

The Apparent Hiddenness of God: A Brisk Evaluation of Opposing Views

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Introduction

The matter of God directly and clearly making His presence known or felt in the world has been a subject of much contention and discussion for some time. While some conclude that this absence of clear tangible evidence proves that God is not, others contend that God has disclosed himself in various ways only that people are looking in the wrong direction using wrong parameters. God is inscrutable they argue. Others conclude that this matter cannot be proved or settled and thus turn out agnostic. What should the theist do to prove the existence of God? How can the apparent divine obscurity be explained away to a person demanding evidence scrutable within the five senses? This paper unveils some general views that have been advanced over time on either side of the argument offering some possible reasons for this obscurity.

Does God make Himself known?

Theists argue that God has made himself known in various ways. Some of these ways are by his word (special revelation), regeneration (i.e. transformed lives) and in Creation (general revelation). Systematic Theologians like Hodge, Berkhoff or Bavink often allude to these forms of argument. It seems a settled matter for them. But these ways have repeatedly been challenged by rationalists and others that demand positive verifiable proof to God's existence. They claim that God either exists or not based on tangible evidence scrutable to the human eye. If that is not forthcoming, all talk about God is mere wishful thinking at best. Depending on one's noetic structure and core beliefs, proof can or cannot come from a particular angle.

Possible Reasons why God remains Hidden

Several reasons have been presented to the fore as to why God apparently appears obscure and not directly reveal Himself so that people believe, although Jesus once argued that even with clear miraculous evidence from the dead, not all would believe! The first step is to acknowledge by stating that the scientific

method cannot prove the existence of God as He is inscrutable. It is only one method among many of arriving at facts or truth and some aspects are outside its scope or domain. However, theists have been charged for failing to give convincing reasons or empirically verifiable evidence for God's existence, hiding in the 'God inscrutable theory'. The accusers allege that the fact that there is no tangible evidence perceivable through the five senses proves that God does not exist, in sync with David Hume's philosophical arguments. For, if God were really there, there would be some semblance of evidence but no shred exists! The theists have offered some possible reasons why God remains silent. Firstly, there is a possibility that humans hearts are naturally too proud to notice the evidence or will most likely grow more proud if they knew about God. He has thus hidden some aspects from them, with good reason of course. Blaise Pascal posited this view. Second, due to sinful nature, after the fall, human beings have been so affected by the fall so that belief in God is hard (Romans 1:18ff). The human cannot easily accept the things of God, although an aspect of God's image remains in them. If this sin is overcome in regeneration, people easily believe and receive sight to perceive the clear evidence, both in general and special revelation. Thirdly, God has so designed that people are interdependent hence the need of communion or fellowship of sorts. In that setting, people learn from each other the dealings and disclosures of God to their soul. Finally, the fact that God can reveal Himself does not in and of itself prove that the subject will believe, as earlier alluded to.

Why it is important for God to make Himself Manifest

It has been argued by Stellenberg and others that God would do well to make his existences plain and clear for a number of rational reasons. Firstly, if he were to make Himself known, people would know that He truly exist. Secondly, people would be compelled to believe in Him, given the compelling evidence. Third, people would know Him and enter a good relationship as He requires. Fourth, God would be trusted and relied upon as the case may be. In the absence of evidence, it is very difficult for any right thinking person to believe in the existence of God more than to rest on a mere hunch. Others however have argued that even if God were to come out of obscurity or hiding, people would not necessarily believe because even in Jesus' time on earth, some rejected him, in the light of clear evidence (Luke 16:31,32). Remember the miracles at Korazin (Matthew 11:21)? The theist argues that while it is important to have God's disclosure more fully, God has reasons beyond tracing out. Theodicy therefore is in order. Three general responses are offered by some theists, though not entirely agree at all points. First, self disclosure can have different effects on people, to believe or not. The sin in humans has affected human beings. Second, God does not know the free will actions of men (though some of us question this view for God is omniscient). Third and finally, God uses agents so that they share with others. He may reveal himself or aspects of to individuals who share with others. Other arguments such as curbing human pride may be brought to the

table for why God remains hidden. Even the Psalmist and other Biblical writers lamented about God's remoteness, of course in a good sense.

What others have said and written about God's self Disclosure

Kevin Kinghorn has made an interesting paper where he presents the various views and arguments for or against the need for God to disclose Himself so that people may easily believe. Having objectively disclosed himself, Kinghorn concludes that God has hidden reasons why this is so, probably that humans may learn from each other about Him as per His design. Other writers such as Swinburne, schellenberg , Henry Morris and others, offer interesting perspectives, both from atheistic and theistic perspective, which make reading on this subject most interesting. Theodicy cannot be avoided on the part of the theist because God is both accused and rejected by the atheist for lack of clear evidence of existence. An alternative view worth considering is presented by Vincent Chueng in his article, "*Presuppositional confrontations*" where he argues that God had not hidden Himself at all. In fact, God has revealed Himself so clearly in Nature only that humans, given their sinful nature suppress or deny the fact in unrighteousness. He holds that if the person is regenerated or objectively looks at the evidence, God's self revelation is evident everywhere both in General and special revelation although the former cannot lead to salvation. Romans 1:18-20 and acts 17 are summoned to advance this presuppositional perspective, since all humans have a world view coloured by their underlying presuppositions.

Lessons learnt from this Consideration

There are many lessons we can pick from this enquiry, especially that the atheist and theist argue about the existence or non existence of God based on evidence. Below are some lessons to take home from this discussion:

- God has His hidden reasons for not fully disclosing himself to mortals. Humans need to seek and find Him, if that were possible, although, it is in fact God that does in salvation (Acts 17:27)
- People are likely to believe if they have more direct evidence about God's existence, so some philosophers and atheologists argue.
- Human beings may not necessarily believe even in the light of God's direct or fuller disclosure because of several factors that include: sin, free-will and the need for interdependence among people to learn from each other.

- In the absence of fuller disclosure of Himself, some theologians argue that people cannot move a step to believe.
- Blaise Pascal argued that God remained hidden partly because humans could easily become proud. This position has been repeatedly attacked though not dislodged.
- Christians come to believe in God by faith as God has revealed Himself in creation as well as planting His image on their hearts.

Suggestions to deepen appreciation of this subject matter

This topic is a good point of discussion. It opens up thoughts not previously considered or areas repeatedly brought out by pundits from either side of the argument relating to God's self disclosure. That God has revealed Himself in both natural and special revelation is a well established view amongst Biblical Theologians but may not necessarily be so for others. Rationalists demand tangible physical evidence testable by conventional means. They will not countenance any other attempted explanations. Thus, this consideration opens up this matter, highlighting key points to note, with possible responses. This paper is meant to be a trigger only of further review. Readers are thus pointed to the water brooks with the hope that they will be motivated to explore further by reading deeply into scripture. Moreover, enquirers must read wide and deep summoning journals on latest conversations around the trending issues, reading books or engaging in discussion with others. In our experience over the years, animistic people will rarely argue that God exists though have wrong notions about the nature of God. The book of nature will have done alot of the basic work for the preacher or teacher, what is needed is to bring about the gospel light unveiled in special revelation. One possible documentary source we referenced during our research was by Kevin Kinghorn which we highly recommend as a starting point for the first time researcher on this matter. The arguments presented by Kinghorn were found to be extremely helpful, though one of the suggested theistic responses attempting to prove why God has not fully manifested divine evidence is worrying; It suggests that God does not know the future! While this view is contentious in theological circles, summoning all other arguments such as Greek influence on text interpretation, we argue that God knows all things. That said, the two other reasons given make better sense. Granted, none of us is perfect or holds the monopoly of truth, we need to exercise wise caution as we read arguments presented by others. Evidently, there is need to read widely with a discerning eye.

Conclusion

It is evident that God has made himself known in different ways, ways that some may agree with or not, depending on their presuppositions or world view. God has reasons best known to Himself for apparently limiting His self disclosure to humans, despite the counter arguments to that fact.

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