

WHAT IS REVELATION?

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IT is perhaps surprising that anyone should raise the question: what is revelation? Most people outside of theology would hope that theologians have gotten beyond this question and have said all there had to be said on the matter centuries ago. Does not one learn what revelation is in the first year or even in the first week of studying theology? Certainly, this is the impression one would receive from most books on theology: either revelation is defined in a few sentences at the beginning of the book or more often it is assumed that the word "revelation" is already understood. It would seem, therefore, that to raise the question of the nature of revelation could hardly be very fruitful and perhaps would be superfluous.

On the other hand, for anyone with some knowledge of the progress of modern science and mathematics, it can be shown quite readily that the great advances in these studies have come about through the examination of foundations and the rethinking of fundamental postulates. "The real 'movement' of the sciences takes place when their basic concepts undergo a more or less radical revision which is transparent to itself. The level which a science has reached is determined by how far it is *capable* of a crisis in its basic concepts. . . . Among the various disciplines everywhere today there are freshly awakened tendencies to put research on new foundations."¹ Of no human knowledge is this more true than philosophy, the science of eternal beginnings, the science of radical reflection upon the foundations of knowledge, and the distending of man's most primitive intentional ties with the world in order to set them forth more clearly.²

Although theology is not a purely human science insofar as its origins transcend the natural, yet in its concrete existence it shares many of the limitations of the human sciences. The partial and tem-

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. John Marquarrie and Edward Robinson (London, 1962) p. 29.

² Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "What is Phenomenology?" *Cross Currents* 6 (1956) 59-61.

poral mode of human understanding makes necessary a movement outward from the first principles of faith to theological conclusions, these serving as instruments to reflection upon the first principles. Since theology exists in human concepts and propositions, there is no part of theology which is untouchable or irreformable. Essential to theology, therefore, the indispensable means of progress within theology, is the radical calling into question of theological foundations.

Anyone who has ever tried to teach or preach the Christian faith knows that he must constantly bring himself back to the same simple question: what does it mean to be a Christian in our world today? Furthermore, he cannot assume that there is a simple answer to such a simple question. In similar fashion, the theologian must, every time he begins his work, raise anew the question: what does revelation mean? He cannot take for granted that because the question is fundamental it has already been adequately answered. Indeed, even if the question has been adequately answered by someone in the past, every man must raise the question again in his own life, and whether or not he likes contemporary thought-patterns and terminology, he must relate his understanding of revelation to the present situation.

One of the charges often lodged against Catholic theology is that there is an unwillingness or an incapacity to raise ultimate questions. Perhaps more accurately stated, there seems to be a failure to recognize the need to examine presuppositions when questions of ultimate foundations are raised. For example, in the debate concerning the relation of Holy Scripture and tradition, there is often very little debate because the question supposedly being argued is not being argued at all. An impasse is reached because some who have written on the subject apparently see no need for seriously examining their own understanding of what revelation is, where it is, how it is communicated, how it is developed. I have suggested elsewhere³ that there is little profit in beginning with the question of whether all revelation is contained in Scripture; what would first have to be agreed upon is how any revelation is contained there.

I would like to raise here some questions that seem to be fundamental and yet inadequately considered in most treatments of revela-

³ Gabriel Moran, *Scripture and Tradition* (New York, 1963) pp. 82-87.

tion. Some of these questions are perhaps more philosophical than theological; but the theologian is forced to raise philosophical issues. It would be incorrect to suppose that there is a ready-made philosophy into which theology can dip for any answer theology needs. Even if philosophical principles are agreed upon, they must come to living expression in human minds before they can be of use to the theologian.

Everyone who has some acquaintance with contemporary theological writing is aware of the dichotomy which modern writers have set up between revelatory action and revealed doctrine, between events of history and conceptual knowledge, between the God who acts and the God who speaks.⁴ A common Protestant complaint about Catholicism is that of the latter's reduction of revelation to doctrinal statements and the corresponding reduction of faith to assent to propositions.⁵ There are today numerous Catholic writers who reject this charge and who assert that we too think that faith is a commitment of the whole person and that revelation consists in the historical saving actions of a living God. While there may be cause to rejoice at these expressions, we must recognize at the same time that if these phrases are not to degenerate into mere slogans there must be penetrating study and deeper awareness of the nature of communication, the meaning of symbolism, and the nature of experience and knowledge. Is not, in fact, our root difficulty here the relation of man's conceptual knowledge to his immediate experience, and the relation of knowledge to being? We say—and all our textbooks say—"ens et verum convertuntur," but we do not see the implications of this phrase. Further, when we go on to speak of truth as something predicated of propositions, we juxtapose these two uses of the word "truth," calling one logical and the other ontological without really understanding their relationship. We define truth as "adaequatio intellectus et rei" and we are in constant danger of reducing this to a mechanical, correspondence notion of truth.

Within the limits of this article it is impossible to develop an ontology of knowledge, something of the order that Maréchal accomplishes

⁴ Cf. René Latourelle, "Révélation, histoire, et incarnation," *Gregorianum* 44 (1963) 225-26.

⁵ Cf. John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York, 1956) pp. 4, 29.

in the fifth volume of his major work.⁶ Yet this must be mentioned here, because whatever is said on this matter implies a certain ontology, and sooner or later if one wants answers, one would have to come to that. In this regard it is somewhat unfair to accuse St. Thomas of distorting revelation by reducing it to knowledge, unless it is known what St. Thomas meant by knowledge. And to say, as is repeatedly said today, that revelation is not *merely* knowledge is a strange thing to say if truth is convertible with being and if knowledge is not something one has but the way in which spiritual beings are.

There are four areas that I would like to touch upon briefly: (1) the natural foundations of supernatural revelation; (2) revelation as supernatural and historical; (3) Christ as the fulness of revelation; (4) the apostles as source of revelation for the Church.

THE NATURAL FOUNDATIONS OF SUPERNATURAL REVELATION

In the area of natural foundations for supernatural revelation there are two closely related themes which could profitably be examined at some length. The first of these is the central importance of the interrelation of man's cognitive and appetitive life, a point which is often referred to today but which has not received sufficient development and application in theology. Every act which is properly man's is at once an act of knowing and loving, not as two actions closely related but as one human action of which knowing and loving are aspects. What modern philosophy (especially American philosophy) here insists upon is not at all at variance with Holy Scripture. But while Scholastic philosophy did not deny this—in fact, it supplies a metaphysical basis for it—it can hardly be denied that theological treatises on faith and revelation have often badly presented the relation of the cognitive and the appetitive. The attempt to imitate the methods of positive science and mathematics has led to the apotheosis of "pure objectivity" as the ideal of knowledge and the consequent abstraction of intellectual activity from the rest of man's life.

All knowledge requires an attitude peculiar to the realm in which knowing is involved. Modern philosophy has stressed that the higher and more valuable the knowledge, the more necessary is the moral disposition of the knower and the impetus of the volitional.

⁶ Joseph Maréchal, *Le point de départ de la métaphysique* 5 (2nd ed.; Paris, 1949).

Between love and intelligence there can be no real divorce. Such a divorce is apparently consummated only when intelligence is degraded or, if I may be allowed the expression, becomes merely cerebral, and of course, when love reduces itself to mere carnal appetite. But this we must assert, and as forcibly as possible: where love on one side, where intelligence on the other, reach their highest expression, they cannot fail to meet.⁷

All knowledge demands not only an openness to know but a readiness to interpret and to approve. The ideal is not to remove man's volitional activity from knowing but to relate knowledge and love in the right way. Since the time of St. Thomas it has been common to use his distinction between "science" and belief when speaking of revelation. While this distinction may be retained, it is necessary to realize that "science" and belief are not two separate and independent ways of knowing. What is referred to here as science, that is, a knowledge where the object compels assent, is a limit case which is perhaps never reached or is reached only in a highly mathematized science. Abstractly and theoretically, one can speak of knowing an existent fact simply present at hand; but every concrete human act goes beyond brute factuality and requires an element of acceptance and interpretation. In all ordinary human knowledge one is never taken up with objective facts isolated from the life of the individual person and his relation to the world and to others.

When the level of personal being is reached, the role of freedom cannot be overlooked. Whether one thinks of knowledge as moving upward from the nonpersonal or whether the personal is what is first and principally known, man's knowledge of another person is radically dependent upon the free bestowal and the free acceptance of that knowledge.⁸ For a person to be known in what uniquely distinguishes him, he must choose to be known; if he refuses to reveal his inner self, he cannot be known except by external, nonpersonal description. If the partner in dialogue refuses to recognize the other as autonomous or does not trust in the free manifestation he makes, then personal knowledge is not communicated.

Is it not obvious that if I consider the other person as a sort of mechanism exterior to my own ego, a mechanism of which I must discover the spring or manner of

⁷ Gabriel Marcel, *Men against Humanity* (London, 1952) p. 7.

⁸ Cf. Remy Kwant, *Encounter*, tr. Robert C. Adolfe (Pittsburgh, 1960) pp. 15-23.

working. . . I shall never succeed in obtaining anything but a completely exterior knowledge of him, which is in a way the very denial of his real being? . . . The knowledge of an individual being cannot be separated from the act of charity by which this being is accepted in all which makes of him a unique creature.⁹

All personal knowledge, therefore, is truly and accurately called "revelation," the reciprocal giving and receiving of knowledge within living experience.

Theology manuals have traditionally admitted, in a rather begrudging way, that it is possible to speak of a natural revelation of God; as a matter of fact, Scripture itself speaks of a revelation to the pagan world.¹⁰ Catholic writers in recent times have tended to use this terminology more extensively, thereby dividing all man's knowledge of God into natural revelation and supernatural revelation.¹¹ This is not merely a vague extension of the word "revelation" beyond its properly supernatural signification. All knowledge which man has of God depends both on the free bestowal of God and on the attitude of receptivity which man takes up vis-à-vis that bestowal.¹² Therefore, if someone writes that all knowledge of God is by revelation, and correlative that God is known only by faith, this is—whether we like the terminology or not—not necessarily at variance with Vatican Council I.

The other point which ought to be mentioned concerning natural foundations is that man knows nothing fully, not even himself. It is not just divine mysteries that man cannot comprehend, but every being, living and nonliving, material and spiritual; being is precisely that which resists exhaustive analysis.¹³ The knowledge which I have of myself or of another is always very limited; it is attained only by the interpretation of symbols. The knowledge of person and of world can always be increased, but this increase takes place through a temporal process that must be lived according to its own rhythm. Thus, even when I desire to reveal myself to another, when I will to make

⁹ Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator* (Chicago, 1951) p. 23.

¹⁰ Rom 1:18-20.

¹¹ Cf. Jean Daniélou, *God and the Ways of Knowing*, tr. Walter Roberts (New York, 1957) pp. 17-30; Werner Bulst, *Offenbarung* (Düsseldorf, 1960) pp. 56-58.

¹² Cf. Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, tr. Bernard Noble (New York, 1960) p. 334.

¹³ Cf. Gabriel Marcel, *Philosophy of Existentialism*, tr. Manya Harari (New York, 1962) p. 14.

known my inner attitudes and being, I can do so only by incarnating these in successive actions, by expressions and gestures, and most of all by the symbol of language which attempts to incarnate thought. It is only through appearances, that is, temporally expressed symbols, that I can communicate with others, the appearances not hiding the human but being the human in visible or tangible expression.¹⁴ The sensible manifestation is not only the effect of man's inner attitudes; there is a reciprocity of cause and effect. Language, for example, is not only determined by thought; it is also a determinative of thought.¹⁵

The two points which we have made can be brought together by recalling that a symbol is ambiguous by its very nature, so that the symbols which mediate personal revelation demand for their understanding a recipient ready to receive, understand, and approve. Revelatory experience in the human sphere demands a reciprocal interaction: there is no revelation unless it is received, while to receive is already to give back, and the reception which is a giving is itself the impetus to further revelation. One can, in short, isolate within human experience a whole set of dialectical movements or polarities within the individual and within the relation of each individual to the world of the other.¹⁶

REVELATION AS SUPERNATURAL AND HISTORICAL

Having said many things which may seem quite irrelevant to the topic, I would like now to consider the historical, supernatural revelation. First, it would seem possible to speak of supernatural revelation only within the context of a supernatural life, though not necessarily equating that term with sanctifying grace. There is a supernatural order into which every man is born, and there is a supernatural life to which every man is called; there is a movement toward that life before one is in the "state of grace."¹⁷ If one is beginning to live a higher kind of life, then there will be present a higher kind of knowl-

¹⁴ Cf. Robert Johann, "Subjectivity," *Review of Metaphysics* 12 (1958) 223; Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 2, tr. Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore, 1963) pp. 272-74.

¹⁵ Cf. Rahner, *ibid.*, pp. 123-24; Remy Kwant, *The Phenomenological Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty* (Pittsburgh, 1963) pp. 46-63.

¹⁶ Cf. Karl Rahner, *Christian Commitment*, tr. Cecily Hastings (New York, 1963) pp. 44-46.

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 103.

edge. To be a spiritual being is to be a conscious being; to be a supernatural being is to be a supernaturally conscious being, with a consciousness that wells up out of life culminating and directing it. This supernatural emergence, of course, is not to be understood in the way that some nineteenth-century schools and Modernism conceived it, but rather in the sense that the Spirit makes man conscious of what man already is. "God using human words, the only words his little ones understand, describes to them the marvelous beings they have become. What he tells them is what their very nature as members strives to tell them, so much is it their own, but does not succeed, so amazing is the beauty."¹⁸

This interior movement no more cuts off man from external realities than does the natural light of reason seal man off from contact with the world; in fact, just the contrary is true. The knowledge which man has of divine things, though it springs up within, depends upon the gestures that God makes in history, gestures that symbolically reveal His inner reality. For if God was to make Himself known to man, it had to be through a human way of knowing, that is, through symbolic actions, through happenings, gestures, and words. Such symbols always retain an ambiguity in their meaning, even though one symbol may help to clarify the meaning of another.

It is a strange limitation to insist, as do many theology manuals, that divine revelation, strictly speaking, takes place through speech, through a "formal utterance on God's part." Personal exchange of knowledge never takes place by words isolated from the rest of human life; and between God and man this would seem to be most strikingly so. Fully human communication includes the verbal, but the verbal can never do more than point to the nonverbal and interpret other activities which form man's living experience. The word brings truth to light, but the most primitive communication of knowledge would seem to be there before reflection and naming begin.¹⁹ Certainly, there are words in the process of God's revealing, but the words spring from reflection upon the prepredicative, prereflexive experience.

¹⁸ Emile Mersch, *Theology of the Mystical Body*, tr. Cyril Vollert (St. Louis, 1951) p. 83.

¹⁹ Cf. Heidegger, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-95; Albert Dondeyne, *Contemporary European Thought and Christian Faith*, tr. E. McMullen and J. Burnheim (Pittsburgh, 1958) pp. 152-54.

Since communication in general takes place through physical event and reflexive, interpretative words, it is not surprising that one finds the same thing in divine, supernatural revelation. There are always prophets for God's revelation, those who bring to light the meaning of historical happenings. Without historical events the words would be empty; without words the events would be unintelligible.²⁰ This is not to say that God could not have verbally addressed Moses on the mountain; but, in fact, it seems that God worked in a more human way. The revelation is a life communicated that has sprung up into cognitive experience.

Both Catholic and Protestant writers today insist that revelation does not consist in doctrines or in statements but in the historical saving actions of God. Although this is a step forward in the understanding of divine revelation, this still leaves room for misunderstanding. Revelation does not consist in doctrines, revelation does not consist in statements; but neither does revelation consist in historical events. The *magnalia Dei* is, of course, a richer expression and a wider category than doctrinal statement; but whatever happens in history or whatever is in a book can only be a symbol mediating revelation. Our irrepressible tendency to objectify makes us think and speak of God "up there," man "down here," and revelation "out there." But there is no revelation "out there"; there is God revealing, man believing, and there is no revelation unless it is received. When the word "revelation" is used as a noun in the objective sense and when one asks where this exists, the only answer would seem to be: in the consciousness of man. Man does not believe in statements or truths, nor does he believe in events; he believes in God revealed in human experience and consciousness.

Finally, in regard to the interpretation of those events and words through which God is revealed, one must note the field in which this takes place. Even within human relations each word and each visible gesture is interpreted within a context that is larger than we generally realize, a context, in fact, that is indefinitely extendible. When it is a question of divine revelation, this fact takes on vast, even cosmic, significance. There was no way in which God could give "truths" to

²⁰ Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, "Parole et sacrement dans l'église," *Lumière et vie* 9 (1960) 42.

the prophets, that is, self-contained statements that would have expressed in an even relatively adequate way what was to be communicated to man. Neither are there events or miracles in Jewish history that can be isolated and understood as "revelations" from God. The Old Testament events are understandable only in the context of Jewish history as it is directed toward a fulfilment. Prophecy has its meaning only by relating it to the Jewish life out of which it springs and back to which it always points. Revelation emerges out of the whole Jewish people, and their cognitive reception is part of the revelatory process. We cannot place the "truths of revelation" on one side and the Jewish people on the other side; the word of revelation cannot be separated from the articulate human response.²¹ The subject of Old Testament revelation, then, is the Jewish nation as the chosen people of God; it is they who write the Scriptures, it is in their life span that God expresses Himself symbolically.

CHRIST AS THE FULNESS OF REVELATION

Everything that has been said so far leads up to one great question, and that is the place of Jesus Christ in revelation. This is the third point we wish to touch upon: what is meant by saying that Christ is the fulness of revelation? It is commonplace today to insist that Christ did not just bring the revelation nor teach the revelation but that He *is* the revelation. Latourelle, for example, lists half a page of statements to this effect by numerous Catholic theologians.²² I would not want to say that the statement "Christ is the revelation" is incorrect, but I would like to examine in what sense it is true. In particular, I would like to requestion my previous assertion that revelation—the noun in the objective sense—has its "to be" in human cognitive experience. If this were true, it would seem to contradict the statement that Christ is the revelation.

Jesus Christ, we believe, is the Word of God, the Image of the Father, born before all ages. Nevertheless, the event of Incarnation and all the events of Christ's historical existence are still symbols through which man knows God. Christ is both reality and sign; He

²¹ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Martin Buber and Christianity*, tr. Alexander Dru (New York, 1962) p. 21.

²² Latourelle, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

is, in Augustine's words, "the sacrament of God," so that although Christ is personally God, one's experience of Christ is the experience of God in a human way and through human symbols. The Word-made-flesh is God, and yet that reality, that inexhaustible reality, is communicated to man only temporally and symbolically. Furthermore, He remains a sign of contradiction, revealing God only to those who believe. The presence of Christ is not the presence of the fulness of revelation to every man who comes into contact with Christ. Even to the individual believer, the experience of Christ does not bring to light the fulness of revelation; each experiences God revealing only partially, according to the temporal conditions. Christ's divinity is not the revelation of God; it is identical with God. Christ's humanity is not the revelation; it is a vehicle of revelation.

Where, then, does revelation come to its full fruition, where does it exist in fulness? The answer would seem to be: in the human consciousness of Christ. Christ's affirmation of Himself includes the awareness of the hypostatic union; the knowledge present to His mind is the transposition into the cognitive order of what the hypostatic union is in the ontological order.²³ The revelation to mankind is present in the divine realities communicated to His human way of knowing. This is not a comprehensive and exhaustive knowledge of God, but it is rather knowledge which a human mind can have of God. It is through Christ, therefore, that divine realities are communicated to man, through His speech assuredly, but once again even here—or perhaps especially here—the ontological density of Christ's person goes beyond whatever Christ could formulate in verbal expression. Not only is it by utterance, therefore, but by every gesture, activity, and attitude that Christ addresses man. Christ knew more than He could say; Christ was more than He could know in His human awareness. He was in Himself the complete expression of God's communication with man; and that divine-human reality is best comprehended in the self-consciousness of Christ.

He is the fulness and the end of revelation, not in the sense that revelation ceased with Him, but in the sense that God is definitively present to the world through Christ in love, salvation, and mercy, and

²³ Cf. Mersch, *op. cit.*, p. 88; Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 1, tr. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore, 1961) pp. 169-70.

the world is definitively open to the concealed presence of that divine plenitude.²⁴ "Through one of us the Word has taken up His abode in all of us." To share in that life bestowed on Christ by the Trinity is to live the supernatural life of grace. Part of that life is the knowledge proper to it, and therefore it follows that our supernatural knowledge is a participation in the cognitive experience of Christ.²⁵ This sharing in His knowledge comes about by listening to the words which Christ spoke, by looking upon the picture of Christ which the Gospels present, by experiencing sacramentally His activity still present in the world. Only by faith, nevertheless, do these activities of the Church bring man into contact with God. The meaning of these words and events is discovered through the engagement of the person in becoming a disciple of Christ.

THE APOSTLES AS SOURCE OF REVELATION FOR THE CHURCH

This brings us to the fourth and final point to be considered: the relation of the apostles to revelation, and the relation of the apostles to their successors in the preservation, transmission, and interpretation of revelation. The Council of Trent, as is well known, defined that the revelation is contained in written books and unwritten traditions that have come down to us from the apostles, and that this revelation was given to the apostles through Christ and the Holy Spirit. The *fons* of revelation, said Trent, is neither Scripture, nor tradition, nor both; the one source of saving truth is the apostolic preaching.²⁶ The apostolic period is unique in the history of the Church, and the apostles occupy a unique place in the constitution of the Church; the apostles as apostles have no successors. They are the ones through whom knowledge of God revealing Himself in the God-man, Jesus, is present to the world in all future ages.

The apostles themselves experienced Christ; they lived with this man who was personally God. Their experience of God revealing was thus a rich, full, human experience, though not reflexively developed. They possessed revelation in a fulness not to be surpassed, because they directly experienced the one who expressed what God wished to communicate to the world. However, the apostles themselves went through a kind of development of doctrine, in that their own self-reflection brought to more explicit form the global and unreflexive ex-

²⁴ Cf. Rahner, *ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁵ Cf. Mersch, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

²⁶ DB 783.

perience they had had. This process of conceptualization and propositionalization sprang, of course, from the original experience, elucidating but never capturing the primitive experience.²⁷ The apostolic process of reflection took place under the guidance of the Spirit in a way not to be equalled in the postapostolic Church.²⁸ It may be noted here that when knowledge is equated with words or even with ideas and judgments, then it becomes impossible to understand the development of dogma in the later Church and the divergencies in the accounts of the Evangelists.

The apostles began communicating knowledge of Christ from the very first days of the Church by their immediate, personal testimony. But as the years passed, it became imperative for the Church to preserve as far as possible and by some mediacy the communication of the apostolic experience. To communicate to others, the apostles had, of course, made use of words, but words were not adequate to the task. The concrete life of the Church in its moral and sacramental activity also transmitted the knowledge proper to Christian faith. There was no set of human statements, written or oral, that could have communicated the apostolic experience of Christ. St. John the Evangelist was speaking quite literally when he wrote that all the books of the world would not be sufficient to exhaust the person and activities of Christ. What is true of every person and everything profound in human experience was pre-eminently true of the apostolic experience: one could not state it; one could only bear witness to it, testify to it, point to it, expose it in action. All of the human statements that are made concerning any deep experience are an attempt to point out various aspects of it and to awaken in the consciousness of another his own personal experience; such an attempt is always "an infinite search which approaches its goal only asymptotically."²⁹

This was the problem of the apostles when they tried to state the revelation: the insufficiency of language itself to bear the weight of what they knew and wished to share. We might think that in these circumstances the best they could have done would have been to construct a precise, scientific system; but if we do think that way, it is probably owing to our own inveterate rationalism. At any rate, we

²⁷ Cf. Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 1, 63-64. ²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64; cf. Robert Johann, "Experience and Philosophy," in Irwin C. Lieb (ed.), *Experience, Existence and the Good* (Carbondale, Ill., 1961) pp. 34-36.

know that when it did come time to bequeath their legacy to the postapostolic Church, their means of expression was not a scientific treatise at all, but a testimony of faith. They gave us impressions of what they saw and what they believed. They might have written more, perhaps they might have written less; but they wrote enough for us to know Christ Jesus and knowing Him to believe in Him.³⁰

Finally, if one asks where this revelation continues to exist, the answer would seem to be: in the consciousness of the believers in Christ, that is, in the life and consciousness of the Church as the continuation of Christ. Between the knowledge which the apostles had and the knowledge which exists in God's people today there is a continuity, despite the fact that the form in which this knowledge now exists is strikingly different: it is today reflexively denser, that is, more explicit and detailed, more categorized philosophically. This is not necessarily bad; in any case, it is inevitable. But what needs constant recall is this: reflexive and conceptual knowledge cannot live off itself, it does not survive by word and concept alone; conceptual knowledge gains its meaning only in relation to a more primitive experience of the realities of which it speaks and in relation to the realities themselves.

To say that all revelation is contained in the Bible is, if not incorrect, certainly open to misinterpretation. Revelation was not put into a book; revelation is given by God through Christ to the Church in her living members. It is true that the Bible is an intelligible summary of the revelation, the objectification of the apostolic teaching and the objectivity of the consciousness of the early Church.³¹ It is also true that the postapostolic Church in understanding revelation reflects upon the words of Scripture, and through Scripture she can open out upon (in the view of many theologians today) the whole divine revelation. But, in turn, that Scripture has its meaning only in relation to the life of the Church, from which it emerges and back to which it always refers. The formulations of Scripture, and much more so those of theology, are meaningful only if in speaking them one goes beyond the objective formulations themselves.

³⁰ Cf. David Stanley, "The Conception of Our Gospels as Salvation History," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 20 (1959) 575.

³¹ Karl Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, tr. Charles Henkey (New York, 1961) p. 48.

Taking the matter from a different viewpoint, it would seem just as legitimate to say that the sacramental life of the Church "contains all revelation." We do not usually think in these terms, because sacraments are for the most part nonverbal communications, while Scripture is verbal; however, event and word are both parts of a single communication of God to the world. The acts of Christ in the sacraments and the word of God in Scripture are mutually illuminative, and the Church by reflection upon both becomes aware of her own nature.

In conclusion, I would suggest that before we overthrow highly formalized statements from the past on the nature of revelation, we ought to examine our own understanding of them. In theological writing today, and especially in catechetical and liturgical writing, there is much impatience with traditional formulations of revelation. There may be some justification for the impatience, but replacing one formula with another one will not end our dissatisfaction. Perhaps it is our shallow understanding of man that makes theological analyses of revelation seem so pale and inadequate.

While keeping in mind the inner relation of knowledge and love, I have insisted that revelation belongs in the order of knowledge, where Catholic tradition has put it. There is no need to apologize for limiting revelation to knowledge. In the act of faith man comes into contact, not with words nor with judgments, but with God, however dimly. The knowledge which is revelation is not only facts; it is, as all knowledge of persons, self-disclosure, invitation, and communion.³² The act of knowing revelation, inasmuch as it is a free act, is at the same time the act of turning to God. Saying that revelation is in the order of knowledge, therefore, does not mean that revelation is morally neutral.³³ The content of the revelation and the assent required for faith guarantee that the moral impetus is built into the knowledge of revelation. Faith and charity are not the same thing, and it is important to distinguish them; but to believe is already to love or to have begun to love. God speaks to man, and man in listening and understanding has already begun to follow.

³² Cf. Schillebeeckx, *art. cit.*, pp. 29-31; René Latourelle, "Personal Encounter through Faith," *Theology Digest* 10 (1962) 233-38.

³³ Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 1, 17.