

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION IN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY

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Modern theology has spoken with renewed emphasis and vigor on the subject of divine revelation and its underlying importance for the Church. Such an emphasis has been both necessary and welcome, and this for two reasons. First, we must consider that these theologians (Barth, Brunner, and many concerned with Biblical theology) have emerged—and sometimes only after intense struggle—from a period dominated by classical Liberalism, evolutionism and pantheistic Idealism. Kant's denial of any rational or factual knowledge of transcendent reality seemed to cow an entire era of theologians. Following his lead, Ritschl reduced all theology to a matter of value judgments to which there was no corresponding reality and the only basis of which was the enlightened reason of the believer. Thus, there was no need and no place for revelation. Unable to answer Kant, Schleiermacher retreated into subjectivism, making Christianity not a matter of cognitive knowledge at all, but a matter of feeling, a dependence upon God. The Bible for him was *ex hypothesi* not a revelation expressing God's thoughts toward man, but rather a book expressing man's thoughts toward God, man's religious experiences. And so it went through the century, Luthardt drawing his theology from the "Christian consciousness," Kahnis from the "consciousness of the Church," these theologians all the time turning their faces persistently in the wrong direction, away from that revelation which is the Scriptures of God, either ignoring the concept of revelation altogether or, by centering it exclusively in God's past acts of which there is no reliable witness, making the revelation (whatever it is) quite inaccessible.

The strong emphasis of modern theology upon the doctrine of revelation is necessary and welcome secondly because of the climate and *Zeitgeist* of our own day which lies under the heavy influence of scientism, positivism, Whiteheadianism and Pragmatism with its immanent (non-existent) god. None of these movements could have any possible concern with a special revelation; in fact, special revelation is impossible on their terms. All these ideologies are committed to a rigid Humean empiricism coupled with a simple and unquestioning adherence to the uniformity of nature (with the exception of Whitehead who seems uneasy about evolution as a unifying principle, about an immanent god and about the scientific method as the method of knowledge).

It is not strange, then, that in such a climate Barth and even Brunner will appear as new prophets and even champions of conservative theology and that their systems will be dubbed a "theology of the Word."

As a matter of record, however, we must point out that this stress

upon the doctrine of revelation is not new; it is merely new in certain circles. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries before and after the devastation wreaked upon natural religion and natural theology by Hume, Kant and even by the proponents of natural theology like John Stuart Mill, many theologians were writing prodigious works on the subject of supernatural revelation. Bishop P. Browne and H. Prideaux had argued that revelation was the Gospel which was a series of propositions to which faith gives assent. On the other side was the practical anti-intellectualism (in the wake of Kant) of such men as S. T. Coleridge, Julius Hare, and F. D. Maurice who like many continental theologians (Kierkegaard) taught a subjective view of revelation. To them revelation was the encounter with the divine, the bestowal of faith. Coleridge broke totally with Schleiermacher who insisted that revelation was not an inbreaking of God, but merely the upsurging of human personality, pious self-consciousness. Coleridge's reaction against Schleiermacher and his position on revelation is remarkably similar to that of Barth today. To him, as for Barth, Scripture is not revelation but the possibility of revelation. Even in the seventeenth century, before the later intense interest in natural revelation and apologetics, there was in certain quarters serious study concerning the nature and mode of special revelation. One might refer merely to Abraham Calov, a Lutheran, who devoted most of the first volume of his great *Systema* to a discussion of divine revelation, offering a presentation unequalled in depth and scope even by A. Hoenecke who of modern Lutherans gives most attention to the idea.

But somehow the great interest and many writings on the subject of revelation did not catch on until modern Biblical theology and Neo-orthodoxy arrived on the scene and dealt with the theme. What, then, is the position of modern theology which has influenced the thinking of so many on this important matter? How are we to interpret and assess it?

I. TWO CONTEMPORARY VIEWS ON REVELATION

Modern theology wavers between two poles of opinion, between two extreme positions, in speaking of revelation. When pressed these theologians often revert from position A to position B and vice versa. It is therefore in some cases difficult to describe the precise opinion of these men.

A. Position A makes of revelation a confrontation of God with man. This encounter is always on the personal level. Brunner calls it "personal correspondence" (*Divine-Human Encounter*, p. 94ff.). Personal correspondence is opposed to the usual subject-object antithesis: it is rather subject-subject. God does not reveal something, but Himself. In ordinary personal relationships there is always a blurring of the "thou" and "something" about the "thou."

But when God speaks with me the relation to a "something" stops in an unconditional sense, not simply in a conditional sense as in an ordinary human encounter. (*ibid.* p. 86)

Thus revelation cannot be "communication", but is rather "communion." Bultmann calls it "personal address". (*Existence and Faith*, 64.)

God does not give us information by communication: He gives us Himself in communion. (Baillie, p. 47)

That revelation is in no sense a communication of information is sometimes pushed to the point where such a communication is not even *involved* in revelation (thus Brunner, Bultmann and emphatically Nygren, *En Bok om Biblen*, "Revelation and Scripture"). To Bultmann revelation is neither an illumination in the sense of a communication of knowledge nor is it to be construed as a "cosmic process which takes place outside of us and of which the world would merely bring a report" (*op. cit.* 78). The result is that

there is nothing revealed on the basis of which one believes. It is only *in* faith that the object of faith is disclosed; therefore, faith itself belongs to revelation. (*ibid.* 79)

Consistent with this view that revelation is address is the opinion that revelation is always contemporary. According to Heineken, revelation is always "contemporaneous", i.e. "it is always in the now." Always involving the recipient of the revelation, revelation is an ongoing activity of God, wherever and whenever God imparts Himself. It does not have the *ephapax* of the incarnation and the atonement ("The meaning of Revelation" from *The Voice*, p. 23).

Summing up, we might make the following observations concerning Position A:

1. It seeks to be monergistic, making God the author of every revelation. A strong stress is placed on God's sovereignty. Thus, revelation occurs only *ubi et quando* God wills. After all, if revelation is God's address to man, then it is He in His sovereign grace who chooses the time and place of this direct encounter.

2. The revelation of God is a *self*-disclosure. The content (*objectum*) of revelation is God Himself. And He reveals Himself always as subject.

3. The place of Scripture in revelation is rather vague. Scripture for Barth is merely the "possibility" of revelation or the "occasion" for revelation (Reid, *The Authority of Scripture*, p. 196). For Bultmann Scripture would appear to be merely the locus of the kerygma by which God addresses man. Brunner calls Scripture a "witness to the revelation" (*Revelation and Reason*, p. 118ff), but this can only pertain to past revelations and therefore begs the question. Modern theology seems to be rather embarrassed to find any open niche for Scripture in its doctrine of revelation.

4. Revelation is practically identified with the call or with conversion. This is seen from the fact that there is no revelation apart from faith (Bultmann, Heineken, Barth, Baillie).

5. Closely associated with this position is the conviction that faith is in no sense directed toward facts about Christ. The emphasis is totally on faith *in*, it is never a matter of faith *that* (Brunner, *op. cit.* 38ff; Baillie, *op. cit.* 47). The noetic element in faith is played down or denied. But cf. *Rom.* 10:9; 1 *Th.* 4:14; 1 *John* 5:5; *Gal.* 2:20; *Rom.* 6:8; *Rom.* 5:4; *Luke* 24:45; *Acts* 24:14; 1 *Tim.* 1:15; *Acts* 26:27. These passages all make Scripture or some particular doctrine the object of faith. Thus, Neo-orthodoxy comes perilously close to the old position of Schleiermacher and Ritschl who made the Person, not the work of Christ, the object of faith. Neo-orthodoxy often appears to have a faith in Christ abstracted from everything that can be said *about* Him.

6. Position A emphasizes the dynamic nature of revelation almost to the exclusion of its dianoetic (informative) nature and purpose. Again this leads either to subjectivism or mysticism. Nygren (*op. cit.*) is the most adamant on this point. According to him, the so-called "static and intellectualistic view" of revelation, that it is the "communication of formerly hidden knowledge," must be utterly rejected. "Not a fiber of its roots must remain." We reply with our hearty agreement that revelation is always dynamic, charged with the very attributes of God and conveying God Himself (Cf. *Isa.* 45:23; *Ps.* 107:20; 148:8; *Gal.* 1:16). This is an old Lutheran emphasis which must not be neglected. But on the other hand God does reveal information (*Gal.* 2:2; 1:12). God has revealed to Paul the Gospel which is a verbal, informative message. Again certain factual information is revealed to Simeon before he died (*Luke* 2:26). On his final journey to Rome information was revealed to Paul about his shipwreck, the survival of all passengers and his eventual arrival in Rome (*Acts* 27:22). Peter says that information was revealed to the Old Testament prophets that their predictions were meant for our time rather than their own. (1 *Pet.* 1:12).

7. Position A has a strong and sometimes healthy emphasis (Nygren) on the contemporaneousness of revelation; not always in the sense of *Deus loquens*, however. The emphasis is upon *Deus revelans*, not upon *Deus revelatus*. Revelation is therefore not a *datum*. To varying degrees this cuts off revelation from history, from God's great acts of redemption (which are fully historical, and necessarily so if Christianity is to be an historical religion, and not degenerate into a form of deism or transcendentalism). To Bultmann, for instance, there is no factuality behind any of the redemptive "myths" connected with Christ's activity recounted in the New Testament. The only historical and real referent he has for revelation is the so-called kerygma which is merely the theology of the early Church.

8. The means of grace are played down on this view. In the case of none of the theologians espousing position A are the Word and

Sacraments *per se* powerful to confer forgiveness or work faith. This is in line with the general existentialist orientation.

B. Position B describes revelation as an act of God, sometimes as an act plus human appreciation of it. Whereas position A is held chiefly by systematic theologians (including Bultmann however), position B is more popular with those who interest themselves in Biblical theology. Position B avoids the supremely subjectivistic element in position A. Position B does not seem to be oriented so strongly in existentialism.

We offer G. Ernest Wright as a rather typical proponent of this position. To him (*God Who Acts*) Biblical Theology is the theology of recital, the theology which recounts the formative events of Israel's history as the redemptive handiwork of God (p. 38ff). This was Israel's faith, a uniquely Israelitish insight. Wright does not say, so far as I can discern that God *revealed* this unique understanding to Israel, but it appears that Israel worked this out for herself. Thus, for instance, Israel takes over an older Canaanitish myth and works it into an account of creation which fits this framework. In a later book with Reginald Fuller this position becomes a little more articulate: boiled down, it implies that the history of Israel was a series of natural events, that is, events which in every case could be explained by natural causes and were not necessarily wonders or miracles to those outside of Israel. Revelation seems then to be the addition of an interpretation which takes God into the picture. The interpretation makes these events revelatory. Thus the same event becomes something quite different when interpreted. The believer (in retrospect) sees it one way, the outsider another. (*The Book of Acts of God*).

Some direct comment is necessary concerning this position. Operating with a naturalistic a priori the position makes miracles and all divine intervention into our cosmos something less than what they must be (if they are miracles and wonders at all) and something less than they were thought to be by those who record them. As a matter of fact, the Bible is filled with accounts of divine intervention into our realm, and that of a stupendous nature. It is true that the full meaning of all that was transpiring in the history of God's people was not open to Pharaoh, Sennacherib, the Amorites in Gideon, the Canaanites and others. But certainly all these people must have known that something awful and supernatural was happening. To deny that these events occurred is actually to take away the basis for Israel's faith in God's Lordship and redemptive activity and to represent her faith either as naive or fraudulent, at any rate something we today could hardly respect. If these events did not take place as they were recorded, Israel's interpretation is merely pious guesswork. Thus we see modern theology operating with a closed system of a closed universe. Something happened to engender Israel's faith, but not something truly miraculous, nothing which represents God breaking through the nexus of nature. And so modern theology has become deistic.

Now the fact of the matter is that God's interpretation of His relation to Israel (e.g., His sovereignty, His Lordship, His providence, His redemptive purpose and activity) is bolstered and attested *by* His mighty acts (the Exodus, the story of Gideon, Jericho, etc.). Modern theology (Wright, Bultmann, Fuller, *et al.*) reverse this order. It is not a matter of Israel interpolating or embellishing some harrowing escape or victory which she has experienced; it is a matter of her miraculous escape or victory vindicating God's previous word of promise and comfort. In other words, the right order in speaking of revelation is often not, act plus interpretation, but interpretation plus act.

C. Similarities between position A and position B can be noted. This is particularly true when we consider certain negative aspects.

1. Both positions seem to be a tour de force against the old evangelical doctrine which made special revelation something broader than a mere confrontation (Bultmann, Barth) or than act plus commentary (Wright, Temple, Baillie), something both *ephapax* and dynamic. The old Lutheran view (and this view seems to be uniquely Lutheran) thus spoke of revelation as something objective, something there, something always available, but at the same time spoke of the continuity of revelation (*Deus revelans*), of God who discloses Himself and speaks to us *now*. This is tied to the uniquely Lutheran doctrine that Scripture *is vere et proprie* God's Word (in the sense that it is God's power and revelation). Only the Lutheran teaching that Scripture is efficacious can retain the Biblical doctrine of revelation in its entire breadth.

It is doubtful whether (with the exception of Barth) Neo-orthodoxy which has never really studied Luther's theology or that of the later orthodox Lutherans was ever aware of this position. At least Baillie in his discussion of the idea of revelation in the seventeenth century seems blissfully ignorant when he describes the era as "defining revelation as a communicating of a body of knowledge, some part at least of which could be independently obtained, or at least verified, by 'the light of reason and nature,' while the remainder was supplemental to what could be so obtained or verified" (*op. cit.* 5). Be all that as it may, Neo-orthodoxy could not have accepted the old Lutheran position, for modern theology is committed to the presuppositions of higher criticism, that the Bible was a mere human response to God's activity among His people and is therefore errant.

2. Both positions deny the possibility of propositional revelation. Heineken (*op. cit.* 43) categorically rejects "identifying written sentences and propositions with special divine revelation and speaking of 'an inscripturated propositional revelation.'" Abba (*The Nature and Authority of the Bible*, 83, 247) who holds essentially to position B, but who like Baillie, Temple and others, when in trouble, sometimes retreats to position A, has the following to say,

Revelation was therefore the resultant, as it were, of two factors:

it was given through two things—the historic event and the prophetic mind [!]. Neither was sufficient of itself, but through the interplay of both God spoke.

Such a statement might suggest a propositional revelation of some sort. But then Abba retreats behind position A when he says much later in his book, "Revelation does not consist of a series of statements about God: it is the self-disclosure of God." His reason for rejecting any idea of propositional revelation is the same as that of Baillie and Temple whom he follows: he has abandoned the belief that Scripture is inerrant, and God's revelation therefore cannot be contained within fallible, human language. That the Biblical writers think in terms of propositional revelation has already been indicated in our discussion of revelation as information. Certainly when Scripture speaks of a revelation of a mystery (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 1:9; 3:3) or of the Gospel (Rev. 1:1ff. Gal. 1:12; Cf. also Luke 2:17), the reference is to a mystery or Gospel which is articulated.

3. Both positions deny that there can be a revelation of truth. One oft-cited quotation from Temple will serve to illustrate this point.

What is offered to man's apprehension in any specific revelation is not truth concerning God but the living God Himself.

(*Nature, Man and God*, 322).

Note the alternative Temple leaves. This seems to be the position also of Barth, Brunner, Baillie and Abba. *Either* God reveals Himself, *or* He reveals a truth about Himself. That revelation could embrace both of these alternatives is a possibility not seriously entertained. Yet this is precisely what occurs and what the Lutheran Church has taught throughout its history. Temple goes on to say,

There is no such thing as revealed truth. There are truths of revelation; but they are not themselves directly revealed. (*ibid.* 316)

This means that there can be no possibility of *revealed* doctrine (truth), or of *revealed* theology.

It has been conjectured that the Bible does not operate with a correspondence theory of truth, and therefore it would be quite meaningless to claim that Scripture reveals truth in the sense of statements. This desperate position seems to lie behind the allegation (Abba) that "there is no biblical warrant for making inerrancy a corollary of inspiration". We should not waste much time answering such a conjecture. The purpose of declarative statements is to make words correspond to fact (except in the case of deliberate lies). Without the correspondence theory of truth there can be no such thing as *informative* language or *factual* meaning. The eighth commandment entirely breaks down unless predicated upon the correspondence theory of truth. So much for the logical impossibility of the above theory. As a matter of fact Scripture is replete with evidence that it operates throughout with the correspon-

dence idea of truth (Cf. Eph. 4:25; John 8:44-46; 1 Ki. 8:26; Gen. 42:16, 20; Zech. 8:16; Deut. 18:22; John 5:31ff; Ps. 119:163; 1 Ki. 22:16, 22ff; Dan. 2:9; Prov. 14:25; 1 Tim. 1:15; Acts 24:8, 11). It is utterly irrelevant when Brunner counters that Scripture teaches a *Wahrheit als Begegnung* (which is the title of one of his books). This is only to confuse truth (which pertains to statements) with certitude. So too is it irrelevant to point out that *aletheia* and *emeth* often refer to something more deep than mere correspondence to fact, that they refer to God and His faithfulness. God is true (faithful) simply because future events (fulfillment) *corresponds* to His word of promise, and His word is true for the same reason.

4. The fourth point of similarity between the two positions is the playing down of the dianoetic nature and purpose of revelation, and we have mentioned this above. We might merely add at this point that it would seem incredible for anyone seriously to think that the meaning of any act of God is less revelatory than the act itself, e.g. the death of Christ. On this fourth point modern theology seems to be less secure than on the first three. If revelation is not dianoetic, if God does not reveal information, there seems to be no escape from mysticism or from the equally sterile positivistic tenet that theology (language concerning God and revelation) is emotive; that is to say, theology is the use of symbolic ("mythical") tools or instruments which are employed in the *practice* of religion. In either case theology possesses no cognitive value. Again there can be no *revealed* theology (Cf. point 3 above), no theology which is either true or false, and this in the nature of the case.

But, as a matter of fact, the revelation of information is a Biblical teaching. Paul (1 Cor. 15:3) "receives" (by revelation) the facts concerning Christ's suffering and death and resurrection on the third day (Cf. John 1:11 and Col. 2:6). The prophets in receiving a vision or word from the Lord receive usually an explanation for this word as well. Information was revealed to Paul in Acts 27:24 and 1 Cor. 11:23 and to Simeon in Luke 2:26—and we could go on and on.

II. GENERAL ASSUMPTIONS AND PREDILECTIONS BEHIND THE MODERN VIEW OF REVELATION

A. Modern theology assumes that the human authors of Scripture, writing out of their cultural milieu, were fallible human beings, subject to error and other human limitations. Here we quote the well-known statement of Barth,

To the bold postulate, that if their [the Biblical writers] word is to be the Word of God they must be inerrant in every word, we oppose the even bolder assertion, that according to the scriptural witness about man [notice how Barth appeals to anthropological evidence rather than bibliological data at this point], which applies to them too [sic], they can be at fault in every word, and have been at fault in every word, and yet according

to the same scriptural witness, being justified and sanctified by grace alone, they have still spoken the Word of God in their fallible and erring human word. (*Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, 529-30).

On such a postulate Scripture cannot be revelation. This is the conclusion of practically all the theologians we have considered. Bultmann makes the point very clear.

God the mysterious and hidden must at the same time be the God who is revealed. Not, of course, in a revelation that one can know, that could be grasped in words and propositions, that would be limited to formula and book and to space and time; but rather in a revelation that continually opens up new heights and depths and thus leads through darkness, from clarity to clarity. (*Existence and Faith*, p. 30)

There are obviously other presuppositions underlying this statement, but Bultmann makes it clear that God's revelation cannot be contained in anything limited to space and time such as human language.

B. The basic methods of higher criticism as well as many of its tenets are assumed by modern theology when speaking of revelation. In general the dogmatic claims of Scripture concerning its origin, power and authority are ignored, and little heed is given to Jesus' attitude and use of the Old Testament. For instance, Barth and Dodd in all their writings on Scripture and its authority never seriously consider these matters. At the same time the Bible is considered only a human response to God's activity, the produce of the Church's theology, which is precisely what the positive theologians of the nineteenth century taught. Theology is the product of the Church (Cf. form criticism: Bultmann, Schweitzer, Schlier *et al.*). God is not the *principium essendi* of theology as our old teachers said, but rather we have Paul's theology, John's theology, James' theology etc. Abba (*op. cit.* 243) remarks, for instance, that at his conversion and his meeting with Peter three years later were the only opportunities Paul had for "receiving" the Christian tradition, thus ignoring the apostle's own claim that he did not "receive" his gospel from men but from God and that he spent three years in Arabia (Gal. 1:12, 17).

Such a procedure involves also fitting isagogical data into the naturalistic or evolutionary development of doctrine. Thus, the book of John is not authentic, but a Hellenized or Gnostic *Tendenzschrift* (Schweitzer, Bultmann). The pastoral epistles are unauthentic because of their emphasis upon doctrine which again is a late Hellenistic development. The psalms of David are not authentic because they conflict with datings concerning the emergence of such themes as resurrection, immortality, etc. Ultimately this position leads often to distorted views concerning Christ Himself, since He committed Himself concerning certain books of the Old Testament: a kenosis doctrine is taught, or adoptionism, or Jesus is called a child of His time, and all because theologians are committed to the historical-critical method. Such con-

clusions as these mentioned, predicated as they are upon naturalistic presuppositions, often become in turn the predilections behind modern theology's view of revelation.

C. At times a strange, atomistic view of language may account for the attitude of modern theologians toward the orthodox doctrine of revelation. Reference will be made to the thousands of textual variants in the Bible, to the rather loose quotation in the New Testament from the LXX, to the impossibility of getting to the autographic texts of Scripture, to the fact that we do not have the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, or to the fact that there can never be an infallible interpreter of Scripture (Temple)—and all to show that the Bible cannot be revelation. Let us take the absurd reasoning of Heinecken as an example of this procedure. Speaking against the position that the Bible is an inerrant revelation, he says,

Admittedly, this leads, in every instance, to an assertion about the autographs for which we must continue to search and which we must try, from our present manuscripts, always to restore as accurately as possible, for it is precisely those sentences and propositions which constitute the revelation and without them we would be at sea and we would have no knowledge of God or of his will and his heart. (*op. cit.* p. 43).

These words of Heinecken's and the other arguments mentioned above are classic examples of irrelevant evidence.

D. Existentialism appears to lie behind much that modern theology says in regard to revelation, particularly in respect to position A. Karl Barth in his *Epistle to the Romans*, (p. 10) says that, if he has any presupposition, or "system", it is what Kierkegaard called "the infinite qualitative difference" between time and eternity in both its negative and positive meaning. "God is in heaven and you are on earth." Schubert Ogden in the introduction to Bultmann's essays in *Existence and Faith* is most insistent that this is precisely Bultmann's point of departure in all his theological endeavor. Such a principle might be pushed to such a transcendental extreme that even miracles and the incarnation are denied (Bultmann, but not Barth or Kierkegaard); but in regard to revelation we can see that the principle would hardly allow for a permanent given revelation such as Scripture. For then (the argument goes) the absolute freedom and sovereignty of God could not be maintained. Bultmann is more consistent with this position than even Barth. To him theological thoughts cannot represent God's thoughts (but cf. 1 Cor. 2:16), are thoughts of *faith*, "thoughts in which faith's understanding of God, the world, and man is unfolding itself." (*Theology of the NT*, II, 237ff). And theological propositions cannot be the object of faith, but only the explication of the understanding of faith. Thus, there seems to be no factual knowledge of God at all, except perhaps that He breaks in upon us (revelation) with the kerygma making possible our authentic existence; but "the theological thoughts of the New Testament are the unfolding of faith itself growing out of that new understanding of God, the world, and man which is conferred in and by faith—or, as it can also

be phrased: *out of one's new self-understanding* [Bultmann's emphasis]." Hence, for Bultmann revelation, as he says elsewhere (*Existence and Faith*, p. 85, 88), is that I am given a knowledge of my own existence, my immediate now.

It is clear at this point why Barth and others will not follow Bultmann all the way in his existentialism. He has chopped Christianity away from its roots in history, in spite of what he says about the Jesus of history and the kerygma. This tendency of position A is the reason why many who espouse it sometimes veer toward position B which sets God's revelation in history. Adherents of position B, however, since their position makes revelation neither dynamic nor contemporary, will sometimes lean toward position A.

Another example of existentialist (Kierkegaard) presuppositions is seen in Brunner's and Heineken's (*op. cit.* 49) argument that the traditional, orthodox doctrine of revelation springs from a desire for guaranteed certainty.

III. SOME OF THE PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE MODERN VIEW CONCERNING REVELATION

A. A playing down of the importance of doctrine in the Church.

B. An uneasy monergism in position B. When we refer to a revelation of God in the past, this is God's act exclusively (e.g. the Exodus or the resurrection). When we make revelation act plus appreciation we have a divine-human datum.

C. Scepticism. Position B, operating with the historico-critical method makes it difficult or impossible to get at the revelatory acts of God. Temple is frank to say concerning Jesus "that there is no single deed or saying of which we can be perfectly sure that He said or did precisely this or that." (Baile and Martin, eds. *Revelation*. p. 114). W. J. Phythian-Adams (*The Call of Israel*, p. 64) is less radical: he says,

However much they may embellish the facts, or even obscure them in the interests of their particular purpose, at heart of their narrative these facts remain as a solid, resistant core, the indestructible nucleus of historical reality.

But how does he know this? Employing the same methodology Bultmann has come to quite different conclusions.

Let us now examine what G. Ernest Wright and Reginald Fuller have to say in their book, *The Book of the Acts of God*, so that we might learn just how much one can say about the so-called revelatory acts of God when the historico-critical method is applied to the Biblical account. Let us consider the one act of the resurrection. According to the authors, the resurrection cannot be an objective act of history in the same sense as the crucifixion of Christ. The latter event was open

to all men as an historical happening (Cf. Tacitus and Josephus). But resurrection is "perceived only by the people of faith." (p. 14) The risen Christ was seen only by a few (but Cf. 1 Cor. 15:5-8; and note the irrelevant thesis here). Thus, Easter is "not an arena where a historical can operate." Only facts available to all men are the data of objective history. We might ask at this point, what historical event in the ancient world is available to the historian, if we ask for more evidence than offered by reliable witnesses? There is, in fact, as much historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ as for the fact that Caesar crossed the Rhein. The reason for the authors' position can only be due to an a priori prejudice against the miraculous. The authors then proceed to call the resurrection a "faith-event," unlike other events, but "nevertheless real to the Christian community." But we ask, is the event real? Did it happen? This is Paul's issue in 1 Cor. 15; he was not speaking of what the event meant to the Christian community. Wright and Fuller then say that the resurrection means Christ is alive, not dead; and finally they make their position quite clear when they conclude that language like "raised on the third day," "ascension," "going up," "sitting at the right hand of God," are simply "products of the situation," "temporal language of the first century Christians. To us they are symbols of deep truth and nothing more." Hence, we can only conclude that the most significant event in Christ's life, that event by which He is declared to be God's Son, by which He spoiled principalities and powers, which renders our preaching and our faith something other than vain, that event upon which the truth of the entire Christian religion depends, perhaps never actually happened. We might remember that Bultmann too makes the resurrection a myth, Brunner denies the open tomb, Niebuhr makes the resurrection supra-historical. Surely this is building a theology on the sands of utter scepticism. If theology is based on revelation, and we cannot be sure of any act of God's revelation, what is there left for theology to talk about except eternal truths or my understanding of my own existence (Bultmann)?

D. A retreat into mysticism is often the result of both positions. When the acids of historical science have eaten away at the roots of God's revelation in history, there is no other direction to go. Thus, we see modern theologians appealing to Kierkegaard with his emphasis upon subjective truth, employing the Kantian phenomenal-noumenal categories (e.g. Christ of faith—Jesus of history; history and super history) and his "ideas of reason" which are totally above all empirical verification (it is true), but are also outside the very realm of the empirical, i.e. the historical. We might recall that it was only one step from Kant to the Neo-Kantians with their rejection of the noumenal, thus resulting in a belief in a god who does not exist. Is all this really so far from A. Ritschl who spoke of Jesus as the Son of God (Werturteil) but denied His deity or said it didn't matter? Is it even so far removed from the pragmatism of John Dewey with his unbounded confidence in empiricism and his "faith" in a god who does not exist? We are not

accusing all these modern theologians of Pragmatism or Kantianism, although many (even Barth) are patterning their theology according to Kant's transcendental aesthetic. We are merely attempting to show the various directions which modern theology with its doctrine of revelation is taking.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is not within the purview of this essay to offer refutation of the ideas of modern theology on the subject of revelation, although in my previous analysis I have at times indicated the direction our answer must take. However, a concluding remark might be made lest our study seem to end hanging in air.

In replying to Neo-orthodoxy we must go back to the basic conviction of the Lutheran Church and of historic Christianity that the Sacred Scriptures are not merely metonymically or metaphorically or hyperbolically, but, as our old theologians have said, *vere et proprie* God's word, the product of God's breath (*theopneustos*), the utterances of very God (*ta logia tou theou*).

What does this mean? It has the most profound meaning and significance for the Church, not only for her theology, but for her life and activity. Christ said we *live* by His word. His words are spirit and life (John 6:63). The Scriptures as the words of God's mouth are able (*dunamena*) to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15). All the things we say about Scripture, its power, its authority, its perfection (*ophaleia*), its inerrancy, are predicated by virtue of its divine origin, its inner nature (*forma*) as God's Word.

Now what does a word do? What is its usual function? It is to communicate, to evoke, to move, to *reveal*. My words are the revelation of my heart. Christ, the hypostatic Word, who is "with God" (John 1:1), who is "in the bosom of the Father," He reveals God (John 1:18). And the prophetic and apostolic Word which on its own testimony (Matt. 4:4; Rom. 3:2; 2 Tim. 3:16) proceeds from the mouth of God *reveals* God. Scripture *is* revelation. How naive for theologians to speak of Scripture as God's Word and then to deny that it is a revelation!

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