

Theological and Philosophical Aspects of Revelation

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Abstract: This article explores the concept of divine revelation from a theological and philosophical perspective, highlighting its implications for religious epistemology. The study examines the distinctions in the understanding of revelation within classical Christian traditions, with a particular emphasis on the neo-Protestant view, as well as modern and postmodern approaches to religious knowledge. Furthermore, the tensions between revelation and reason are analyzed, along with the impact of secularization on the reception of the revealed message in contemporary contexts. The aim of the paper is to provide a coherent conceptual framework for understanding revelation as an act of divine communication with ontological, hermeneutical, and existential dimensions.

Keywords: Theology, Philosophy, Revelation, Concept, Thought, Transcendental

1. Introduction

Revelation, analyzed from a theological and philosophical perspective, is a subject of profound reflection in religious discourse and contemporary epistemological investigations. At the heart of this interest lies the question of how divine reality is made known to human beings and the mechanisms through which this act of transcendent communication is understood, internalized, and valued in personal and collective life. The history of religious thought has been marked by a variety of interpretations of revelation, shaped by the specificities of religious traditions and the dominant philosophical foundations of the respective eras.

In classical theology, revelation is perceived as a supra-rational manifestation through which God transmits essential truths to man about himself, creation, and human destiny. Christian traditions distinguish between natural revelation, which derives from the contemplation of creation, and special revelation, embodied in sacred texts and in the person of Christ. These are considered privileged channels through which the divine makes itself known. In parallel, the philosophy of religion has sought to formulate a rational understanding of revelation, analyzing its cognitive status, its relationship to religious experience, and its place in relation to human reason.

Cultural and spiritual transformations (Rotaru, 2023a, pp. 62-79) in modernity and postmodernity have led to a significant reevaluation of the concept of revelation. The dispute between rationalism and fideism, doctrinal pluralism, and the advance of hermeneutics (Rotaru, 2017, pp. 49-65) have led to a more nuanced view, in which revelation is perceived not only as a communication of content, but also as a living interaction between the divine and the human, between meaning and interpretation. In this context, revelation takes on existential and symbolic dimensions, transcending strict dogmatic frameworks.

This paper aims to analyze revelation from an interdisciplinary perspective, bringing together theological perspectives and philosophical questions (Rotaru 2005a, pp. 285-287). The objective is to construct an integrative conceptual framework that captures the relevance of revelation as an act of transcendent communication, with profound ontological implications and multiple meanings on the epistemological, hermeneutical, and existential levels.

2. 20th-Century Theology: Revelation as “God's self-disclosure”—E.G. White

In 20th-century theology, revelation (Offenbarung) was understood, we might say, as “God's self-revelation,” according to His decision. Another characteristic of this theology is that it paid greater attention to the historicity of human life and its difficulties and distinguished, from people's references to the Scriptures, an “original revelation (Ur-Offenbarung)” (Fischer, 2002, p. 97). This

revelation directs attention, I would add, to the model of humanity and community contained in the Bible, which is increasingly sought after as a reference point.

In the 20th century, Ellen G. White (1827-1915) became one of the leading theologians. The famous American pastor made a thorough exegesis of the Scriptures and considered herself a spokesperson for the Divine. Looking back on her rich work, in a letter from 1905, Ellen G. White writes that "my work includes more than this word signifies. I consider myself a messenger to whom God has entrusted messages for His people" (White, 1870, p.1369). She did not consider herself a prophet, content with the role of defender of the faith.

Regarding the conception of revelation, Ellen G. White assumed that "the Bible is our guide on the sure paths that lead to eternal life... God has determined that the Scriptures, the source of knowledge that is above all human theories, should be studied" (White, 1870, p. 1421). She also assumed that "God has undertaken to prepare His divinely inspired word for finite man. This *word*, organized into books, the Old and New Testaments, is the guidebook for those who live in a fallen world, entrusted to them so that by studying its directives, no soul will lose its way to heaven" (White, 1870, p. 1364). She also assumed that the entire Bible is divinely inspired. "I take the Bible exactly as it is, as the inspired Word of God. I believe the utterances throughout the Bible" (p. 1365). Finally, she accepted what was written in the Gospel of John (1:9) – "The Son of God came into the world as a revelation of the Father" (White, 1870, p. 1433). She accepted the Apocalypse of John or the Book of Revelation and believed that in this book, "in revelation, all the books of the Bible meet and end. Here is the complement to Daniel" (Rotaru, 2022, pp. 672-691; Rotaru, 2023b, pp. 672-691). Furthermore, Ellen G. White believed that God gives people "the light of knowledge." In her concise self-presentation in *The Revelation of God* (1898), she argued that it is enough for people to look at the nature around them and their own beings to realize God's revelation in what they are, to His glory. "But while it is true that God can be perceived in nature, this does not mean that after the Fall a perfect knowledge of God was revealed in the natural world to Adam and his posterity" (p. 1433). Adam's fall into temptation brought with it a kind of loss of the possibility of fully reaching "heavenly light." In his love for mankind, however, God left us a world with many different aspects. "On earth, scorched and ground down by the curse, in thorns, thistles, thorns, and weeds, we could read the law of condemnation; but in the delicate color and fragrance of flowers, we could read that God still loves us. His forgiveness has not completely withdrawn from the Earth" (p. 1433). Sin has obscured the view of the world that man can reach. Man cannot attain an adequate image of nature. Furthermore, "nature testifies to God, but nature is not God" (p. 1434). Nature itself is under the action of God, and we find no phenomenon of nature that is not in the word of God. A personal God, as is His Son! "God has the laws He has established, but they are only servants through which He creates results" (p. 1434). Therefore, knowledge of God precedes all other knowledge (Rotaru, 2015, pp. 34-44).

One cannot obtain a knowledge of God except through His Word, which are the Scriptures. "It is impossible to acquire a perfect knowledge of God from nature alone; for nature itself is imperfect. In its imperfection it cannot represent God; it cannot reveal the character of God in its moral perfection" (p. 1434). Jesus alone is the absolute image of God (Rotaru, 2005b, pp.295-324).

In *Acts of the Apostles*, Ellen G. White explains the revelation that she extends to the entire Bible. There are moments, she writes, when inspiration leads people to revelations of truth. Such was the fervor sparked among Jesus' disciples by his personality. The disciples came to understand God's will because their hearts beat for Jesus' cause. They understood his message and made it their life's cause. The members of the early church were united in feeling and action—the love of Christ was the golden chain that bound them together. There are many revelations in the *Book of Revelation*—they were given for the guidance and comfort of the church in the midst of the dispersion of Christians.

Ellen G. White solved the problem of the words of the Bible by operating with the notion of "inspiration." "It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the people were inspired. Inspiration acts not in man's words or in his expressions, but in man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Spirit (Ghost) is moved to thought. But words receive the imprint of the individual mind. The divine mind is divided. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; in this way man's utterances are the word of God" (White, 1994, p. 487). Ellen G. White believes that "God wants to have a people on earth who will hold the Bible and the Bible alone as the rule of doctrine and teaching, and as the foundation for every reformation" (White, 1994, p. 487). God reveals Himself through the minds and in the words of men, not all at once, but in "successive generations", whenever He sees fit to intervene.

With Ellen G. White, revelation was extended, on the one hand, to the entire Bible and, on the other hand, to the whole of nature. She took the radical step of subordinating nature to God and placing revelation above all knowledge. Knowledge is possible and real, but ultimately, it remains conditional.

3. Revelation in the vision of the theologian Karl Barth

Karl Barth (1886-1968) shared opinions that came from the past, including from Kierkegaard, who had established a kind of beginning of revelation in Jesus. Barth's monumental commentary (1922) on the Epistle to the Romans is not only an impressive explanation of Paul's famous epistle, but also an expression of his own interpretation of revelation. "Jesus Christ is our Lord," he argues, "this is the message of salvation, this is the meaning of history" (Barth, 1999, p.5). From this point, he writes that "Jesus as historical determination means the place of rupture between the world known to us and an unknown one. Time, things, and people do not rise in this place of the world known to us above other times, things, and people, but as soon as they delimit that point, the dividing line between time and eternity, between thing and origin, between man and God, becomes apparent. Therefore, the time of revelation and the time of discovery are in the years 1-30. These are the years in which a new, different divine determination of all times, as shown by the view of David, is perceived, and its particularity among other times rises again as it opens up the possibility for every time to be a time of revelation and a time of discovery" (p.5). In those years, an ideal for humanity rises and another foundation of life is established. "This Jesus Christ is 'our Lord'. Through His presence in the world and in our lives, we are as people surpassed and founded in God, through looking at Him, settled and set in motion, as beings who wait and hurry" (p. 7). The Apostle Paul is the one who drew attention to this major change.

4. Franz Rosenzweig and revelation in "The Star of Salvation"

Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) treated "revelation (Offenbarung)" somewhat following Hegel, as something that the individual experiences and that flows experimentally and logically from the fundamental data of his life. On the one hand, revelation is placed after the realization of the inevitability of "death (Tod)," which the philosopher brings to the basis of his philosophy. On the other hand, it is placed before "salvation (Erlösung)." Thus, revelation is part of the chain of creation, revelation, and salvation.

Thus, Franz Rosenzweig made a turning point in world philosophy and theology. The most solid interpretation of his conception was given not long ago. With regard to revelation, five premises should be highlighted. Namely, Rosenzweig takes up Kant's theme of the "thing in itself," the noumenon, and seeks to resolve it theologically; God, who is noumenal reality, is brought back to the basis of philosophy and culture; through "love" of people, God reveals himself; it is fitting that people take revelation as the basis of their behavior; and it is fitting that people take "salvation (Erlösung)" as the horizon of life. "Taking the distinctive notion of revelation as a necessary logical guide in phenomenal knowledge and action, Rosenzweig made possible a process in positive rational knowledge; the independent necessity at stake

here is neither the mathematical (transcendental) ideal nor an empirical psychological construct, but a new type of positive rational necessity, that is, a new theological-philosophical notion" (p.31). Revelation thus becomes a kind of quasi-transcendental condition of human knowledge and actions.

In his major work, *The Star of Redemption* (1921-1930), Franz Rosenzweig expands the scope of revelation to include creation. In his view, "creation (*Schöpfung*) is not only the creation of the world for God, but also something that transmits what is within him. In this sense, we should already call creation a revelation of God" (Rosenzweig, 1988, p.177). God transmits "deeds (*Taten*)" but also "attributes (*Eigenschaften*). His complete freedom becomes "destiny (*Schicksal*)," which is the "original law (*Urgesetz*)" for humans and is consecrated as "love (*Liebe*)." In any case, God "has passed from the first revelation in creation, precisely by virtue of its character, to the emergence of a second revelation, which is nothing more than a revelation—a revelation in the narrower sense, no, in the narrowest sense" (p. 179). As a result, revelation becomes "the means by which creation precipitates into forms" (p. 180), and God becomes present moment by moment in every event in the world, which He fills with "love (*Liebe*)," but not "the love of the beloved (*die Liebe des Geliebten*)," but "the love of the lover (*die Liebe des Liebenden*)."

As a result, God rules the world and gives man a gift—this gift is a Book. "Man is, therefore, the other pole of revelation. God's love is directed toward him" (p. 186). The question is, what does man do with this love? How should he view it? The way in which man uses the "freedom" he enjoys from God shows, in fact, what forces have occupied him. Man's 'soul' is at peace in God's "love," "like a child in its mother's arms," but it is exposed to the harsh sea around it and pushed to the "gates of the grave." However, he can remain with God.

This is where the "great secret of faith (*das grosse Geheimnis des Glaubens*)" comes in as a mediator. Each person's "I (*Ich*)" gains its full reality by accepting the "you (*Du*)" in front of it—the "I-you" relationship being already in God's plan for humanity. Revelation ensures "the ascent to maturity, under God's love, of the silent self, which becomes a speaking soul" (p. 221). On this basis, man attains full reality.

5. Revelation in Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar

From his earliest writings, Joseph Ratzinger was concerned with clarifying revelation. His examination of the work of Bonaventure, then of the Church Fathers as an institution, included clarifying what revelation means and what its place is in human life. He made a number of distinctions—*professio*, *cognitio*, *orthodoxi patres*, *professio fidei*, *fidei veritate*, *ecclesiae auctoritate*, based on tradition—and resolved the much-discussed relationship between Scripture, revelation, and tradition.

Joseph Ratzinger believes that "revelation is not simply the same as Scripture, so that one can say 'it is written in revelation'. Scripture is only the material principle of revelation, which remains as such behind Scripture and is not fully objectified in Scripture, so that in order to be revelation, Scripture needs interpretation according to what has been revealed" (Ratzinger, 2009, p.711). It is the error of scholasticism to derive revelation from the material principle of Scripture and to make it the sole principle of faith. The erroneous identification of revelation with a material principle has resulted in the claim of the completeness of revelation. The biblicalism of old Protestantism made the same mistake of pointlessly dissolving revelation into Scripture. There is also an error in the current discussion—that of remaining with a narrow view of tradition and Scripture. Joseph Ratzinger concluded by emphasizing the need to embrace tradition, revelation, and Scripture without reservation and to view them together, based on an updated concept of revelation. This concept remains to be developed, especially in a culture deeply marked by science.

There are writings that have explicitly used revelation to construct entire conceptual fields. Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) constructed aesthetics in this way, starting from

the observation that late modernity had reached a serious situation. That is, we have reached “the night of our present and the ambiguity of our future,” and we must find a new beginning other than that assumed by philosophy, science, and theology, which focus only on scientific accuracy. “Now is the time to break through this kind of accuracy, which can only ever refer to a particular sector of reality, in order to once again consider the whole truth, truth as a transcendental property of being, truth that is not an abstraction, but the living connection between God and the world” (Hans Urs von, 2020, p. 15). We can, of course, as human beings, go ahead and probe the “depths of Satan” once again. But why not do something else? Namely, “put beauty before all things! In a world that no longer believes itself capable of affirming beauty, the evidence of truth has also lost its conclusiveness, that is, syllogisms continue to scrupulously do their duty, chattering like a conveyor belt or a robot that can spit out a precise number of results per minute, but the process of reasoning itself is a mechanism that no longer captivates anyone, the conclusion is no longer conclusive. And if this happens with the transcendentals (only because one of them has been excluded), what must happen then to being itself” (pp. 16-17). For “the testimony of the spirit remains incredible to those who no longer know how to read the language of beauty” (p. 17). This “beauty” remains the “primordial phenomenon,” and we arrive at it as human beings becoming “the mirror of God,” thus adopting a ‘form’—which is “the Christian being.” “And from here we must contemplate the most elevated thing. The form of divine revelation in the history of salvation up to Christ and from Christ onwards” (p. 23). Hans Urs von Balthasar exploits revelation as a basis for conceiving the form that ensures the beauty of man and those around him.

6. Revelation in the vision of Orthodox theology - Constantine B. Scouteris

Orthodoxy operates with an expanded concept of revelation, the church itself and the people of God becoming the place of revelation. Constantine B. Scouteris (1939-2009) regards the Scriptures of Christianity as “the written, authentic rendering of the divine message”, whereby “God reveals himself to the Church and through the Church to the world. In other words, Holy Scripture is a revelatory reality”. There is such a unity between Scripture and the Church “that they cannot be separated. One is contained in the other, one depends on the other. Holy Scripture is created for the Church, and the Church is the basis for its genesis” (p. 123). Neither Scripture is superior to the Church nor is the Church superior to Scripture. “Only if we accept that the Church and Scripture are neither separate nor confused, being unity without confusion, will we be able to understand that it is the Church alone which finds the true meaning of Holy Scripture, just as it is the son alone who is able to understand the words of the Father” (p. 124). Scripture is not only the meaning of a text to be read, but also the deeper meaning to be understood, and “understanding” is provided by the Church - the Church being a “continual synod”, “the continual synod of the people of God”. We are naturally interested in how Judaism today views revelation. This is the place of origin of the theme of revelation in universal culture.

Judaism is based on the premise that Moses received not only the written Torah on Mount Sinai, but also the oral Torah, which is the key to understanding the written Torah. The Torah is transmitted orally from generation to generation, preached by rabbis, and enshrined in writing in their commentaries. The Torah as a whole contains the Law revealed by God. Jews basically follow the Torah and the contributions of generations of rabbis. Its application is contextual. For example, the saying “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” (Ecclesiastes 21:24) is understood today to mean a balance of exchange, not physical harm. Rabbi Walter Gomolka concludes that “Judaism believes in a progressive process of revelation. It starts from the representation that God's will continues to unfold and can be interpreted by distancing oneself from past interpretations. This concept of revelation makes it possible to relativize the written Torah through the corrective of the oral Torah—that is, through interpretive interventions—which create bridges between views consistent with reason and the text of revelation. We can assume that such questions can be addressed in an exchange of

views on the conception of the world by Talmudic scholars and representatives of contemporary philosophy" (Homolka, 2008, p.31). The various denominations within Judaism differ in the extent to which they accept these interpretative interventions of modernity.

Of course, this "progressive process of revelation" is based on a certain conception of the relationship between reason and revelation. The crucial option is that "independent human reason permanently accompanies revelation" (p. 32). Some believe that Moses transmitted the entire revelation, others that he left room for new revelations. Today's research has made it clear that "the revelation at Sinai only established certain frameworks" (p. 33). In any case, the structure of the world is such that, as far as people's current lives are concerned, "the right decision is made on Earth, not in heaven" (p. 35). The key to "truth" lies in "respecting the position of others in discourse and not considering one's own opinion to be absolute" (p. 36). And "the religious message is heard from generation to generation and requires constant reinterpretation. Its holiness lies in what it testifies to, not in the way and manner in which something is presented" (p. 37). 'Revelation' is thus implemented by means of human "reason."

7. Conclusions

Divine revelation remains a fundamental concept in both theology and the philosophy of religion, serving as a bridge between transcendence and human existence. Analysis of various theological models—from general to special revelation—has highlighted the fact that the relationship between God and man is essentially conceived as a divine initiative of communication and closeness.

From a philosophical perspective, interpretations of revelation vary between fideist, rationalist, or existentialist approaches, but all converge around the idea that revelation involves not only the transmission of content, but also the transformation of the recipient. Contemporary philosophy of religion has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of revelation, highlighting both the limits of religious language and the epistemological challenges related to its validity and interpretation.

Consequently, revelation cannot be reduced to the mere communication of information, nor to a subjective act of inner enlightenment. It involves a creative tension between mystery and reason, between experience and norm, between divinity and history. It is precisely this tension that gives revelation a complexity that makes it relevant and indispensable in any serious reflection on the human condition and its relationship with the sacred.

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