

On So Called 'Divine Revelation'
Some Quotes From Six Founders
Curated by Thomas Ulatowski

Introduction

Without Revelation there are no dogmas and no organized religious sects. The arguments found in the writings of Ethan Allen, Tom Paine, and Thomas Jefferson convinced the other American founders to create the first secular nation.

Carl Sagan observed that "human history can be viewed as a slowly dawning awareness that we are members of a larger group." These quotes are based on an awareness of the fact that there is no consensus about 'Divine Revelation' — a fact that was becoming more and more obvious almost two centuries after Columbus and the Magellan-Elcano circumnavigation, and five centuries after Marco Polo.

Ethan Allen:

"Reason...must be the standard by which we determine the respective claims of revelation; for otherwise we may as well subscribe to the divinity of the one as of the other..."

"To suppose that God Almighty has confined his goodness to this world, to the exclusion of all others, is much similar to the idle fancies of some individuals in this world, that they, and those of their communion or faith, are the favorites of heaven exclusively; but these are narrow and bigoted conceptions, which are degrading to a rational nature, and utterly unworthy of God, of whom we should form the most exalted ideas."

"The representation of a God, who (as we are told by certain divines) from all eternity elected an inconsiderable part of mankind to eternal life, and reprobated the rest to eternal damnation ...is a selfish and inferior notion of a God void of justice, goodness, and truth, ...which, if admitted to be true, overturns all religion, ...resolving the whole into the sovereign disposal of a tyrannical and unjust being, which is offensive to reason and common sense, and subversive of moral rectitude in general."

"[I]n those parts of the world where learning and science has prevailed, miracles have ceased; but in such parts of it as are barbarous and ignorant, miracles are still in vogue; which is of itself a strong presumption that in the infancy of letters, learning and science, or in the world's non-age, those who confided in miracles, as a proof of the divine mission of the first promulgators of revelation, were imposed upon by fictitious appearances instead of miracles."

"Besides, those subsequent revelations to the law of nature, began as human traditions have ever done in very small circumferences, in the respective parts of the world where they have been inculcated, and made their progress, as time, chance, and opportunity presented. Does this look like the contrivance of heaven, and the only way of salvation? Or is it not more like this world and the contrivance of man?"

Tom Paine:

"A thing which everybody is required to believe, requires that the proof and evidence of it should be equal to all..."

"Had it been the object or the intention of Jesus Christ to establish a new religion, he would undoubtedly have written the system himself, or procured it to be written in his life-time. But there is no publication extant authenticated with his name."

"Had the news of salvation by Jesus Christ been inscribed on the face of the sun and the moon, in characters that all nations would have understood, the whole earth had known it in twenty-four hours, and all nations would have believed it; whereas, though it is now almost two thousand years since, as they tell us, Christ came upon earth, not a twentieth part of the people of the earth know anything of it, and among those who do, the wiser part do not believe it."

"That the idea or belief of a word of God existing in print, or in writing, or in speech, is inconsistent in itself for reasons already assigned. These reasons, among many others, are the want of a universal language; the mutability of language; the errors to which translations are subject: the possibility of totally suppressing such a word; the probability of altering it, or of fabricating the whole, and imposing it upon the world."

"[T]he thing so revealed (if anything ever was revealed, and which, by the bye, it is impossible to prove), is revelation to the person only to whom it is made. His account of it to another person is not revelation; and whoever puts faith in that account, puts it in the man from whom the account comes; and that man may have been deceived, or may have dreamed it, or he may be an impostor and may lie. There is no possible criterion whereby to judge of the truth of what he tells, for even the morality of it would be no proof of revelation. In all such cases the proper answer would be, 'When it is revealed to me, I will believe it to be a revelation; but it is not, and cannot be incumbent upon me to believe it to be revelation before; neither is it proper that I should take the word of a man as the word of God, and put man in the place of God.'"

"But when I see throughout the greater part of this book scarcely anything but a history of the grossest vices and a collection of the most paltry and contemptible tales, I cannot dishonor my Creator by calling it by His name."

Thomas Jefferson:

"The priests of the different religious sects... dread the advance of science as witches do the approach of daylight, and scowl on the fatal harbinger announcing the subdivision of the duperies on which they live."

"My religious reading has long been confined to the moral branch of religion, which is the same in all religions; while in that branch which consists of dogmas, all differ... the former instructs us how to live well and worthily in society; the latter are made to interest our minds in the support of the teachers who inculcate them."

"He who steadily observes the moral precepts in which all religions concur, will never be questioned at the gates of heaven as to the dogmas in which they all differ."

"I repeat, you must lay aside all prejudice on both sides, and neither believe nor reject anything, because any other persons, or description of persons, have rejected or believed it. Your own reason is the only oracle given you by heaven, and you are answerable, not for the rightness, but uprightness of the decision."

"Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch towards uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites. To support roguery and error all over the earth. Let us reflect that it is inhabited by a thousand millions of people. That these profess probably a thousand different systems of religion. That ours is but one of that thousand. That if there be but one right, and ours that one, we should wish to see the 999 wandering sects gathered into the fold of truth. But against such a majority we cannot effect this by force. Reason and persuasion are the only practicable instruments. To make way for these, free enquiry must be indulged; and how can we wish others to indulge it while we refuse it ourselves."

"Christianity is the most perverted system that ever shone on man."

"The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the Supreme Being as His Father, in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva, in the brain of Jupiter."

"Indeed I think that every Christian sect gives a great handle to Atheism by their general dogma that, without a revelation, there would not be sufficient proof of the being of a god."

"In fact the... paradox that one is three, and three but one is so incomprehensible to the human mind that no candid man can say he has any idea of it, and how can he believe what presents no idea. ...With such persons gullability which they call faith takes the helm from the hand of reason and the mind becomes a wreck."

"The clergy believe that any power confided in me will be exerted in opposition to their schemes. And, they believe rightly."

Benjamin Franklin:

"But I was scarce 15 when, after doubting by turns of several Points as I found them disputed in the different Books I read, I began to doubt of Revelation itself..."

"As to Jesus of Nazareth... I have, with most of the present Dissenters in England, some Doubts as to His divinity; tho' it is a question I do not dogmatize upon..."

"I cannot conceive otherwise than that He, the Infinite Father, expects or requires no worship or praise from us, but that He is even infinitely above it."

"Lighthouses are more useful than churches."

John Adams:

"Philosophy, which is the result of reason, is the first, the original revelation of the Creator to his creature, man. When this revelation is clear and certain, by intuition or necessary inductions, no subsequent revelation, supported by prophecies or miracles, can supersede it."

"As I understand the christian religion, it was, and is, a revelation. But how has it happened that millions of fables, tales, legends have been blended with both Jewish and Christian revelation that have made them the most bloody religion that ever existed?"

George Washington:

"Of all the animosities which have existed among mankind, those which are caused by difference of sentiments in religion appear to be the most inveterate and distressing, and ought most to be deprecated."

Robert G. Ingersoll:

"Every sect is a certificate that God has not plainly revealed his will to man."

Mark Twain:

"The easy confidence with which I know another man's religion is folly teaches me to suspect that my own is also."

Richard Dawkins:

"No one believes in Zeus or Thor. Almost everyone is an atheist regarding 99 out of 100 gods; however, most believers simply make one exception for the god that they were told to believe in when they were children."

Conclusion

It is past time to acknowledge the now obvious fact that there is no worldwide religious consensus. Consequently, the belief in a divine revelation produces this devastating dichotomy. Either God is not almighty because He was incapable of making Himself clear regarding the existence of one true religion, or the Almighty created mostly defective people who can't recognize His clear message.

If the clearest fact is that there is no clear-cut successful revelation, then the religious are insulting the Creator by insisting that there was an inadequate revelation or a botched creation!

When serious thought is required, all relevant facts must be honestly acknowledged. The All-Perfect Almighty God's religion should stand out; instead, any semi-powerful and just god must be hiding from us. Only a devil could be behind our current ball of delusion and confusion. Can you prove that your religion wasn't started by a devil?

Whatever is right is right, so imagine this. If you are a random believer, what if when you die there is an actual ALL-GOOD and Almighty God, and HE or SHE asks you why (instead of standing for responsibility, truth, and understanding) you stood for superstitious irresponsibility, provincial flimflam, and liars everywhere? How do you answer?

For their quotes and further discussion of 'Divine Revelation' visit these pages:

Ethan Allen

Tom Paine

Robert G. Ingersoll

Richard Dawkins

Sam Harris

Christopher Hitchens