

Reality and Revelation

A Prologue to the Study of the Logos

by David Morsey

THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH

What is truth? Who am I? What am I for? Where am I going? How can I really know anything for certain? These are the crucial questions for the individual. These are the questions one asks when one is alone. The intellectual may use more sophisticated terms; the philosopher may go at it in a more systematic manner, but in the end, the deeply intimate and lonely confrontation with oneself, when the shades are drawn on the outside world, brings a peeling back of veneers and an encounter with the same simple questions. In the forum and in the parlor, the vital life issues are likely to be obscured by the insistent demand of the ego for self-respect—the need to defend one's sophistication, or **“sanity”**. But when one is alone, and the defenses are dropped, there comes the moment of truth. It is to this **“moment”** that the following pages are addressed.

We want to know the truth, if possible. We have agreed to set aside the facades of intellectualism and sophistication. We will attempt to define our terms as we go, and strive for clarity rather than rhetoric. Immediately, we are confronted with that most ambiguous of terms, **“truth”**, itself. What does it mean? Is what we do mean by it possible? Or is it, like the word, **“happiness”**, an elusive bird which slips from our grasp the moment we think we have it? If we are going to talk about it, we must define it, as it will be used in these pages. To the Greeks, whose language lies at the roots of ours, the word signified reality and genuineness. Perhaps the best synonym is reality. We may say that truth is the **“verbalization of reality”**. For the purpose of our discussion, we shall use this concept. One may argue that it is impossible to be absolutely sure of having reality, which renders the word at least impractical, if not useless. Such a one would say that if you include the idea of absolute reality in the term, it loses its validity since there is no such thing as absolute truth. Thus, truth is relative, that is, it applies only to the given situation. In this sense, truth would be a verbalization of appearances. But here is a contradiction. Because the idea that there is no absolute truth would become itself an absolute. So, you see, we argue in circles. The best way to go at the discussion is to grant certain basic definitions as acceptable for the immediate purpose. Thus, truth as absolute reality is at least an ideological goal toward which we work. To challenge its validity at this point is to beg the question which means that we call for the vote before we hear the evidence.

In the quest for truth, where do we start? Why not start with the question, **“How do we know?”** The philosopher calls this, **“Epistemology”**—theories of knowledge. It is not really so complicated. There are only a few major theories. Simply expressed they are as follows: 1) knowledge we are born with; 2) knowledge we receive by authority; 3) knowledge we receive from revelation; 4) knowledge we arrive at by reasoning; 5) knowledge we acquire by experience. Of course, in a way, the whole system is suspect, because the very mind that figures out these theories is also the judge of their accuracy. To put it another way, the mind that accumulates the data, affects the data it accumulates. So, another circle—we are, alas, back where we started.

Where, then, is hope? How can microscopic man stand on his tiny microcosm—earth—and say that he knows the universe, much less anything beyond it, such as a supreme being? How, indeed, can he even know that the measuring reed he uses for his own world has any relevance to ultimate reality? Obviously, the only certainty, if in fact there be any at all, must come from some source outside of man himself. Else, there can be no objectivity of judgment. And if there be such a source, the only way that man can interact with this source is to have the capacity for getting outside himself. The philosopher calls this “**self-transcendence**”. This is the essence of the great debate throughout the entire history of man's effort to know himself. Is there something beyond nature or is there not? And, if there is, does man have access to it?

THE PURSUIT OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

What is the nature of man? Can man make an objective judgment about the nature of his own being? The pursuit of these questions has led the thinkers of history down two main streams. These streams have many branches, but ultimately, one either sees man as totally encompassed in the cycle of nature, or, as having the capacity to transcend nature. That is to say, that there is something within man that allows him to go beyond nature. For purposes of this discussion we will use the terms, “**Naturalism**” and “**Supranaturalism**”.

Naturalism. To say that man is totally encompassed in the cycle of nature means that he originated out of the stuff of the universe (and this, unaided by any outside force such as a supreme intelligence); that all of his life processes are governed by natural and mechanistic laws; and that in the end he simply disintegrates and becomes again part of the stuff of the universe. This does not deny his capacity as a rational being, but, on the other hand, does not allow for explanations of these processes outside the measurable phenomena of nature. Naturalism, as this position may be generally classified, depends primarily on the “**scientific method**” for knowledge. The scientific method involves a specific process of investigation based on four steps—observation, verification, classification, and generalization. From this process are derived what we call objective evidences. Objective evidence is that which stands apart from, and is unaffected by individual attitudes or feelings, as for example, the results of chemical experiments. Subjective evidence deeply involves the individual psyche, and cannot really be verified apart from it, as for example, experience of love and faith. Subjective evidence may be as convincing to the individual as objective evidence, but may not be convincing to another person. It must be made quite clear, however, that the idea of objective evidence does not imply absolute proof. The scientist who deals with objective evidence will himself be the first to admit the lack of absolute certainty in all human knowledge.

The approach of Naturalism closes the discussion at the point where the scientific method is not applicable. The Naturalist has, by definition, excluded himself from discussions that hinge on revelational knowledge, since he does not accept the possibility of it. It is obviously true that the scientific method cannot be used to verify knowledge which is presumed to come from a source outside nature. Scepticism of religious, or supranatural experience is totally consistent with the premise of Naturalism.

Supranaturalism. The other major stream flows in the direction of man's capacity to interact outside nature. This position is based on a premise that there are forces that are not identifiable within the spectrum of natural law, or the scientific method. The branches of this stream include everything from the simple acknowledgement of a supreme intelligence, to the dogma of special revelation. Once one acknowledges the possibility of knowledge that lies outside the range of rational verification, he immediately opens the door to limitless discussion. However, here again consistency is important. If the Naturalist cannot deny the revelational on the basis of the scientific method, the Supranaturalist cannot appeal to the scientific method to verify his premise. Whereas the Naturalist expects objective evidence, the Supranaturalist must depend primarily on subjective verifications. For example; the existence of an orderly cosmos may confirm for the individual, his premise that there exists a Supreme Intelligence, but this cannot be advanced as proof, since to use nature in proof of something that exists outside of it, is to render it no longer outside nature.

It is vital that the lines be drawn between subjective and objective evidence. Failure to distinguish between the two has been the cause of endless and needless debate and bitterness. The acceptance of the possibility of subjective evidence, or the demand for objective evidence is a matter of presupposition since neither position can be proven. Just so, the positions of Naturalism and Supranaturalism rest upon presuppositions. A presupposition is a viewpoint that has been assumed without the aid of complete or conclusive evidence. One takes the presupposition as a premise or a hypothesis. He then proceeds to gather the evidences which confirm or deny it. Theoretically, when the negative evidence outweighs the positive, he shifts his premise. Unfortunately, many assume that shifting premises is a mark of instability. This introduces a prejudicial hurdle that makes the pursuit of truth difficult. Debates between the Naturalist and the Supranaturalist are impractical since each is arguing from a different premise.

THE PURSUIT OF THE SUPRANATURAL

It is not relevant to this discussion to consider further the position of the Naturalist. We have no quarrel with him. For his own reasons he has accepted the premise that man cannot get beyond himself, and we must admire the consistency that does not allow him to be involved with the possibilities of that which is beyond nature. On the other hand, we are not always consistent. There are many who accept the premise of naturalism, but would like to consider the question of the supranatural. This is, of course, quite reasonable, only let it be remembered that the same rules do not apply. We are approaching knowledge on the basis of the revelational and authoritative; and perhaps, to some degree, intuitional. Data from the realm of nature will only be of confirming value at best.

Once we are in the realm of the supranatural, further critical choices must be made as to basic premises. Here again we come to two major streams, viz., that which is based on authority and special revelation, and that which is based upon the experimental knowledge of self-exploration. The latter view is basic to various expressions of Eastern Mysticism, of which Hinduism and Buddhism are prominent examples. The necessity of authority and special revelation is the basic premise of such religions as Islam, Judaism and Christianity. In fact, the development of religion throughout the western world has largely followed this stream. Again, these premises are all presuppositions. There are no absolute proofs. No matter what documentary evidences may be cited in proof of the authenticity of the sacred writings, or the consistency and validity of their message, there is still a large chasm

between the confirmation of authenticity and the proof that it was a Divine Being that actually was responsible for the message that the writings contain. By the same token, the numerous personal experiences of the mystic can at best confirm to himself alone the credibility of his convictions.

The premise which allows for the pursuit of the supranatural on an individual basis apart from special revelation shall hereafter be called "**Mysticism**". By special revelation we mean a specific, inscripturated statement of truth which is universally applicable. That is, that there is a body of absolute truth which has been communicated to man by a Supreme Being and that this body of truth is no more subject to personal choice than the laws of nature. For example, in the Chemistry lab, the formulae for producing given substances are not open to choice. Thus, the premise of special revelation stands opposed to the premise of mysticism which allows the individual not only the right to make a choice, but the assumption that whatever choice he makes will be as valid as any other so long as it is an honest choice. On this basis, for example, the Hindu would be quite willing to accept the idea that one could be a Hindu and a Christian at the same time. The Christian, however, could not accept the Hindu as equally in possession of the truth without giving up the premise of special revelation. Implicit in the term "**Christian**", is the concept of one God with Jesus Christ as the primary revelation of God. Although in common usage, the term Christian is sometimes broadly applied to include those who accept the historicity of Jesus without his Deity, the apostles would have insisted that such ones could not properly be called Christian. The Christian concept of revelation constitutes an absolute. If a Christian were to acknowledge other deities as equally valid, he would deny the uniqueness of Christ. It is extremely important to note, however, that the New Testament does not exclude the possibility of God's extending grace to a Hindu. Rejecting the Hindu's right to call himself a Christian does not mean rejecting the possibility of God's grace extended where it may be justified.

Mysticism. The premise of mysticism allows one the possibility of exploring the supranatural realm in his own way and without the aid of dogmatic guidelines or interaction with others. There is, of course, a generally accepted body of literature and an appeal to human guides along the way, as in the sacred writings and gurus of Hinduism. The literature and the guides are not, however, regarded with the same spirit of authority and uniqueness that the Christian attaches to Jesus Christ. Further, the "**mystic**" does not expect any personal assistance in the pursuit of faith from the object of that faith. Thus, he would not be looking for the Deity (whoever it may be) to indwell his own spirit on a personal level. Oriental mystic religions in general involve the individual in a continuous search for ways to harmonize his spirit with the forces of life that stand outside nature and govern its processes. There are no guarantees of success, nor guideposts to indicate when success has been reached. One will never encounter a Hindu, for example, who will assume that he has satisfied the requirements of the supranatural forces, because when that occurs he will be ready for Nirvana (a state of eternal, semi-conscious bliss). As long as he is in the world, he has not lived out his "**Karma**", which is a sort of predetermined "**balance sheet**", based upon the past which establishes the destiny of the individual. Until the Karma is lived out, one must return to life in some other form, human or animal. This is called "**Reincarnation**". The pursuit of Mysticism is an individual effort to reach out to God, without any guarantees of success.

Special Revelation

In contrast to the latitude of Mysticism, the premise of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity is that there is a special revelation which gives definite guideposts, and guarantees, while it is subjective, of course, the adherents have certain assurances now in this life if they follow faithfully the dogma of their sacred writings. This is especially true of Christianity, as in the declarations of the apostles. Paul says, ***“I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to keep what I have entrusted Him with, unto that day.”*** (II Timothy 1:12) John says in his first epistle, ***“These things I have written to you in order that you may know that you have eternal life.”*** (I John 5:13) For the Christian, the confirmation of this possibility of assurance is the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. Paul says in his letter to the Romans, ***“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”*** (Romans 8:16) Again, it is very subjective, but quite convincing to the individual when the statement of Scripture is accompanied with an inner peace that seems to defy the realities of surrounding uncertainty. The mystic accepts uncertainty as an integral part of his system. The Christian expects certainty and depends on special revelation through Christ to provide it. But now, we are back in the circle. The mystic has no guarantees; the Christian has guarantees within special revelation. But the acceptance of that special revelation as truth must be based on the premise that it has come from God, a point which is itself not subject to absolute proof.

THE SUPRANATURAL AND SPECIAL REVELATION

If we assume the premise of special revelation, further consideration of the varieties of mystical experience apart from special revelation are not relevant to our present discussion. Remember again that both views are presuppositions and not subject to proof within the bounds of human reason. Now, if we take the premise of special revelation, we are confronted with another critical choice. Which special revelation is the true one? Once again we cannot appeal to objective evidence for proof. All the documentary evidence that we may accumulate can at best confirm our personal convictions. To say that this revelation has come from God makes a leap across a broad chasm. In fact, on the basis of groundwork already laid, we must conclude that God himself would have to make that leap. In other words, the conviction that a particular expression of special revelation, as for example, the Bible, has come from God, must be verified outside human processes. God alone can confirm to man His own revelation. From a logical point of view, it would be self-defeating to expect those who come to faith to personally examine every piece of sacred writing and make a discriminating choice. Even if time were not an insurmountable obstacle, the technical capacity required to make such a judgment is not available to more than a scant minority if really to any at all.

How then, do we make a choice? We must appeal to God to show us. If God is real, and if He relates to man at all, and if that relationship cannot be verified apart from Himself, then it is reasonable to expect Him to respond to the one who seeks after Him. Else, He cannot hold man responsible for failing to relate to Him. In a sense, it is like knocking on a door. If we wish to visit someone, we knock on the door. We do not stand on the sidewalk and try first to determine if the party is at home. If we knock and get no response, we conclude that the party is either not home, or does not wish to see us. If God wants man to know Him, He must aid man in the predicament of knowledge. He must take the responsibility to make known to the seeker, the way of truth. Man's responsibility is to seek. Indeed, the Bible takes this very position. Jesus says, ***“Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone***

who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it is opened.” (Matthew 7:7,8) If this seems too simple to be valid, let it be remembered that if to find God one must be able to handle abstract ideas, both the equity and the universality of Divine revelation is questionable. Jesus said, **“I confess to you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and intellectual and have revealed them unto infants.”** (Luke 10:21) That is not to say that the truth itself is simple, or that there is no place for the rational mind. As a matter of fact, once the chasm is bridged and the realm of God entered, the vastness of the truth of God challenges the keenest minds. It is for the above reasons that Jesus put faith on the basis of the will, rather than the reason. He said, **“If any man will to do His [God’s] will, He shall know concerning the teaching, whether it is from God, or I speak from myself [that is, as a human person].”** (John 7:17) God seems to respond to the one who is willing to set aside his own independence and ego and ask Him for help.

WHICH SPECIAL REVELATION?

In the choice of which revelation is the true one, the Christian insists that there is only one—that which comes through Jesus Christ. Specifically, this would be the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Again, if the Christian yields to the pressure to be **“broadminded”**, he gives up his foundational premise. But how can one be certain that the Bible is the true revelation from God? Can it be proven from external evidences? The Cambridge History of the Bible, a recognized authority in the field, makes an exhaustive study of the subject of documentary evidences. One of the editors, C. F. Evans, professor of New Testament studies at the University of London, makes the following comment: **“This study has of necessity become one largely of internal criticism of the New Testament documents themselves, because such external evidence on matters of origin, authorship, sources and date as has come down from the second and succeeding centuries is very meagre, and, when itself subjected to critical examination, turns out to be of dubious value, if not worthless.”** (Volume 1, p. 235) This statement comes from the most responsible scholarship in the field. There have been a number of popular books by authors of limited scholarship purporting to uncover documentary evidence that casts shadows on either Jesus Christ or the Bible. One may suggest that in a matter as important as this, the credentials of such authors should be carefully checked to determine their qualification to speak on the subject. The statement given above from C. F. Evans can be relied upon as being based on the most recent technical scholarship available.

All major theories advanced as to the authenticity of the various books of the Bible are based primarily on an analysis of the text itself and not on external documentary evidence. Thus it is really a subjective judgment after all and not conclusive. Further, it must be understood that there is a large difference between authenticity and inspiration. Authenticity has to do with whether or not the book in question was actually accepted as a part of the original literature of the early church. Inspiration has to do with whether or not the book was given under conditions of special revelation from God himself. To determine, then, which special revelation has come from God requires the witness of the Holy Spirit. Once again we are pressed into a position where God alone can really bring us assurance of truth. This is clearly stated in Hebrews 11:6—**“Without faith it is impossible to please Him; for it is necessary that the one who comes to God believe that He is and that He becomes a rewarder to them who search Him out.”**

SUMMARY

In summary, the following propositions may be advanced:

1. All systems of knowledge, or views of life are based on presuppositions which do not allow ultimate proof from within nature.
2. For man to accurately judge the validity of knowledge about himself he must be able to transcend himself.
3. There are two major streams of thought regarding the nature of man—Naturalism and Supranaturalism. Either man is able to get outside nature, or is caught within the cycle of nature.
4. The presupposition of Naturalism holds that there is no knowledge beyond nature; hence man cannot transcend himself.
5. The denial of man's ability to transcend himself implies the inability to postulate absolute truth.
6. The presupposition of supranaturalism is that man can indeed transcend himself and that there is a realm of knowledge beyond nature.
7. The system of knowledge of Supranaturalism is, for Mystic religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, experimental—self-exploration; and for religions such as Islam, Judaism and Christianity, revelational and authoritative.
8. The acceptance of “special revelation” requires the further choice of which revelation.
9. In terms of the validity of a given revelation such as the Bible, the only thing that man can determine is authenticity—that is that the writing was historically accepted by the religious group it represented. Whether or not it was inspired by God can only be verified by God Himself.
10. The Christian position that there is a God, and that He has revealed Himself through the Bible is a premise that can only be verified by the Holy Spirit. Evidences in the realm of nature may confirm the premise but cannot ultimately prove it. Debate with the Naturalist is invalid because of the differences in basic premises.

CONCLUSION

After a lifetime pursuit of truth, Plato makes the following statement (actually Simmias to Socrates) in the Phaedo: ***“I think a man's duty is one of two things: either to be taught or to find out where the truth is, or if he cannot, at least to take the best possible human doctrine and the hardest to disprove, and to ride on this like a raft on the water of life and take the risk; unless he could have a more seaworthy vessel to carry him more safely and with less danger, some divine doctrine to bring him through.”*** This was written some 400 years before Christ. The pursuit of truth to the present day has fared no better. No premise of human philosophy, however wisely framed, can be advanced as absolute truth. To state with any degree of certainty that there is no God is as absurd as to attempt to prove by human logic that there is a God. The more knowledgeable one is, the more reserved are his judgments. The true scientist always leaves a door open for further data, no matter how strong existing evidences may be. Is it possible then, for man to know God? It is only possible if God Himself reaches out to man and makes Himself known. The Christian takes the premise that God has indeed done this. This means of revelation is Jesus Christ, who, according to the Bible, is the LOGOS—the Living Word of God. Both the Old and New Testaments give abundant testimony to the fact that the revelation of God is personal. Jesus said, ***“I am the way,***

the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” (John 14:6) The entire concept of the Logos will be examined in the next writing.

And what is the evidence of this revelation? Those who base their lives on this premise find that deep within their consciousness and beyond the processes of human logic there is a constant insistence confirming the statement of Scripture, ***“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.”*** (Romans 8:16) The constant presence of that Spirit is as certain to the believer as the existence of human persons whom we cannot see.

But if it is so subjective, how can we prove it to others? There is no way. Argumentation and debate is futile. All one can do is bear witness to the grounds of his own faith. All the apostles ever did, Paul included, was to declare the Gospel. They did not try to prove it. It is the task of the Holy Spirit to convince the world as John clearly states in 16:8. ***“And when that one comes [the Holy Spirit] He will convince the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment.”*** Perhaps the clearest statement and that upon which we may rest our case is found in I Corinthians 1:18-25. ***“For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing, foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the understanding of the intellectual I will cancel out.’ Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the inquirer of this age? God has made foolish the wisdom of this world, has He not? For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not, through wisdom, know God, it pleased God to save those who believe through the foolishness of the message. For since the Jews ask for a sign and the Greeks seek wisdom, but we proclaim Christ as crucified, to the Jews an offense, and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, to Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”***

Note: All scripture quotations are translations by the author directly from the Greek text.