**Unity of the True Religion**

**Can different religions be true?**

**Proposition 1: The objectively true religion is one and the same for all men.**

* Religion rests on an objective foundation; the true religion teaches objective truth about God and our duties toward Him
  + Objective means that the foundation for these truths exists *in the object* – that is the thing known and therefore *outside the mind* of the one who knows
  + Subjective means within the mind of the knowing subject – the source of religion is not here (though it is commonly thought to be so today)
* A religion can only be true and legitimate if it tells the truth about God [creed]
* If practicing it leads man to his ultimate goal [code]
* If it worships God the way He wants to be worshipped [cult]

**Proposition 2: Not all men at all times are going to have identical religious duties; all will be obliged at least to observe the natural law.**

* + - 1. Absolute religious duties – flow directly from the nature of God and the nature of man
         * Obligatory for all men, at all times, w/o exception

1. E.g. Acknowledge all the naturally knowable truths about God.
2. Worship Him both internally and externally.
3. Obey the Natural Law.
   * + 1. Hypothetical[[1]](#footnote-1) universal religious duties
          - Obligatory by a free act of God, but relevant for all men
4. E.g. reception of baptism – instituted in time by a free act of God; obligatory for all men from then on;
5. Believe in divine revelation.
6. Join the Catholic Church.
   * + 1. Hypothetical particular religious duties
          - Given by God to certain individuals called to a greater holiness
          - E.g. Mosaic Law obliged the Chosen People only, the religious state

**Supernatural Religion**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Truths** | **How we know about them** | **What we have to do about them** |
| Natural | Reason (“natural revelation”) | Natural law (absolute duties) |
| Revealed  Natural (manner)  Mysteries (matter) | Faith (Divine Revelation) | Divine positive law (hypothetical duties) |

Supernatural religion is that based on a revelation given by God of truth not attainable but the unaided work of human beings.

**“Natural” = that which is according to the requirements, powers, order, and end of nature; id quod est secundum exigentias, vires, ordinem, et finem naturae.**

* **Supernatural** is that which exceeds the requirements, powers, order and end of the whole of created nature.
* **Preternatural** is that which is above the order (mode) of this nature but not above any created nature (so the actions of angels are strictly preternatural not supernatural).

**Revelation**

* *Revelare* – to remove a veil, to manifest what is hidden
* **Revelation (def) -** **a divine action, beyond the order of nature, manifesting to us a truth previously hidden.**[[2]](#footnote-2)
* Divisions of revelation
  + **Public vs. private** – question of who it is intended for, not to whom revealed
    - **Public revelation** – intended for everyone; belongs to faith ends w/ death of last Apostle
    - **Private revelation** – intended for individuals or groups
  + **Immediate vs. Mediate**
    - **Immediate revelation** – directly to someone
    - **Mediate revelation** – made through another man (authorized to speak in God’s name)
      * e.g. Christ's revelations were immediate for the apostles but mediate from our point of view.
  + To what extent the mystery is supernatural:
    - **Supernatural as to the manner** – *quoad modum* – the revelation of important natural truths difficult for men to discover.
      * One God, immortality of the soul, sinful nature of fornication.
      * natural truths revealed in a supernatural way
      * There is a moral necessity for God to reveal these; it is discoverable by reason, but most people will never get it on their own
    - **Supernatural as to the substance** – *Quoad substantiam* – mysteries, truths beyond natural knowledge; the revelation’s content cannot be known by reason alone
      * There is absolute necessity; if God wants us to know these truths, He must reveal them

**The Possibility of Revelation**

**What is “Possibility”?**

Possibility = a capacity to exist

**Internal vs. External Possibility**

* Internal / intrinsic / metaphysical possibility – the agreement of the notes that constitute a things essence / the terms of a definition.
* External / extrinsic possibility – the existence of an efficient cause which is able to bring that thing into existence

*n.b. God is omnipotent, the only limit on His power is absurdity / contradiction. Anything that is intrinsically / metaphysically possible, God has the physical possibility to cause. So all that needs to be proved in order to establish that revelation/mysteries/miracles/prophesies are metaphysically possible, is that they involve no essential contradiction in terms.*

**How does one prove?**

**“Proofs and Disproofs”**

One of the goals of the Apologetics course is to develop an organized method of thinking about issues related to the faith. An important aspect of this development is learning how to demonstrate that something is necessarily true, that it is at least possible, or that it is certainly not true.

**1. Disproving:**  To disprove something in matters theological i.e. to show that it is certainly not true, it is necessary to **point out that some contradiction or impossibility is involved**. For example:

* Given that there is some effect, one can disprove an infinite series of (essentially subordinated) causes because, in this case, all the causes would be intermediate. But it is *impossible* that exclusively intermediate causes could produce an effect.
* One can disprove that God changes because change would require God to be in a state of potency. But God must be pure act. But to be pure act and to also be in potency would be a *contradiction*.

**2. Showing that something is possible:**  To prove the possibility of something, it is sufficient to show that there is **no contradiction involved**. In this case, the thing *may* happen, or it *may* be true.

* For example, revelation is possible since it does not involve any contradiction on the part of God's nature nor on the part of man's nature.
* But **just because something is possible does not imply that it will certainly happen** or is certainly true. If there had been some period in history before God chose to reveal, men living in that time could have proven that revelation was possible and even fitting, but they could not have proven that it would certainly happen.[[1]](https://word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en%2DUS&rs=en%2DUS&hid=zJOruJiCeUKVjgJcZB7NbQ%2E0&WOPISrc=https%3A%2F%2Fwopi%2Eonedrive%2Ecom%2Fwopi%2Ffiles%2FA57C8844D06E5ACB%213846&&&sc=host%3D%26qt%3DFolders&wde=docx&wdp=3&wdPid=655E35CE&wdModeSwitchTime=1597802720051&wdPreviousSession=38fedc59-326f-498c-a6a7-5f1c5fcb538b&pdcn=pdc544e&wdOrigin=AppModeSwitch#_ftn1)
* Apologetics very often uses philosophy to defend the faith by showing that a dogma is possible e.g. that there is no contradiction involved in the dogma of the Trinity. But this is as far as Apologetics is able to go.

**Proposition 1:** **Revelation (of some sort) is possible.**

**Reminder what is revelation**

* “an action – divine, free, and essentially supernatural – by which God, in order to lead the human race to a supernatural end… speaking to us through [human beings]…, manifests under a certain obscurity, supernatural mysteries and natural truths of religion.” (Modified from GLG)

**Proof: Revelation does not imply any contradiction either on the part of God or on the part of man.**

* + - **In reference to God:**
* At the very least, God knows naturally knowable truths;
* He can communicate them – The Cause has every perfection of the effect, and men can communicate;
* He can communicate these truths supernaturally – He is not bound by laws of nature;
* He can do this in such a way that we are certain God is the one instructing us: The Cause has every perfection of the effect, and men can speak to each other in such a way that they are certainly identified.
* **In reference to man:**
* It is normal for men to be instructed by others, if it is no disgrace to man’s dignity to learn from finite, fallible teachers; far less to learn from an infinite, infallible one.
* Revelation does not reduce man to absolute passivity (as some claim): the mind is still active in grasping, reflecting on, systematizing, drawing conclusions, communicating and defending revelation

**Revelation of natural truths is fitting, as well as possible**

* Natural truths made more accessible to man – natural law carries more weight
* God’s goodness manifested in a new way

*n.b. such revelation implies no deficiency in God’s work, but rather that man is capable of greater perfection*

**Proposition 2: A revelation containing mysteries is possible.**

* + Regarding Mysteries in a broad sense / 2nd class mystery: It is absurd to deny that God has the right to make free decrees, but these decrees would not be knowable unless revealed.
  + Regarding Mysteries in the strict sense / 1st class mysteries: Reason cannot disprove their possibility. To do so it would have to prove that in an infinite God there is nothing beyond the powers of a finite intellect…
  + *De facto*: we can prove (*a posteriori*) from ***external evidence*** (the fact of revelation) that revelation containing both kinds of mysteries **does** exist

**Objection 1: Revelation destroys the independence of reason**

* Answer: It is absurd to speak of freedom in regard to a faculty’s formal object
  + The intellect’s formal object is truth – there is a transcendental relation between truth and the mind – the concepts cannot be defined w/o reference to each other
  + Intellect is not free in regard to the truth; any more than the eye is free to see something rather than color[[3]](#footnote-3)...
  + Thus, regardless of how it is known it is the proper object of the intellect

**Objection 2: “If the object of the intellect is truth, then nothing could lie beyond the grasp of the intellect. So the existence of things which would be mysteries becomes absurd.”**

* Answer**:** Knowledge is a relationship between the knower and the thing known
  + There must be a **proportion** between them
  + Only the essences of material things are naturally proportioned to the human intellect (also knowledge that can be deduced from material things)
    - “proportionate object - the connatural object or proportionate object of a power
      * = the connatural object, i.e., the object to which a power / faculty is naturally best suited, and attains by its own intrinsic principles
    - “Adequate object” = all that that faculty can attain by its own power or by being raised by a superior power.
      * All that a power is equal to doing / knowing
    - Proportionate object (as **human** intellect) – essences of material things vs. adequate object (as **intellect**) all being
  + There can be a certain knowledge about things that are above the material world by means of analogy with material things (i.e. we “reduce” the thing known to something accessible to the intellect, we know the less known by means of the more known).

**Objection 3: The revelation of a mystery is a contradiction in terms: to reveal means "to remove a veil,” but even after revelation, mysteries “remain covered with a veil and wrapped… with a kind of darkness” (Vat I).**

* Answer: In the revelation of a mystery the veil is moved aside far enough to make known the existence of the reality, but not far enough to disclose the intrinsic possibility of that reality.

**Objection 4: The Author of reason does not want us to abdicate reason. But any man who assents to propositions that are neither proved nor provable (mysteries) abdicates reason.**

* Answer: what cannot be proven from internal arguments may be proven from external arguments, e.g., testimony historically certain and eminently trustworthy: divine testimony. To acknowledge obscure truths on trustworthy testimony is not to abdicate reason, but to follow it.
  + - This is how court cases work, for example.
    - It is stupid to reject something just because we don’t understand it.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Objection 5: “God would not teach propositions which are meaningless. But a truth is meaningless if I cannot positively grasp it with my mind.”**

* + This objection is pointing out something true; namely, that whenever we try to express a mystery with words, we always fall short of the total reality of the mystery.
    - e.g. “In God, there are three Persons.” But “Person” in God does not mean the same thing as “person” when we speak of human beings.

**Answer: The solution is analogy**

* An analogical concept is a concept broad enough to include various modes of being.
* It asserts an essential similarity while denying an absolute “sameness.”**[[5]](#footnote-5)**
  + e.g. intellectual vision vs. physical vision.
  + e.g. plant life, animal life, vs. human life.
  + e.g. the many sense of “love”.
* If all we could do was deny sameness (i.e. if terms were used equivocally), the objection would hold. But analogies have both positive and negative aspects.

Our ideas about mysteries arise from a three-step process:

* We assert some truth.
* We deny the normal created mode which that truth normally expresses.
* We assert a higher mode (“eminent” when refers to with mysteries about God).

**In conclusion:**

* Knowledge through analogy is not meaningless, the terms are not equivocal – they don’t tell us nothing.
* Analogical concepts do allow us to express mysteries in correct terms and thus distinguish true propositions concerning mysteries from false ones e.g. there are not two Persons in God.
* Because we are certain (from divine testimony) that the statement is true, we **do** have access to a knowledge otherwise inaccessible.

**Proposition 3:** **Mediate Revelation is possible.**

Proof: Mediate revelation does not imply any contradiction either on the part of God or on part of man.

* Regarding God:
  + He has the right to appoint men as messengers
  + He has the power to preserve His message incorrupt over centuries
  + He has power to provide His message with unmistakable signs of divine origin
* Regarding men:
  + They are capable of acting as messengers, even of mysteries
  + They are usually docile enough to accept instruction from other men, even in religious matters.
  + No contradiction in receiving doctrine from men and yet believing God (The motive for belief is still God's word. Man's role is to point out what God's word is vouching for).

**Rousseau’s Objection:** “I would prefer to have heard God myself; it would not have been more difficult for Him, and I would have been protected from deception. Why should there be men standing between God and me?” J. J. Rousseau (*Emile*, Book 4)

**Answer to Rousseau’s Objection:** There may be advantages to immediate revelation from certain points of view, but mediate revelation is already a great gift. And God is not obliged to give the better gift.

Furthermore, there are reasons why mediate revelation is quite fitting.

1. God thereby acts through secondary causes – His normal way (sun heats, parents give life, etc.)
2. Mediate revelation causes a supernatural religious society to spring up con-naturally which is more in harmony with the nature of man.
3. Mediate revelation provides the opportunity to practice certain virtues (humility, obedience, and charity) thereby giving more glory to God.

**Fittingness / Usefulness of Revelation (important to remove bias against notion of revelation)**

* Natural truths (speculative and moral) become more accessible, especially to the average man.
* Man could be preserved from many mistakes in the realm of Natural Religion / Natural Law.
* Man could learn things which he could never discover by natural reason alone (e.g. his higher goal).

1. *We usually say “Hypothetical” for just possibilities or contrafactual scenarios; but it is used here causally – “****since*** *God has revealed, these things now bind all…”* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **Garrigou-Lagrange, *De Revelatione*, Vol. 1, p.138-9** (in full: “an action – divine, free, and essentially supernatural – by which God, in order to lead the human race to a supernatural end which consists in the vision of the divine essence, speaking to us through the prophets and lastly through Christ, manifests under a certain obscurity, supernatural mysteries and natural truths of religion. *Actio divina libera et essentialiter supernaturalis, qua Deus, ad perducendum humanum genus ad finem supernaturalem qui in visione essentiae divinae consistit, nobis loquens per prophetas et novissime per Christum, sub quadam obscuritate manifestavit mysteria supernaturalia naturalesque religionis veritates.*) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Example of (then) Rev. Mr. Wood on train (what he wanted to say to the guy):*

   *Professor: I love my job because it gives me complete intellectual freedom.*

   *Fr. Wood: Does complete intellectual freedom exist?*

   *Professor: Of course, I just said that I have it.*

   *Fr. Wood: Am I obliged to believe it exists? Because if I am, it doesn't exist.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “For just as an ordinary man would be very stupid to assert that facts proposed to him by a philosopher were false solely on the grounds that he could not personally grasp them, so too a man would be guilty of an even greater stupidity who would suspect truths revealed by God to be false solely on the grounds that they could not be investigated by reason.” **(St. Thomas, S.C.G., 1,3).** [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *In this discussion, we refer to analogies of proportionality.* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)