big Bang theory
4. 'Evolution proves that God does not exist' What do you think? Explain your opinion (3 marks)
5. i) Explain two ways in which people's ideas about the world changed in the cosmological revolution (4 marks)  
ii) Explain briefly why this was a problem for the Church at the time (3 marks)
6. 'It is impossible to believe in both scientific truth and religious truth' Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer, showing that you have thought about more than one point of view. (6 marks)

### **CHRISTIANITY**

Christians– name of the religious believers.

Bible - Christian Holy Book

Comforter– Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is with them helping them, aiding them through life.

Denomination - One of the worldwide Christian traditions e.g. Roman Catholic, Anglican.

Jesus - Christians believe he is God in human form.

Guide– Christians believe that the Holy Spirit guides them on their lives so that they can do what is right.

The Pope– Head of the Roman Catholic Church.

### **ISLAM**

Islam - The name of the religion

Muslims - the name of the religious believers

Qur'an– The Muslim Holy Book.

Muhammad– The last and greatest of the

Prophets.

Hadith– Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (used as guidance)