

THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCTION AND FOREWORD

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

This course is a revised traduction of the work “I Fondamenti del Cristianesimo” written by Rev. Piero Ottaviano and Didaskaleion.

The course is divided into units with a logical sequence. Therefore we suggest you to read them following their progressive order.

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FOREWORD: THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIANITY

Many talk about Christianity, whereas very few clearly know anything about its foundations.

- Christianity is **NOT** grounded on such things as:
- God's existence, even though it does acknowledge there is a God;
- the Ten Commandments, even though it has laws;
- love and its effects, even though love is indeed a Christian absolute;
- equality of men, even though it preaches it.

We could go on with such a list for quite a while!

Was any of you shocked by these statements, then maybe you might need to read this book, for your ideas about the fundamental principles of Christianity are quite hazy.

By way of introduction to the reading comprehension, may we say that Christianity claims to be a revealed religion.

THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION

If we look up the meaning of "Religion" in any dictionary, we will probably find ever different meanings, which shows how confused ideas are about it in our language.

The definition for "religion" which is being proposed here follows the present studies on this topic, particularly the reflections by D. Bonhoeffer: they have the merit of being clear.

We do not expect them to be universally acknowledged, nevertheless we will be crediting the word "religion" with the very meaning we are about to establish.

No sooner has man realized that he exists and started thinking, than he has also realized that he is not the master of his own destiny, and that he is heading for death.

So he starts asking himself questions like these:

- Who am I?
- Where do I come from? Where am I going to?
- What's the purpose of my living?

Let us describe "religion" as:

- The answer to the "meaning of life" question
- The subscription to some value regarded as an absolute

In order to be in a position to answer these questions, that he cannot escape, man has thus to get faced by two possibilities:

1. Either he tries to solve the problems of his own existence by means of human discretion, thus by formulating theories and expressing his own convictions, so as to possibly reach a convincing conclusion;
2. Or he accepts to trust some Teacher, whom he holds qualified enough to solve his problems as to the meaning of Life.

Over centuries a lot of such teachers have presented themselves as no less than "spokesmen" of a God, by giving to the "meaning of life" question an answer coming straight - so they would claim - from God Himself.

In such case, we call that a God-revealed religion.

This solution is professed to exceed the possibilities of human wits and therefore cannot be achieved by reason, but it is grounded only on the authority of the God who has spoken through His spokesman, whom, in turn, people freely and reasonably choose to trust.

Let us determine what a "**revealed religion**" is:

an answer to the "meaning of life" question that is believed to come from a God who has spoken through some "spokesman" (prophet).

In this case we are talking about a "revelation from God" through a "prophet", which matches the listener's "faith", or trust, in the prophet.

Of course, any prophet had to give a proof testifying for him. Usually, it consisted in either foretelling future events, or of "miraculous" deeds, which would convey the idea of the actual intervention of God in human history.

The one who presents himself as God's spokesman may thus be trusted or not trusted at all, for the proof's contents are not that evident in themselves; it takes a consenting will to believe, as soon as intelligence has ascertained both the non-absurdity of what the witness says and the credibility of the witness himself.

Any revealed religion takes its place in history.

Revealed religions arise whenever somebody presents himself as God's spokesman and has a party trusting him.

CHRISTIANITY

Christianity claims to a revealed religion, namely it claims to be the ultimate answer, as provided by God Yahveh, to the "meaning of life" question.

The man who provided such revelation is Jesus of Nazareth, who, in turn:

- said he is God's spokesman
- supplied evidence of that by rising from the dead

The foundations of Christianity will be introduced here starting from the historic-proven existence of a man - Jesus of Nazareth - who has left us no writings to be found (so far) and whom his disciples would present as the founder of Christianity.

Our work will be basically developed through documents.

Its goal is to provide the reader with enough rudiments to enable him/her to honestly make up his/her mind about Christian faith: to believe or not to believe?