



Divine Revelation and Religious Exclusivism: A Philosophical and Epistemological Study

Revelación divina y exclusivismo religioso: un estudio filosófico y epistemológico

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INFORMACIÓN DEL ARTÍCULO	ABSTRACT/RESUMEN
Recibido el: 21/08/2026 Aceptado el: 22/09/2026 Keywords: Divine Revelation, religious exclusivism, Abrahamic religions, scriptural orientation, religious epistemology. Palabras clave: Revelación divina, exclusivismo religioso, religiones abrahámicas, orientación escritural, epistemología de la religión	Abstract: In contemporary times, religious exclusivism has emerged as a significant issue –not merely within the philosophy of religion but for the entire world– posing a challenge to global harmony and concord due to its fundamentalist beliefs and claims. Religious exclusivism is rooted in the differences and conflicts between religions and their respective religious truths. The evolution and interaction of various religions over past centuries gave rise to doctrinal and practical disagreements, fostering a state of conflict rather than dialogue. Consequently, religions began to view one another as adversaries; the doctrine of religious exclusivism derives its distinct character from this very dynamic. However, this issue possesses both theoretical and practical dimensions. While contradictory statements are generally not considered simultaneously true, in the context of religion, many beliefs are accepted as true despite appearing contradictory. The practical manifestation of this issue is religious fundamentalism, wherein specific doctrines are regarded as absolute truths–immutable, indisputable, and final. An important fact emerges here that the doctrine of 'Divine Revelation'–the root cause of religious exclusivism–underpins the notion that religious tenets constitute essential, final, and immutable truths. Therefore, this research paper aims to elucidate the fundamental aspects of Divine Revelation and provide a clear outline of the concept. In

this context, the present study examines Divine Revelation not merely as a source of religious knowledge but also explores its epistemological nature. It seeks to clarify how concepts such as Divine Being, religious founders, scriptures, and divine truth establish religious authority. Specifically, through the concepts of propositional and non-propositional revelation, the study attempts to understand how the certainty of religious truth lays the groundwork for religious exclusivism. Additionally, the epistemological problem arising from such established religious certainty in the context of religious diversity has also been examined.

Resumen:

En la actualidad, el exclusivismo religioso ha emergido como un problema significativo –no únicamente para la filosofía de la religión, sino para el mundo entero–, lo cual supone un reto para la armonía y concordia global debido a sus creencias y afirmaciones fundamentalistas. El exclusivismo religioso tiene sus raíces en las diferencias y conflictos entre religiones y sus respectivas verdades religiosas. La evolución e interacción entre diversas religiones en las pasadas centurias ha originado desacuerdos doctrinales y prácticos, provocando conflictos en lugar de diálogos. En consecuencia, las religiones empiezan a verse entre sí como adversarios; la doctrina del exclusivismo religioso deriva su rasgo distintivo precisamente de esta dinámica. Sin embargo, este problema presenta una dimensión teórica y una práctica. Mientras que las declaraciones contradictorias no son generalmente no son consideradas simultáneamente verdaderas, en el contexto de la religión, muchas creencias son aceptadas como verdaderas, a pesar de que parezcan contradictorias. La expresión práctica de este problema es el fundamentalismo religioso, donde determinadas doctrinas son tratadas como verdades absolutas, inmutables, incuestionables y definitivas. Un importante hecho emerge en este punto: la doctrina de la “revelación divina” –el origen de la causa del exclusivismo religioso– fundamenta la noción de que las creencias religiosas constituyen verdades esenciales, definitivas e inmutables. Por lo anterior, el propósito de este trabajo es dilucidar los aspectos fundamentales de la revelación divina y proporcionar una clara descripción del concepto. En este contexto, el texto examina la revelación divina no meramente como una fuente de conocimiento religioso, sino que explora su naturaleza epistemológica. En ese sentido, se busca clarificar de qué manera conceptos como “Ser Divino”, “fundadores religiosos”, “escrituras” y “verdad religiosa” establecen la autoridad religiosa. Específicamente a través de los conceptos de revelación proposicional y no proposicional, la investigación procura entender cómo la Certeza de la verdad religiosa sienta las bases para el exclusivismo religioso. Se examina, también, el problema epistemológico que deriva de tal Certeza religiosa en el contexto de la diversidad religiosa.

Introduction

Religion is not merely a system of faith or worship in human life, but it also offers a comprehensive philosophical perspective regarding truth, knowledge, and the ultimate purpose of life. Each religious tradition attempts to determine, in its own way, what constitutes ultimate truth and how humans can attain knowledge of that truth. In this

context, the concept of divine revelation holds special significance because it acknowledges religious truth as knowledge derived from a divine being beyond human reason and sensory experience. When a religious text, a religious leader, or a religious experience is designated as divine revelation, its associated truth claim gains a unique and higher level of authenticity than ordinary human knowledge.

This situation becomes a philosophical problem when different religious traditions, while considering their own revelation to be true, authoritative, or final, present different truth claims. In such a situation, divine revelation ceases to be merely a matter of theology but becomes a crucial epistemological question related to religious exclusivism, religious diversity, and religious coexistence. In this context, the present paper attempts to understand how the concept of revelation influences the authenticity of religious truth, its finality, and the religious exclusivist tendencies that develop on its basis, by philosophically examining the fundamental elements of divine revelation.

It is important to note at the outset that the concept of the uniqueness of religious truth –in one form or another– lies at the heart of almost all religious-philosophical traditions. Particularly within the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, the concepts of divine revelation and sacred scripture have played a pivotal role in establishing religious truth, thereby fostering the ideas associated with Semitic or Abrahamic religions. Therefore, it is essential to first understand what is meant by Semitic and Abrahamic religions.

‘Abrahamic religions’ is a term generally used for those monotheistic religious traditions that trace their religious history and heritage back to Abraham. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the primary examples; the Baha'i tradition is also broadly associated with Abrahamic religious traditions. These religions originated in the Middle East and are monotheistic (Hick, 1983; Ward, 1994). The role of the Prophet is to convey the words of God (or *Khuda*) to the people through the sacred text; like the Quran or the Bible. This principle is known as Scripture (or *Shruti*). According to this principle, since the divine words were presented exactly as they are by the Prophet in the scriptures (such as the Bible or the Quran), there is no possibility for error, as they constitute the word of God. This concept is known as the ‘Propositional theory of revelation.’

On this basis, the Prophet and his words are accepted as indisputable truth, and all tenets or doctrines contained in the scriptures they presented are embraced as the sole

ideal—one that is beyond question. This constitutes the very root of religious exclusivism. However, it is essential to clarify here that equating divine revelation with religious exclusivism would be inappropriate. Accepting divine revelation does not, in itself, necessitate exclusivism. The issue becomes more complex when revelation is perceived as the sole, absolutely certain, and immutable form of religious knowledge, and when the human reception and interpretation of that revelation are also accorded the same degree of certainty. Therefore, to understand religious exclusivism, it is not enough to merely ask whether a religion accepts revelation; one must also examine how it defines the epistemological status of that revelation.

Furthermore, the term ‘divine revelation’ is composed of two words: ‘divine’ and ‘revelation.’ Here, ‘divine’ pertains to the deity, and ‘revelation’ means the act of making an unrevealed element or subject manifest. Thus, ‘divine revelation’ refers to the self-revelation of the divine entity or God. In other words, it can be described as the ‘divine self-disclosure’ of the divine entity. The Bible employs the word ‘Revelation’ for this concept. Consequently, divine revelation entails not merely the transmission of information or religious facts but also the establishment of a unique relationship between the divine entity and humanity. For this reason, the question of revelation transcends epistemology; it becomes intertwined with issues concerning ontology, language, and religious authority. Defining ‘Revelation,’ Bernhardt (2007) explains revelation in the context of religion and theology as the disclosure of truth or knowledge through communication with a deity or another supernatural entity.

In this context, the term ‘*Ilham*’ is used in Islam to denote the concept of divine revelation. According to the definition of ‘*Ilham*’ provided in Darshan Kosh (Frolov, 1980) “*Ilham*, or divine knowledge, is a fundamental concept in theology and idealistic religious philosophy. *Ilham* is the expression of the transcendental cognition of supernatural reality within the process of mystical enlightenment” (p. 88).

Fundamentally, divine revelation is discussed in the sacred texts of Semitic religions (the Bible, the Quran, etc.). In Abrahamic religions, this term refers to the process by which God Himself reveals His will and knowledge of His divine nature to the human world. ‘*Ilham*’ means the resulting human understanding regarding God, prophecy, and other divine matters.

Divine revelation is acknowledged as the primary and ultimate means of religious knowledge; it constitutes a distinct and unique mode of knowledge, regarded as a medium of divine wisdom attained solely through divine experience. The philosophical world recognizes two fundamental sources of knowledge: empiricism and reason.

However, this classification is not universally accepted across all philosophical points of view. There have been significant differences of opinion among various philosophical traditions regarding the sources and number of valid means of knowledge. Therefore, rather than regarding sense experience and reason as the only two universally accepted sources of knowledge, it is more appropriate to view them as key instruments employed within general philosophical epistemology.

However, these foundations are insufficient for religious knowledge because every religion –for its followers– presents a guidebook; It expounds upon the scriptures and simultaneously attempts to establish this scriptural knowledge as divinely bestowed, supernatural, and self-evident, thereby linking it to faith and reverence.

For this, a source of knowledge is required—one that can satisfy our faith and reverence beyond the realms of sensory experience and rational intellect, and which is based on irrefutable truth and is extraordinary in nature. Such an extraordinary medium is ‘Divine Revelation.’ Regarding divine revelation, George Joyce writes in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*: "Revelation may be defined as the communication of some truth by God to a rational creature through means which are beyond the ordinary course of nature" (Joyce, 1912, p. 11).

In other words, divine revelation can be defined as the communication of a truth that God conveys to a rational being through a medium transcending ordinary natural means. Two aspects of divine revelation in this definition are particularly noteworthy: on one hand, its source is God, and on the other, its recipient is a human being. Thus, even though the source of the revelation is divine, its reception and expression occur through a human medium. This distinction becomes crucial later when interpreting divine revelation and understanding the religious claims based upon it.

In this context, it is important to note that the ‘rational creatures’ mentioned here are specific individuals to whom God reveals Himself. They are known by various titles such as Prophet, Messiah, *Rasul*, *Tirthankara*, etc. Their role is to convey the truth revealed by God to

the general public in the form of a 'sacred text.' The practice of presenting God's words as a sacred text is termed Scripture. According to Pathak: "Divine revelation is often classified into 'Scripture' (Shruti) and 'Direct spiritual realization' (Aparokshanubhuti), distinguishing between the objective and the subjective; however, as a fundamental concept, they can be considered identical here. In this sense, mystical experience is also synonymous with It" (p. 175).

Fundamental Elements of Divine Revelation

Based on the preceding discussion, four fundamental elements of divine revelation can be identified: (i) the self-manifestation of God or a supernatural entity, (ii) its communication through specific religious figures such as angels, the Messiah, *Rasul*, prophets, and *Tirthankaras*, (iii) the preservation of that revelation in the form of a religious text or scripture, and compilation, (iv) its acceptance –beyond ordinary human reason and experience– as a divinely authenticated truth.

These four fundamental elements of divine revelation can be briefly categorized into two forms: the 'tangible aspect' and the 'intangible aspect' of divine revelation. The purpose of this division is not to split divine revelation into two separate theories, but rather to understand two interconnected dimensions of it. If revelation is to reach humanity, it requires a medium; and if it is to be accepted as religious truth, the conviction of its divine and extraordinary nature must also be associated with it.

While the tangible aspect involves a discussion of themes such as 'person-centricity' and 'scripture-centricity,' the intangible aspect deals with subjects like the 'transcendental nature' and 'trans-rationality' (nature beyond reason) of divine revelation. Therefore, it is essential to shed light on both these categories –the 'tangible' and the 'intangible' aspects– to enable a proper evaluation of this concept.

The Tangible Aspect of Divine Revelation

Divine revelation is a process or mechanism that requires an individual as a medium to manifest and a text to appear in written form; these are identified respectively as the Propounder or Prophet (religious founder) and the Scripture. These constitute the tangible aspects of divine revelation.

First, considering the individual aspect: across various religions, one clearly observes concepts such as Messiah, Prophet, Rasul, Bodhisattva, Tirthankara, Avatar, Guru, or Rishi. This is because knowledge derived from divine revelation is revealed to a human being, who then becomes the medium for conveying it to others.

It is evident that within religious traditions, regarding any instance of divine or godly knowledge. The concept of manifestation through a specific individual is widely accepted; consequently, such a person often attains a divine or God-like status, despite being human. It is especially important to note that Hinduism encompasses the unique concept of God Himself incarnating in human form –a notion absent in other religions. Thus, while Hinduism attributes a human form to God, other religions –particularly the Abrahamic faiths– tend to elevate the human being to a divine status. Although there are no fixed rules governing this practice or belief, it would not be incorrect to view it as a result of divine revelation.

Sometimes, an intermediary –referred to as a *farishta*, *devdoot*, or angel– is envisioned between God and humanity. For instance, followers of Islam believe that the Quran was revealed by Allah to Muhammad, word for word, through the angel Gabriel (Lambert, 2013, p. 287).

Here, a significant epistemological question arises: to what extent can the human medium of divine revelation serve as the basis for the authenticity of the revelation itself? If divine truth reaches humanity through a specific individual, it becomes necessary to acknowledge the distinction between that individual's perception, their language, and the communication they convey. Equating the perfection of divine revelation with the perfection of its human communication is possible only if no epistemological gap is acknowledged between the two. Therefore, philosophically, it does not seem appropriate to treat the authenticity of the divine source of revelation and the authenticity of its human reception as a single issue.

The second major basis for the tangible aspect of divine revelation is the religious text. While it is natural for any text to be committed to writing, the situation differs when it comes to religious knowledge –specifically, religious scriptures; religions often do not accept this knowledge as merely written text. This is because, being divinely bestowed, such knowledge is categorized as *Shruti-gyan* (knowledge received through hearing/revelation). In Hinduism,

the term '*Shruti*' is explicitly used for this purpose, which is why the Vedas are described as '*apaurusheya*' (not of human authorship).

Phenomena akin to divine auditory revelations are acknowledged in other religions as well; this is particularly common in Jewish and Islamic traditions. The concepts of 'divine revelation' and '*Shruti*' are so closely intertwined that they are often treated as synonyms. Generally, a text is regarded as a repository of knowledge, a supreme preserver, an aid, and a primary instrument; however, when the subject is a religious scripture, its nature undergoes a transformation. Religious scriptures are not viewed merely as sources of knowledge; rather, they are regarded as sacrosanct, transcendent, inviolable, beyond challenge, and immutable. This is because the very attributes associated with the personality of the religious founder or the experience of divine revelation are ascribed to the scripture itself.

Consequently, every sentence in such a scripture is treated as the word of the Divine, every tenet as absolute truth, and every letter as a sacred ordinance. In some religions, even questioning these texts amounts to blasphemy or heresy – offenses for which history records instances of the death penalty, and examples of which can still be found in certain places today. However, it would be inappropriate to conflate the religious authority of the scripture with the interpretation of its individual statements. The long-standing tradition of exegesis, commentary, and exposition within religious traditions suggests that the meaning of a sacred text is not confined to its literal words; rather, it is grasped through the text itself, its context, and the interpretive tradition surrounding it.

It is noteworthy that Islam has maintained the strictest stance in this regard; there, let alone questioning or criticism, even the interpretation and translation of the scripture can be deemed contrary to the faith. Judaism and Christianity have not been exceptions to this trend either.

For instance, the Catholic Church speaks not only of the infallibility of doctrine but also holds the belief in the 'doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture' (Vatican II, Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1965, pp. 105-108). A clear example of this within the Christian tradition is found in *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council, which states regarding the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture: "Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth

which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation” (Second Vatican Council, 1965, par. 11).

In other words, everything stated by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be regarded as spoken by the Holy Spirit; therefore, the Scriptures must be acknowledged as teaching –firmly, faithfully, and without error– the truth that God intended to set down in sacred writing for the salvation of humanity. A subtle yet significant distinction is evident here. Accepting the divine inspiration of Scripture is different from regarding every aspect of its linguistic form as being beyond human interpretation.

It is particularly noteworthy that the same document also states that God speaks in Holy Scripture through human beings and in a human manner; therefore, the interpreter must attend both to the meaning intended by the sacred writers and to the meaning God reveals through their words –as stated: "God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion," and therefore interpretation must consider what the sacred writers intended to communicate (Second Vatican Council, 1965, para. 12).

Therefore, even if a revelation is divine, automatically attributing the same level of infallibility to its linguistic, historical, and interpretive forms is a distinct philosophical question.

The aim of this question is not to deny the religious authority of the scripture, but to clarify the epistemological gap that exists between divine revelation and its human communication. While a scripture may hold supreme authority for religious faith, the question remains for philosophical analysis: what is the nature of that authority, and how is it determined? Consequently, when interpreting scripture, it is essential to consider the author's intended meaning, the historical context, and the literary forms employed.

This is precisely why the element of religious exclusivism manifests most rigidly in these religions. It is worth noting that Hinduism and its associated traditions stand as exceptions in this regard.

The Abstract Aspect of Divine Revelation

Thus far, we have examined the concrete aspects of divine revelation –namely, the religious founder and the scripture– and how they occupy the highest position as sources of knowledge, ideals, or guides; because they are bestowed by God, they are accorded a divine status that renders them irrefutable and unalterable.

The question arises: on what basis is this done? Answers to this can be found within the abstract aspect of divine revelation. This abstract aspect can be categorized into three parts: (i) the supernatural nature of the source, (ii) the divine authenticity of the knowledge, (iii) the human nature of its reception.

Thus, the analysis of the abstract aspect of divine revelation cannot be limited merely to its supernatural source. It is also essential to examine how knowledge originating from a divine source reaches human beings, how it is expressed through language, and how it is validated and preserved by the religious community. If we first examine the supernatural nature of divine revelation, it becomes evident that while it is divine and supernatural by virtue of being God-given, it is also regarded as supernatural because it conveys knowledge that transcends the natural order. This same aspect of revelation is reflected in Joyce's definition; he views it as the communication of a truth that reaches humanity "through means which are beyond the ordinary course of nature" (Joyce, 1912, p. 1).

Therefore, while the source of divine revelation is considered supernatural, it does not necessarily follow that every item of content conveyed through it is entirely beyond the grasp of human reason. Joyce himself clarifies that revelation may encompass truths accessible to ordinary human reason, yet truths that God authenticates or discloses through extraordinary means (Joyce, 1912).

It's important to mention here that there is a distinction between a supernatural source and supernatural knowledge; for even without reference to divine revelation (as acknowledged by some religions), something can be termed "divine revelation" if it embodies two divine elements: divine knowledge and divine experience.

The distinction drawn here between divine knowledge and divine experience is particularly significant. Divine experience may articulate an individual's existential or spiritual encounter, whereas a claim to divine knowledge establishes that experience or revelation as a truth. This distinction between divine knowledge and divine experience can be further clarified. An individual having a specific type of spiritual or divine experience is

one thing; accepting a statement derived from that experience as a universal truth is quite another. The former pertains to personal experience, whereas in the latter, that experience transforms into a knowledge claim. This is precisely where a philosophical problem arises. Can a personal experience be so inherently authoritative that the truth derived from it must necessarily be accepted by all other individuals? Religious faith may answer this in its own way, but from a philosophical perspective, the question remains open.

Thus, the journey from experience to a truth claim is, in itself, an epistemological process. The question is whether the certainty derived from an individual's divine experience can be accorded the status of universal religious truth without any additional basis.

It seems natural here to present the concept of divine revelation independently of God, as many religions and traditions do not explicitly acknowledge the existence of a deity. In Buddhist and Jain traditions, a Creator God is not accepted as an essential foundation for knowledge and religious truth. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to apply the traditional God-centric concept of divine revelation to these traditions in its standard form. Examples of this can also be found in Indian philosophical schools, specifically within the Samkhya and Mimamsa systems.

Thus, divine revelation is regarded as a source of knowledge that is considered authoritative and, in many traditions, infallible.

Again, divine revelation is acknowledged as an eternal and self-evident source of knowledge, distinct from both sensory experience and rational intellect. According to Hick (1989), "Revelation is the importing to men of divinely authenticated truths" (p. 2). In other words, divine revelation is the unveiling of truths to humanity that are considered divinely authenticated. This definition links revelation not merely to an extraordinary experience, but to a truth whose authenticity is tied to the Divine Being itself. This is why, for a religious person, the truth derived from revelation appears more certain and authoritative than ordinary human knowledge.

As it is divinely bestowed, it embodies all the attributes of God –namely, truth, eternity, and a supernatural quality– requiring neither arguments nor empirical proofs to validate it. However, it is often observed that the compiled form of divine revelation found in scriptures consists of practical precepts and moral teachings, which are clearly relative to time and place. Yet, for a religious person, this practical aspect of the scriptures holds little

significance; instead, they accept it merely as a means to attain the ultimate spiritual goal bestowed by the Supreme Reality.

This religious conviction is so steadfast that, for a believer, accepting everything contained in these scriptures as irrefutable becomes essential. Since these matters are objects of faith that transcend rational intellect, it is natural to regard them as beyond the scope of logic. This gives rise to the problem of religious exclusivism. If a religious tradition becomes firmly convinced that it possesses divinely authenticated truth, its followers may naturally find it difficult to accept any religious claim that differs from that truth. Thus, the concept of divine revelation not only clarifies the origin of religious knowledge but also influences the nature of the relationship an individual establishes between their own religious truth and other religious truths.

However, a different problem arises here. Can what God revealed and what man understood be considered exactly the same?

If divine revelation reaches humanity through a prophet, messiah, sage, or any other religious figure, then the recipient of that revelation is a human being, as is the person who articulates it further. If it appears in the form of a scripture, it inevitably manifests in a specific language, and language is, in itself, a human medium. The meanings of words can shift over time, interpretations can vary according to circumstances, and two individuals might understand the same statement differently. Therefore, it appears essential to distinguish between divine revelation and its human reception (Pathak, 2011).

This perspective is significant regarding the issue of divine revelation because it reveals an intermediate layer between the revelation itself and its human reception. For a religious individual, the experience may be real and meaningful; however, the nature of the belief derived from that experience can be influenced by their religious tradition, pre-existing beliefs, and interpretive framework. Thus, it is not necessary to conflate the acceptance of divine revelation with the human interpretation of its meaning.

Another intriguing question concerning divine revelation is whether it constitutes a direct disclosure bestowed by God or knowledge gained through human effort –specifically, a divine experience acquired in the pursuit of understanding ultimate reality.

In short, a distinction is being drawn here between ‘divine knowledge’ and ‘divine experience,’ a topic mentioned earlier. In this context, two schools of thought prevail in Indian

philosophy: the *Brahmana* and the *Shramana*. Similarly, in the West, a debate persists regarding this very issue between the Catholic and Protestant branches. It is worth noting that the propositional theory of divine revelation lies at the core of religious exclusivism –a theory accepted equally by both Christianity and Islam. For this reason, John Hick characterizes the nature of divine knowledge as 'propositional' in accordance with Catholic theology, and as 'non-propositional' in accordance with Protestant theology. The propositional view implies the acceptance of a definite truth –akin to deductive reasoning– whereas the non-propositional view suggests that truth is not entirely certain, resembling inductive reasoning. In the propositional perspective, the content of revelation consists of specific true statements; an individual accepts these statements because they are regarded as divinely authenticated. Conversely, in the non-propositional perspective, the focus of revelation is not a specific statement but rather the human experience of the Divine itself or its manifestation in history. Hick (1983) draws a clear distinction between these two approaches. According to him, in the non-propositional view, theological propositions are not revelations in themselves; rather, they represent human attempts to comprehend revelatory events.

This distinction clarifies that divine revelation need not be understood merely as the communication of a specific religious fact or statement. When revelation is viewed as a process of experience, relationship, or existential transformation, its nature differs from that of a proposition. It is precisely this distinction that complicates the relationship between the certainty of religious knowledge and religious exclusivism.

This is where the philosophical problem of divine revelation becomes particularly intriguing. If revelation consists solely of specific statements delivered by God, the scope for questioning their truth is naturally limited. However, if revelation also entails a relationship between the Divine and human experience, then the human role in its reception, expression, and interpretation must also be considered.

Highlighting these key aspects of divine revelation clarifies the manner in which the doctrine of divine revelation operates. Its significance is further evidenced by the fact that it serves as the foundation for virtually all religious scriptures; history bears witness that religions lacking such scriptures either succumbed to the passage of time or were absorbed into other faiths –though, in its extreme form, it also fosters religious exclusivism.

Divine Revelation and Religious Exclusivism

The discussion thus far makes it clear that divine revelation is not merely about God imparting specific knowledge to humanity; it also concerns the authenticity of that knowledge. When a religious individual accepts that certain knowledge has been received directly from God, that knowledge ceases to be on par with ordinary human knowledge. Regarding ordinary knowledge, one may demand evidence, engage in argumentation, propose revisions, or even discard it if necessary. However, doing so with knowledge accepted as the Word of God is not nearly as simple from a religious perspective (Pathak, 2011; Locke, 1690/1975).

Thus, accepting the concept of revelation and identifying a specific statement as divine revelation are not identical matters. According to Locke, the role of reason is not eliminated even when accepting divine revelation; particularly when that revelation reaches us through a tradition, a scripture, or another person. As Locke states: “it still belongs to reason to judge of the truth of its being a revelation, and of the signification of the words wherein it is delivered” (Locke, 1690/1975, p. 689). It is essential to keep this distinction in mind because religious exclusivism often fails to distinguish between the authenticity of divine revelation and the authenticity of its human comprehension.

This gives rise to a significant question: if the fundamental basis of a religion's truth is divine revelation, what status does the truth of another religion hold for a follower of that faith?

If a follower finds a tenet of another religion to be contrary to the truth expounded in their own scriptures, they face only two possibilities: either they reject the other tenet by regarding their own religion's revelation as absolute, or they somewhat relax the certainty of their own religious truth. The tendency of religious exclusivism is to accept the first possibility. For it, the question of truth is not merely about which view is more rational, but rather about what God Himself has revealed. Therefore, in discussions regarding religious exclusivism, it becomes necessary to view divine revelation not merely as a matter of religious faith, but as an epistemological foundation.

Here, another possibility must also be considered. The basis of religious knowledge need not be limited to written scriptures or the pronouncements of a historical religious

founder; religious experience, too, can serve as the foundation for an individual's religious belief. Instead of regarding religious experience merely as a private emotional state, William P. Alston has explored its potential epistemological dimension. According to him, beliefs derived from the experience of God can be linked to the question of epistemological grounding in the same way that we view other types of experiential beliefs (Alston, 1991).

It is also worth considering the nature of the relationship between divine revelation and human reason. If revelation is regarded as knowledge received from God, then... Does this render the role of human reason obsolete?

John Locke makes an important distinction in this regard. According to him, knowledge acquired through revelation and knowledge acquired through reason both pertain to truth; however, revelation cannot be considered diametrically opposed to reason. He writes: "Reason must be our last Judge and Guide in everything" (Locke, 1690/1975, IV.19.14).

This proposition by Locke points to an important caveat regarding divine revelation. A religious person may base their faith on revelation, yet the question of how to understand that revelation and determine its meaning remains unresolved. Thus, accepting revelation and understanding the process of grasping its human meaning become two distinct issues. This is the point where the question of divine revelation intersects with the issue of religious exclusivism.

In reality, the difficulty inherent in religious exclusivism does not lie merely in a religion basing its truth on divine revelation. The problem intensifies when a specific interpretation of that revelation is deemed absolute, leading to the rejection of any religious experiences or truth-claims found outside that framework. In such a scenario, the scripture ceases to be merely a guide and becomes the ultimate arbiter of truth and falsehood. The notion that whatever is contained therein is true; and whatever contradicts it is false, provides a definitive basis for religious exclusivism. It is also important to note here that regarding the validity of religious belief as dependent solely on external or logical evidence is not the only possible perspective.

Alvin Plantinga (2000) has advocated for an epistemological stance on religious belief wherein belief in God can be rationally held without being derived as a conclusion from other

propositions. From this perspective, religious belief cannot be dismissed as irrational simply because no prior argument has been presented in its favor.

The question of the credibility of divine revelation takes on another dimension here. If revelation is viewed as knowledge reaching humanity, what constitutes the basis for its trustworthiness?

Swinburne (2004) examines this problem within the context of the rational assessment of religious belief. According to this view, religious beliefs should not be evaluated solely on whether they are empirically verifiable; rather, one can also consider the nature of the support provided by available evidence. From this perspective, the claim of religious revelation ceases to be a realm entirely divorced from reason; instead, the evidence supporting it and its underlying epistemic grounds can be examined.

An important distinction emerges here. For a religious individual, revelation may serve as the source of ultimate truth, yet the human process of accepting the credibility of that revelation can still involve reason, experience, evidence, and prior beliefs. Therefore, accepting divine revelation is not necessarily the same as regarding every religious claim based on it as absolute without any interpretive process. However, it would be incorrect to assert that every religion accepting divine revelation is inherently exclusivist. This is because the concept of revelation itself varies across religions; it is variously viewed as the literal word of God, as God manifesting through a specific individual, or as an apprehension of religious truth not tied to any single written statement.

This diversity can also be understood within the broader philosophical context of religious pluralism. According to Ward (1994), when interpreting religious traditions, it is insufficient to assume that all religious claims are of the same nature. Different religious traditions develop distinct ways of comprehending Ultimate Reality through their respective experiences, symbols, languages, and historical contexts. From this standpoint, rather than defining divine revelation in a single, universal manner, it is more fruitful to understand its various religious manifestations and the epistemological assumptions underpinning them.

Alston's analysis of religious experience further clarifies this distinction. Alston does not dismiss religious experience merely as a private emotional sensation; instead, he raises the question of how religious beliefs based on such experiences can be justified. According to him, beliefs grounded in religious experiences should not be deemed epistemologically

worthless simply because they differ from ordinary sensory experiences. In this context, he views religious experience as a "socially established doxastic practice" (Alston, 1991, p. 153).

This perspective is significant for the issue of divine revelation because it reveals an intermediate level between revelation and its human reception. For a religious individual, the experience may be real and meaningful, yet the nature of the belief derived from it can be influenced by their religious tradition, pre-existing beliefs, and interpretive framework. Thus, it is not necessary to conflate the acceptance of divine revelation with the human interpretation of its meaning.

Furthermore, when examining the relationship between divine revelation and religious exclusivism, it is pertinent to consider how the revelation itself is conceptualized.

If revelation is regarded as knowledge that is self-evident, final, and unquestionable, then the development of religious exclusivism based upon it is a natural outcome. However, if revelation is viewed as a process occurring between divine truth and human reception – one in which human understanding and interpretation play a role – then the situation changes significantly.

In the context of religious diversity, the work of Knitter (2002) is particularly useful here. Knitter does not limit the relationship between religious traditions merely to the question of which religion holds the ultimate truth; rather, he emphasizes how diverse religious traditions can re-examine their understanding of truth through dialogue with one another. From this perspective, the possibility arises of understanding religious truth not merely as an authoritatively proclaimed conclusion, but within the broader context of dialogue and experience.

This does not imply that a religious person must abandon the truth of their own faith. Rather, the question is whether one can remain open to the religious experiences and truth-claims of others while remaining faithful to one's own beliefs. This very openness provides a basis for understanding the rigidity of religious exclusivism and for subjecting it to philosophical scrutiny. The issue here concerns not the veracity of divine revelation itself, but the nature of the human relationship to it.

This distinction can also be understood from an epistemological standpoint. While a claim of revelation points to a divine source, the processes of its reception, comprehension, and interpretation are carried out through human agency. Therefore, distinguishing between

the divine authenticity of revelation and its human interpretation does not amount to a denial of religious faith; rather, it clarifies the faith's epistemological nature.

For a religious person, their scripture may be true, their faith may serve as the foundation of their life, and they may regard their religion's revelation as originating from God. However, this does not necessarily prove that another person's religious experience is false simply because it is not described in one's own scripture. It is at this juncture that religious exclusivism takes an additional step: it moves beyond affirming its own religious truth to actively rejecting the religious truth of others. This very issue regarding truth-claims across diverse religious traditions subsequently gave rise to the philosophical debate concerning religious exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. John Hick briefly characterizes divine revelation as follows: "Revelation is the importing to men of divinely authenticated truths" (Hick, 1989, p. 2).

In other words, divine revelation is the unveiling of truths to humanity that are regarded as divinely authenticated. The defining characteristic of divine revelation in this definition lies in its divine authentication. Consequently, for the religious individual, truth derived from revelation is not merely knowledge accepted on the basis of reason or experience –as is ordinary human knowledge; rather, their faith in it is rooted in the very foundation of their religious belief.

Divine Revelation in the Context of Religious Diversity

The problem of religious exclusivism becomes even more complex when, rather than examining the internal structure of a single religion in isolation, we consider various religions together. There are many religions in the world that embrace their respective religious truths with profound seriousness. For their adherents, their scriptures, prophets or religious figures, and religious experiences are not merely historical events but the very foundation for understanding and living life (King, 2008; Dastmalchian, 2013).

In such a context, it is natural to ask: if more than one religion grounds its truth in a divine source, how are we to interpret their mutually divergent or contradictory claims? (Hick, 1983)

The issue of religious diversity here goes beyond the mere fact that multiple religions exist in the world. A philosophical problem arises when these religions assert claims

regarding the truth and authenticity of their respective beliefs. To view the problem more clearly, it is not simply a matter of the coexistence of distinct beliefs; rather, we are confronted with religious claims that are, at times, incompatible with one another. If two religious traditions make mutually contradictory truth-claims about a particular matter, mere acceptance of coexistence does not resolve the philosophical problem. Paul J. Griffiths (2001) has analyzed this aspect of religious diversity by examining the divergent –and sometimes conflicting– doctrines and truth-claims of different religions.

King (2008) has emphasized the need to distinguish the epistemological –or truth-related– aspect of religious belief from soteriological questions when considering religious diversity. This distinction helps in understanding ‘which religion is true?’ and ‘what kind of religious life leads to liberation or moral transformation?’ –these two questions are not the same. In this regard, Quinn (1995) states: “Observing the differences between the perspectives of Hick and Alston on the question of religious diversity, it becomes evident that while the epistemology of religious experience and the issue of religious pluralism are interconnected, they are not identical” (Quinn, 1995, pp. 145–164). Notably, King's bibliography itself identifies Quinn's work, *Towards Thinner Theologies: Hick and Alston on Religious Diversity*”.

It is here that religious diversity compels us to examine the concept of divine revelation more deeply. Does divine revelation imply that only a single religious tradition possesses the authority of truth? Or is it possible that there exists an expression of truth across various religious traditions –one that their followers have apprehended through their respective languages, traditions, and religious experiences?

The answers to these two questions cannot be the same, and it is on this basis that the fundamental distinction between religious exclusivism and religious pluralism becomes apparent (Hick, 1983). However, it would be inappropriate to regard religious pluralism as a self-evident solution to this problem. If exclusivism claims that a particular religious tradition holds a unique status regarding truth, then pluralism; by asserting that various religious traditions are distinct responses to an Ultimate Reality, is itself making a sweeping philosophical claim.

Critiquing pluralism on this very point, D'Costa (1996) raised the question of whether the pluralist perspective can itself remain free from the criteria it employs to evaluate religious traditions.

Hick (1997) did not accept D'Costa's objection and sought to clarify that the philosophical nature of religious pluralism is not akin to the sectarian claims of any specific religion. According to him, the function of the pluralist hypothesis is to place various religious traditions within a comprehensive. It needs to be understood from a philosophical perspective, rather than establishing one over the other in the manner of religious exclusivism. For this reason, in contemporary philosophy, religious diversity is not regarded merely as a matter of religious tolerance but is also viewed as an epistemological problem concerning religious belief. By presenting the diverse perspectives of Swinburne, Plantinga, Alston, and Hick in this debate, Dastmalchian has demonstrated that the question of religious diversity ultimately hinges on how various religious beliefs are to be understood epistemologically. (Dastmalchian, 2013)

However, caution is required here as well. Concluding that all religions are equally true simply because multiple religions exist is just as simplistic a solution as assuming that only one religion is true while all others are false. In both instances, there is a tendency to confine the issue within a fixed conclusion rather than truly resolving it.

Religious pluralism itself is not limited to merely acknowledging the fact of religious diversity; it seeks to offer a philosophical interpretation of that diversity. In this sense, it would be inappropriate to view religious pluralism merely as the simplistic notion that *all religions are the same*. Hick's pluralistic approach attempts to understand conflicting truth-claims across religious traditions within a broader philosophical framework. In *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, he directly addresses this issue in his discussion of "Conflicting Religious Truth-Claims" (Hick, 1985, pp. 88-95).

From a philosophical perspective, it is more important to understand the basis upon which a claim to religious truth is made and the extent of that claim.

If a person asserts that they have attained the truth of God, their belief cannot be dismissed simply because it differs from another person's belief. Similarly, one need not deem another person's religious experience false merely because it does not exist within one's own religious tradition.

Having a religious experience and interpreting that experience are two distinct matters. It is possible for the experience to be genuine while its interpretation remains influenced by the individual's religious background. This distinction has been crucial for philosophers examining religious diversity, as it allows for a differentiation between the religious experience itself and its philosophical significance.

This is where the importance of epistemological humility becomes evident. This does not imply that one should abandon one's religion or discard one's faith due to doubt; rather, it simply means recognizing the distinction between what truth is in itself and the extent to which human beings are capable of comprehending that truth. Hick articulates this very problem in the context of religious diversity as follows: "Without this postulate we should be left with a plurality of 'Personae' and 'Impersonae' each of which is claimed to be the Ultimate, but no one of which alone can be". (Hick, 1989, p. 249)

This perspective also lays the groundwork for religious dialogue. If a religious individual proceeds with the assumption that while they possess a potential expression of the truth, their own understanding of that truth is human, then the possibility of listening to another religion remains open. Conversely, if one's own interpretation is regarded as the complete and final form of divine truth, dialogue may gradually give way to dispute. However, religious dialogue does not imply that the genuine differences existing between religious traditions should be dismissed simply to make dialogue possible.

D'Costa argues that dialogue between religious traditions can only be meaningful if the participating parties do not conceal the actual distinctiveness and truth-claims of their respective traditions. Thus, it is not necessary to view dialogue and religious commitment as mutually exclusive (D'Costa, 2000).

Therefore, religious diversity does not negate the concept of divine revelation; rather, it poses a new question: what is the relationship between divine truth and its human comprehension? This question is, perhaps, the most crucial for understanding the problem of religious exclusivism. For even if divine revelation is the source of truth, the human being is the recipient of that truth; and as the recipient, to regard one's understanding, language, and interpretation as entirely divine is, in itself, an additional claim.

Acknowledging this distinction does not weaken religious faith. On the contrary, it creates the possibility for an individual to remain faithful to their own beliefs while avoiding

unnecessary hostility toward the religious beliefs of others. Similarly, the aim of critiquing religious exclusivism is not to dismantle the faith of any religion, but rather to examine the space between steadfast adherence to one's own truth and the outright rejection of another's truth-claim. Is there a path where both faith and philosophical discernment can coexist?

Conclusion

The preceding discussion clarifies that divine revelation is a distinct concept within religious knowledge, grounded in the belief that certain truths are conveyed to humanity through a medium connected to the Divine. Its tangible aspects are characterized by religious founders and scriptures, while its intangible dimensions are defined by transcendence and divine authenticity.

However, it is inappropriate to conflate the divine source with human reception and interpretation. While regarding revelation as divine may be a matter of religious faith, treating every human interpretation of it as final and beyond question constitutes an additional epistemological claim. Similarly, the propositional and non-propositional natures of revelation suggest that religious revelation cannot be confined merely to specific religious utterances. From the perspective of religious exclusivism, a crucial point is that exclusivism does not arise solely from divine revelation itself; rather, it intensifies when a particular revelation, scripture, or interpretation is accepted as the ultimate and infallible truth.

Thus, the core of the issue lies less in the revelation itself and more in the epistemological stance adopted towards it. Acknowledging this distinction does not negate religious faith; instead, it opens the possibility for a more discerning dialogue among religious truth, human understanding, and religious diversity.

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