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## Chapter 12

# IDEA OF REVELATION IN MODERN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

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### Introduction

If we understand theology as *faith seeking understanding*, the concept of revelation should be considered as the primary source of theology and one of the main categories in theological thinking. It principally has three dimensions: cognitive, ontological and ethical. In the Bible, *revelation* in general means “unveiling” “unmasking” of what was previously unknown. The Hebrew and Greek terms in the Bible that refer to revelation vary from theophanies to apocalyptic events, from historical deeds to God’s grace in the human heart. Although there was not a fully articulated doctrine of revelation in the pre-Enlightenment period, the idea that God’s communication with the humanity and humanity’s access to the divine has always been present.

During the first centuries of Christianity and throughout the Middle Ages, the fact of revelation was hardly challenged. The fullest medieval statement on revelation was realized in the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). According to the Council, the doctrine that leads to salvation is mediated first through Moses, then the prophets and others; at the end it reached its fullness in Christ (Latourelle, 1994, pp. 923-924). As a result of the Enlightenment, the possibility of supernatural revelation, its existence and object were widely discussed. The Enlightenment, as Pannenberg notes, destroyed the old concept of revelation which belonged to the 17<sup>th</sup> century orthodox dogmatics, namely the identification of revelation with the inspiration of the Holy Scripture in addition to the understanding of revelation as the transmission of supernatural and hidden truths (Pannenberg, 1969, p. 4). Consequently, modern Christian theology proposes varying categorizations, or models of revelation which will be the topic of this chapter. In what follows, I will initially introduce the biblical account of revelation in relation to the theme of covenant. Further, I will give an overview of the concept of revelation as it is understood in modern Christian theology.

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## Revelation in the Old Testament

Although the Old Testament does not possess any strictly formed concept of revelation, it states that God being transcendent has manifested himself. God is manifested first in appearances to Abraham (Gen.12:7), to Isaac at Beersheba (Gen. 26:24), to Jacob (Gen. 35:9), and to Moses (Ex. 3:2), either as himself, or as an angel.<sup>1</sup> To Abraham, God appears in the form of an angel (Gen 18:1). When he appears he promises the gift of land and makes a covenant. To Ezekiel, God appears in the majestic form (Ezek.1:26), the cloud of divine glory (Ex. 34:5). Second, God makes himself known as *himself* first to Moses in the disclosure of the name Yahweh, and in the powerful disclosure through his historical acts in the past and the future. Third manifestation is in the epiphany of the glory (Is. 6:1-4).<sup>2</sup> In the patriarchal theophanies, new information is contained not so much in the theophany itself but in the promise that is giving of land or blessing or innumerable descendants. As Pannenberg states, revelation of the name of God to Moses is the entrance upon a new stage in the knowledge of God (Pannenberg, 1991, p. 207).

Yahweh, in the Old Testament, is known to ancient Israel in his historical and in them manifests Himself as *He is*. However, history should not be taken just as the calculated activity of God, but as a happening in which God himself is manifested (Rendtorff, 1969, p. 46). The sight and appearance of Yahweh brings forth knowledge about himself. This takes place either through a single event or through a chain of events. However, the oral pronouncements authorized by Yahweh are spoken out by Moses and other prophets. These pronouncements are not revelations themselves, but they refer to such an unveiling of Yahweh through the events related by the word. Thus, Yahweh unveils himself (Gen. 35:7), and his mysteries (Dt. 29:29), his glory, and his justice (Ps. 98:2). He makes himself known to people (Ex. 6:2-3), speaks to them (Ex. 25:22), brings them out of Egypt (Ex. 13), and enters into covenant with them.

Thus, in the Old Testament revelation takes place through natural theophanies and events such as thunderstorms (Ex. 19:16), the storm, earthquake, lightning (1 Kgs. 19:11-13), pillars of cloud and fire (Ex. 14:24), and through human or angel mediators who describe and interpret these theophanies. Revelation is in the form of words as well as visions. God's hand is laid on human beings and His spirit fills the prophets. The privilege of the prophet comes from his intimacy with God. Yahweh speaks to him and entrusts His word to him. The prophet, receiving this word, transmits it to all. He is deemed to be the *mouth* of Yahweh (Jer. 15:19). The visions are also accompanied by words. God makes covenants with the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, but the Word of God is spoken in a special way to Moses (Ex. 6:2-3, Num.12:8) because of the attribution of all Laws to Moses and because he sees God face to face. The act of salvation in God's plan for Israel reaches its peak by their deliverance from Egypt and by the covenant at Sinai.

<sup>1</sup>Regarding the angel passages in the OT, the relationship between God and the angel is not very clear. In most places the angel is at one moment an angel and at the next God Himself.

<sup>2</sup>*Glory is kabod* in Hebrew and *doxain* LXX. There is a widespread tendency to mix up glory with presence (*Shekhinah* in Hebrew). The word, *Shekhinah* does not appear in the Old Testament.

According to the Exodus account of revelation there are two phases. In the first phase, God Himself comes down upon Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:20) and speaks directly to the people of Israel and declare them the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17). In the second phase, Moses has the role of a mediator. He makes several ascents to Sinai. In the first one, he remains there for forty days and forty nights (Ex. 24:18) at the end of which he receives the two tablets of the covenant (Ex. 31:18). When Moses descends and sees Israel worshipping a golden calf, he casts the tablets out of his hand and breaks them (Ex. 32:19). After this event, Moses intercedes on behalf of Israel and God decides to renew the covenant and instructs Moses to cut two stone tablets as he did earlier (Ex. 34:1). Moses ascends the Mount Sinai and stays there for forty nights for the second time (Ex. 34:4, 28). In the end, Moses, receiving the teachings from God, gives them to the people of Israel (Ex. 34:32).

After Moses, all later prophets of the classical period are also considered to be the proclaimers of the Word of God. Yahweh speaks through their mouth, his spirit moves them and his word is given to them when they speak. Their prophecy does not consist of future predictions, but mediates the words of God. God's saving plan would reach its fullness when God's reign is realized over all humanity at the end of the time by the coming of the Messiah. Thus, the decisive saving event is expected in the eschatological future. By the time of the prophets the self-revelation of Yahweh turns to be expected in the future. However, rabbinic tradition holds that the Sinai event is the midpoint of time and the climax of revelation, and the Torah possesses the normative revelation, which is valid for all times. Another concept that attracts attention regarding revelation, God's relation with the humanity is the *covenant*.

In the Bible, although the term covenant is not used referring to God's relationship with creation, his activity is pictured in terms of imposing his rule on the elements of heaven and earth, sea and land. In Gen. 1, at creation God bound all the cosmic elements to keep their places and to function in order, and established the cosmic order. According to the Old Testament creation theologies, mainly presented in the first chapters of Genesis, the transcendent God created the universe and chose his people. This covenant depends on God's choice and the choice of people. It is a free choice to be obedient. Later, when human wickedness began with rebellion, God decided to destroy the world and remake it, preserving the righteous and creating a new order. Disorder begins in Gen 3. Although the term "sin" is not used there, we see the examples of sin as in the case of Cain and Abel, and of Lamech killing a man in Gen 4:23. In Gen 6:18 God promises a covenant to Noah. Later, in Genesis 9: 16, the phrase "eternal covenant" appears for the first time when God renews the cosmic harmony after the flood. Although, God promises a covenant to Noah, covenant language had not been previously used in the context of creation. The covenant between Yahweh and Israel is the main theological concept on which Yahweh's relationship with the people of Israel is based. Although covenant theology is formulated earlier around the time of Hosea, during the period of the monarchy, it becomes conceptually concretized in Deuteronomic circles in the years leading up to the Exile. Thus,

covenant has two faces: Yahweh's commitment to Israel and Israel's obedience to Yahweh's commandments. Yahweh enters into covenant with Israel (Ex. 24:3-8 and Ex. 34:10-28). He gives the Law (Deut. 26:17-19 and Deut. 17:14-20). By this, Israel becomes Yahweh's peculiar possession among the nations (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). Israel is glorified and set above nations (Deut. 26:19) and expected to be a holy nation (Exod. 19:6).

### Revelation in the New Testament

In the New Testament, revelation takes the form of the manifestation of a new and definitive covenant in Jesus as the Messiah and the Lord. Building on the Old Testament understanding of revelation, New Testament writers view revelation as the self-communication of God and his Word incarnated in Jesus. Revelation in Jesus is viewed unique because he is considered to be the agent and the content of revelation itself. But there is a close correlation between the incarnational and the apocalyptic understanding of revelation in Christianity as in the case of its Jewish roots. As believed in early Christianity, in the fate of Jesus the end of all history is anticipated. God is revealed as the one God of all humankind who had been expected since the time of the early prophets. This is the *already* and *not yet* of the Apocalyptic expectation which is fulfilled in Jesus. The fate of Jesus is understood in connection with Jewish-apocalyptic thought as the self-revelation of God. Thus, as Wilkens notes, early Christianity is apocalyptically stamped (Wilkens, 1969, p. 112).

Derived from the Jewish background, revelation in Christianity is the meeting point of *already* as in the pre-existence of Christ, *already* in the incarnation, and *already-not yet* in the Kingdom of God eschatology. Thus, incarnation as the historical revelation can be seen as the culminating point in the Christian idea of revelation. As the Letter to the Hebrews says: "At many moments in the past and by many means, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our time, the final days, he spoke to us in the person of his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the ages" (Heb. 1:1-2). According to O'Collins, "in the whole of the New Testament the Letter to the Hebrews provides the classical passage for expressing the once-and-for-all quality of the crucifixion and resurrection" (O'Collins, 1981, p. 99).

For Paul, mysterious God and his hidden plan are uncovered and have become apparent in Jesus (Eph. 1:9, Col 1:26), who is the agent of creation and the firstborn from the dead. Revelation, for Paul, is the uncovering of the divine plan by which God reconciles human race to himself in Christ. Resurrection has made Jesus "the first fruits" of the dead. According to the Synoptics, Christ is the fulfillment of the Law (Mt. 5:17-19). Revelation through Jesus is unique not only because he claims a direct and complete knowledge of God's saving will (Mt 11:27, Lk.10: 22), but also his role as a minister is definitive (Mt. 4:19-20, Mk 1:18). In the Synoptic Gospels, which concentrate on the ministry of Jesus, revelation is chiefly understood as something which Jesus communicates through his preaching and teaching. For John, although God is invisible and unknowable, the only Son alone makes him understandable to

the world through incarnation. He does not only communicate word and truth: He is the Word and the Truth (Jn. 1:1, 14:6).

In the New Testament, mainly in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus is viewed as the Preacher, the Teacher, who promulgates God's Word to people in continuity with the prophetic tradition. In Acts, the Apostles also preach the doctrine of their master, and announce the good news with his permission and by his command. According to the Gospel of John, there are three main elements in the revelation of Christ: His pre-existence as the Logos (Jn. 1:1-2), the incarnation of the Logos (Jn. 1:14), the intimacy of the Father and Son before as well as after the incarnation (Jn. 1:18). In the end, Christian revelation is God's self-disclosure guiding the Apostles to discern the divine nature and purpose as definitively manifested in Jesus.

### **Revelation in Modern Christian Thought**

In the following pages, I will introduce varying categorizations, or models of revelation, proposed in modern Christian theology.

#### **Revelation as Proposition**

Although none of the Fathers of the Church has written particularly on revelation in the Patristic era or in medieval monasticism, revelation was mainly envisaged as the action of God inwardly enlightening the soul with an obscure, but deeply satisfying anticipation of the eternal vision. In medieval Scholasticism, revelation was viewed as a body of divine doctrine giving answers to questions which philosophy was unable to answer: about God himself, three persons in one nature, about man, and the universe (mainly created things in relation to God). It was a body of truth intended to inform people about the nature of the ultimate reality so that they may rightly direct their lives to their last end. Also later, in the Catholicism of the Counter Reformation, revelation was viewed as the content of the Church doctrine derived from the Scripture and the Tradition as sacred sources. This idea of revelation as a divinely authoritative doctrine, which is also called the *propositional model*, is today held by the conservative Evangelicals, most notably Gordon H. Clark, James I. Packer, John Warwick Montgomery, and the Catholic neo-Scholastics, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Christian Pesch and Hermann Dieckmann (Dulles, 1983, p. 37, 41).

According to this model, while the Evangelicals argue that God has revealed Himself primarily through the doctrines embodied in the Scripture, neo-Scholastic Catholic theologians would add the Magisterium of the Church to this. This is because for the Evangelicals, the Bible is the only infallible source while yet, it might not be a strict verbal dictation from God. However, Catholic neo-Scholastics stress the infallibility of the Church, through which the Bible as the embodiment of Christ's doctrine, is actualized. Whereas up until the Council of Trent (1545-47) the focus was on the historical and incarnational aspect of revelation, later on Protestant ideas of *illumination* and *Sola Scriptura* began to play an important role in Christian thinking (Latourelle, 1987, pp. 923-924). In the Protestant Reformation, revelation was seen

as the response to humanity's anxious quest for a gracious God. It was therefore viewed as the good news that God offers salvation to sinners through Jesus. The Council of Trent decreed that Scripture is not enough for formulating dogma, but there was need for tradition.

Since Scripture is not taken as the revelation itself, there are different approaches to the idea of inspiration. The Apostles, prophets and hagiographers are believed not to write on their own account but out of inspiration. God, in the ultimate sense, is seen as the author of the Scripture. According to some, God inspired both the content and the words, but according to some others, he inspired the content and the hagiograph is the literary author.

### **Revelation as Inner Experience**

Advancing towards the contemporary period, we encounter the fruits of the Enlightenment, which are prominent on the idea of revelation. This period, mainly influenced by modern epistemology, philosophical agnosticism, biblical criticism, social change and a comparative approach to religion gave rise to new approaches. As the main perception, revelation is God's free action by which He communicates the saving truth to the human person, especially through Jesus Christ accepted by the Apostolic Church and attested by the Bible and by the continuing community of believers.

According to the model which takes revelation as an *inner experience*, it comes as a direct interior experience of God's self-communication. Some authors who hold this view are F. Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl, Auguste Sabatier, Wilhelm Hermann, George Tyrell, Nathan Söderblom, and John Hick (Dulles, 1983, pp. 69-70). For this model, the direct content of revelation is God himself, who communicates himself to the soul as utterly transcendent and ineffable. These authors make a sharp distinction between dogma and faith. According to Schleiermacher, who calls the response to revelation "pious affections," the experience comes first, and Scripture is a spontaneous breaking forth of emotions into speech (Dulles, 1983, p. 77). He is also against any definition that "would make the revelation to be originally and essentially doctrine" (Schleiermacher, 1948, p. 50). This model, strengthened by Albrecht Ritschl, argues against the propositional model that God cannot be contained in words and deeds. Against the historical model, it holds on to the immediate encounter with God that results in piety.

### **Revelation as Dialectical Presence**

During the time between the two World Wars, the skeptical-pessimistic period affected by existentialist ideas, and the thought of Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky, revelation was seen as a "dialectical presence", which unveils and at the same time hides the manifestation of God. This approach was mainly held by Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Rudolf Bultmann. It continues today with J. Moltmann, and E. Jungel. According to this approach, the truth of revelation is not what the preacher or

the theologian conceptually asserts, but rather the very truth of God who asserts himself. God's word is only paradoxically or dialectically identified with the word of man. The preached word becomes revelation when and insofar as God is pleased to speak through them (Dulles, 1983, pp. 88-89). According to this model, which concentrates on Christology, the content of revelation is God himself. Since revelation comes through the word, its proper form is Christ, the Word in person. As Pannenberg states, this concept of revelation as the self-revelation of the absolute appears to have been first introduced by Hegel (Pannenberg, 1969, p. 4). Accordingly, the Bible is not revelation itself but the primary witness to revelation, which is Christ. The Bible and the preaching of the Church bear witness to divine revelation but are not themselves revelation. They are revelation insofar as they preach Christ and God is pleased to speak through them. This is why the historical being of Jesus and the word of the Church have secondary importance compared to faith in Christ, which is the integral part of revelation. The events are not decisive in their objective character, but that the encounter with them makes the revelation actual.<sup>3</sup>

### Revelation as History

After World War II, the concept of "revelation through history" held by Oscar Cullmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg became influential. Criticizing the approach to revelation as the direct self-revelation of God through his name, his Word, or through the Law and Gospel, Pannenberg proposes an "indirect self-revelation as a reflex of his activity in history" as the totality of God's speech and activity shows who he is in an indirect way (Pannenberg, 1969, p. 13). The strict conception of God's self-disclosure rules out the idea of a medium of revelation that is distinct from God himself. Pannenberg states that neither the Old nor the New Testament knows of any terminological expression for the "self-revelation of God" (Pannenberg, 1969, p. 9). Accordingly, God's announcement of his name is not self-revelation in the sense of a full self-disclosure; second, biblical contents and functions of the Word of God do not have the character of direct self-revelation of God; third, the proclamation of the Law on Sinai should not be taken as direct self-revelation of God.

According to Cullmann, God is active in history; and God, who is witnessed in the Bible, is revealed not by his *being* but by his *activity*. Cullmann, in his *Christ and Time*, distinguishes four progressive stages in redemptive history. First is the fall into sin. Second, out of this sinful humanity God chooses one community, the people of Israel, for the salvation of the world. As Cullmann states, "apart from human sin, the whole history of salvation would be unintelligible. The sin of all leads to the election of some, with the salvation of all as its purpose" (Cullmann, 1967, p. 161). Third is the prophetic expectation of the "Servant of Yahweh" and "the Son of Man" which is going to be fulfilled in the final stage through Jesus of Nazareth (Cullmann, 1965, pp. 115-116). This is the salvation history within history in general. Time is going to be fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Christ. This is what makes Cullmann

<sup>3</sup>While Brunner strengthens his view with stress upon Christology, to this Barth adds pneumatology. See E. Brunner (1947), *Revelation and Reason* and K. Barth (1994), *Church Dogmatics*. Westminster: John Knox Press.

recognize the Old Testament redemptive history as a preparation for this final event. "Thus the entire redemptive history unfolds in two movements: the one proceeds from the many to the One; this is the Old Covenant. The other proceeds from the One to the many; this is the New Covenant". Thus, redemptive history has its mid-point in Christ (Cullmann, p. 1965, p. 117).

### Revelation as New Awareness

Another model, mainly influenced by the transcendental idealism of Kant and the subjective idealism of Fichte, holds revelation to be the "new awareness." In this model, revelation is viewed in evolutionary terms by which humanity is confronted with the transcendent action of God through inner attraction and external paradigms (Dulles, 1983, p. 99). For those who support this model, God is never just the God of religious experience or of sacred history, or the Bible or the Church. God is the Lord of the world, who should be sought in the totality of life and experience. According to this model, revelation once given in Christ continues to be given and, "as an ongoing process, revelation has no fixed content... Past events and doctrines are revelation only insofar as they have illuminative power for the present. They are subject to continual reinterpretation in the perspectives of contemporary awareness" (Dulles, 1983, p. 109). For this approach, revelation has an ascending movement towards the future. Until the final *Parousia*, the process of revelation will continue, but the terminal stage has already started with Jesus. For this approach, exemplified by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, history should be understood in evolutionary terms. According to Teilhard de Chardin's evolutionary Christology, which is influenced by the Logos idea of the Johannine prologue, and Paul's Letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians, Jesus appears as the bearer and the goal of the upward movement of the universe towards the divine. For Teilhard de Chardin, Christ is the Omega point which would lead to a higher state of union.

Turning to some contemporary theologians, we come across different approaches to answering the question "what is revelation?" For instance, according to O'Collins, who starts directly from the Trinitarian understanding, revelation is disclosure of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as God through the history of the Old and the New Testament (O'Collins, 1981, p. 54). For O'Collins, whose starting point is the fundamental understanding of Christian theology, revelation is realized before Christ, with Christ, and after Christ in terms of history. For Macquarrie, speaking with terms of Heidegger, revelation is the dimension of the holy and revelatory experience is the holy breaking in (Macquarrie, 1966, p. 6). "The content of revelation is 'being' or 'holy being'" (Macquarrie, 1966, p. 95). He goes on as follows:

His (human person's) *quest* for the sense of existence is met by the *gift* of a sense for existence. He experiences this initiative from beyond himself in various ways... In so far as it brings him a new understanding both of himself and of the wider being within which he has his being then it may be called "revelation" (Macquarrie, p. 75).

In *The Craft of Theology*, Avery Dulles, inspired by George Lindbeck, distinguishes three types of theology: thepropositionalist-cognitive, experiential-expressive, and

cultural-linguistic theology (Dulles, 1992, p. 17). According to the first approach, mainly held by scholasticism and neo-scholasticism, revelation is understood as divine doctrine, and in the second type of theology, revelation is held to consist of privileged inner experiences. But Dulles himself prefers to call the third approach ecclesial-transformative with which he associates himself. Revelation, according to this third model is considered “a real and efficacious self-communication of God, the transcendent mystery, to the believing community. The deeper insights of revelatory knowledge are imparted, not in the first instance through propositional discourse, but through participation in the life and worship of the Church” (Dulles, 1992, p. 18).

### **Revelation as Symbol**

According to Dulles, along with Paul Tillich, H. R. Niebuhr, Karl Rahner, Paul Ricoeur, John Macquarrie, Langdon Gilkey, Gregory Baum and Louis Dupré (Dulles, 1983, p. 131), the self-communication of God is realized through the symbolic events and the words of the Scripture, especially in Jesus, who is the “mediator and fullness” of all revelation (Dulles, 1992, p. 19). Symbols, being the means to communicate revelation themselves, have a kind of transformative power to convert one into communion with God. These symbols are mainly found in the Bible and in the living tradition of the Christian community. They are not pure creations of human imagination; they disclose what is ontologically real and do not necessarily point to things strictly other than themselves. A symbol evokes meaning rather than stating it. Using the expression of Karl Rahner, symbol is not a sign arbitrarily chosen and applied by man to give something a historical expression in space and time, but the “phenomenon” which “utters” itself (Rahner, 1990, p. 491). The relationship between symbol and the reality it symbolizes is, in a way, like the one between the body and the full reality of a person. Since symbols cannot grasp the full reality of what they symbolize, they invite one to participate in the meaning they put forth. Thus, for the central Christian doctrine of the incarnation, “it is a person who becomes the symbol of Being, the revelation of God” (Macquarrie, 1966, p. 131).

In an earlier work, in the concluding chapter of his *Revelation Theology*, Dulles distinguishes three styles of revelation theology: the historical, doctrinal and mystical (Dulles, 1970, pp. 177-178). Further, he tries to reconcile them all in a balanced theory of revelation as he notes what follows:

Revelation is never mere fact, in the sense of a verifiable historical occurrence; it is a fact pregnant with an abiding divine significance. Revelation is never mere doctrine, in the sense of abstract propositional truth; it is always doctrine which illuminates a unique event. The event occurs not merely in the world outside man, but also within him; it has an objective and a subjective pole, neither of which can be surpassed. The most properly revelatory element would seem to be precisely the inbreaking of the divine in a manner that overcomes the subject-object dichotomy characteristic of our ordinary thought and speech (Dulles, 1970, p. 180).

Later, in his *Models of Revelation*, Dulles outlines five models of revelation: revelation as doctrine, historical event, mystical experience, dynamic word and new

awareness. However, he himself advances a further model that he calls “dialectical retrieval.” He uses symbolic mediation as a dialectical tool and tries to harmonize the models he sets forth in a critical method in light of this approach. He is also critical of modern subjectivism that reduces revelation-faith to a matter of private feeling and concludes that “revelatory symbols must themselves be understood as means by which God chooses to bring people into living relationship with himself, especially through the incarnate Word” (Dulles, 1992, p. 50).

Obviously, the concept of revelation has a dynamic history of meaning within the Roman Catholic tradition. For example, against the discussions of the Rationalists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Vatican Council I (1869-70) responded with the Constitution on the Catholic Faith (*Dei Filius*). The Council decreed that supernatural revelation is possible and exists; the object of revelation is God and His salvific will, and faith is the acceptance of revelation. The Constitution was mainly against the traditionalist fideism and Rationalism of the period. Faith has a dialectical aspect: personal and communal. Faith is believed to be gained through free will, intelligence, divine illumination, Church, community and the tradition. Thus, God can be known by reason, but since God is totally other, reason alone is not enough and there is need for supernatural revelation. The Council uses the term *revelation* for the first time (Latourelle, 1994, p. 924). Later, Vatican Council II (1962-65) producing a Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*), responded to the modern-existentialist understanding of the period.<sup>4</sup> *Dei Verbum* has been evaluated as thoroughly Christocentric since it recognizes the climax of revelation and its signs in the death and resurrection of Christ (O’Collins, 1993, p. 48). In the history of Christianity, *Dei Verbum* was the first conciliar document on God’s self-revelation. Even if the First Vatican Council’s *Dei Filius*(1870) also considered revelation, it was more concerned with the question of faith (O’Collins, 1993, p. 57).

## Concluding Remarks

Consequently, as noted above, there has never been a uniform understanding of revelation. This is because it has acquired different meanings according to different ages, individuals and cultures. For example, although not conceptually defined, the reality of revelation was not questioned before the Enlightenment. However, by the advance of modern epistemology, philosophical agnosticism, biblical criticism, social change and comparative approach to religion, possibility of supernatural revelation, its existence and object have been widely discussed. While Vatican I responded to the arguments of rationalists and fideists, Vatican II reacted to the existentialist views of the period. More recently, not only the Catholic Church, but also various individuals belonging to different denominations within Christianity

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<sup>4</sup>Vatican Council II (from 1963 to 1965) promulgated sixteen documents. *Dei Verbum* is the Constitution, which deals principally with divine revelation, whereas some other documents, although, deal partially with the theme of revelation. Among these documents are the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), *Lumen Gentium* (Constitution on the Church), *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), *Ad Gentes* (Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity), *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the *Church in the Modern World*) (O’Collins, 1993, pp. 63-78).

have proposed various models of revelation according to the needs and contexts of their period. While the Evangelicals and Catholic neo-scholastics view *revelation as proposition*, those who hold *revelation as inner experience* argue against this. For the latter, revelation is neither words as in proposition, nor in deeds as suggested by the *historical model*. Those who hold *revelation as dialectical presence* also argue that neither the Bible, nor historical events are themselves revelation; words and events are revelation as long as God chooses to speak through them. The model that holds *revelation as history* argue against direct self-revelation of God and suggest that God is revealed indirectly through his deeds in history. For those who support *revelation as new awareness*, it should neither be reduced to religious experience or history, the Bible or the Church; but should be sought in the totality of life and experience. Building upon the strengths of each model Dulles, a Catholic theologian, tries to harmonize them and employs symbol as a dialectical means. Within his symbolic approach to revelation, Dulles also proves that each of these models have not been created in a vacuum but in accordance with the context. Hence, these models or understandings of revelation are in historical dialogue with each other and are consecutively inter-dependent rather than contradictory.

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