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REVELATION

PART I

I

THE idea of revelation is involved in the idea of religion. There are three sources of evidence which appear to support such an assertion. A study of the history of religions shows this to be a fact; the conditions of man's knowledge require it; and the practical needs of man's life demand it.

Students of religions are agreed that religion and revelation are correlative terms. Tillich ascribes the creation of the "concept", as distinguished from the "idea" of revelation to Hellenistic philosophy, but says that revelation as "idea" is as old as religion itself, as old as man's addressing himself in adoration to something from the other world, which manifests itself in this objective world.[1] Thus it appears that when one seeks to make clear what revelation is, he is really defining religion. The two are inseparable. They stand or fall together.

Brunner opens his book on the "Mediator" with an assertion, coming down from the Apologists, that

> "Through God alone can God be known. This is not a specifically Christian principle; on the contrary, it is the principle which is common to all religion and indeed, to the philosophy of religion as a whole. There is no religion which does not believe itself to be based upon divine revelation in one way or another. There is no religion worth the name which does not claim to be 'revealed religion'. Further, there is no speculative philosophy of religion which does not endeavour to base its statements about God and divine Truth upon a self-disclosure of the divine ground in the spirit of man."[2]

This can be shown even more clearly through reference to what Tiele has called the "ethical religions", all of which have personal gods and all of which claim to have been founded by a Mediator through whom the Godhead made known to mankind the supreme revelation. The Vedas of India which

[1] Tillich, Paul, *Die Lehre der Offenbarung*, Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, Teil 8, 1927, p. 403.

[2] Brunner, Emil, *The Mediator*, E.T. by Olive Wyon, Lutterworth Press, London, 1934, trans. of 2nd Ger. edition of 1932, p. 21.

contain the holy laws are not of human origin but are attributable to divine revelation, and in the strictest sense of the word are considered to be of divine origin. Zarathustra received his calling to be a prophet in a dream, and was often transported by angels to heaven, where he had conferences with Ormuzd. Hammurabi wrote down his laws as revelations of the Sun-god Samas. Mohammed received his first revelation when he was forty years of age, and thereafter was frequently rewarded with all kinds of revelations, the contents of which were deposited in the Koran. Amongst the Greeks and Romans there was a universal belief that the gods were redeemers, helpers, and counsellors of men, and that they voluntarily imparted revelations, or allowed their will to be deciphered in extraordinary experiences or dealings; from the flight of birds, from the bowels of animals, from signs in the heavens, etc.[1] A belief in divine revelations has always been considered an inherent element of religions.

It is necessary to inquire what factors may help to explain this historical fact. At least two considerations point the way out, both of them rooted in the very nature of man's life. The first is that the conditions of man's knowledge have apparently required revelation, and the other, that the practical needs of his life have demanded it.

It is reasonable to suppose that when man began to reflect upon the nature of his knowledge, and to extend his inquiry to his knowledge of divine things, there arose, in the course of time, what has proved to be one of the most formidable problems of the modern religious philosopher,—How can I know supersensual reality? Am I not helplessly shut out from a real revelation because of the very nature of my means of knowledge, by which I am and must be confined to what the senses do and can perceive?

It is only natural that the reflective modern man, because he is more deeply aware of this problem, should have a greater concern with the concept of revelation than the man of yesterday. For the latter had not as yet so consciously and explicitly stated this problem, if indeed he was aware of it at all. But even modern man, conscious as he may be of this difficulty, has not completely surrendered religious beliefs. Rational

[1] Bavinck, Herman—*Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Reformed Dogmatics), J. H. Kok, Kampen, 1928, Vol. I, pp. 255–6.

scruples alone have not been sufficient to stifle what pervades man's whole being. And whether or not he has been able to explain it rationally, man in all stages of culture has lived by the belief that this system of things in which he lives, including his natural life, is not self-sufficient. And no matter how far he may have succeeded in extending the boundaries of the known or the knowable, he has always continued to acknowledge the need of a knowledge transcending that of his most brilliant discoveries. He has always desired and accepted a knowledge he knew not how to attain, and received it wholly as a gift. This is a vital element of what man has meant by revelation.

In fact, it is noteworthy that periods of scepticism and agnosticism have also been the eras of the deepest faith, or have soon been followed by such. This is what happened in the period of Greek scepticism which gave rise, by way of reaction, to the spiritually-centred religious philosophies, Neo-Platonism and Neo-Pythagoreanism. Supernaturalism manifested itself as a correlate of the shattering of all rational confidence. Man will not tolerate being left in uncertainty when it comes to the most serious things in life. English Methodism and German Pietism were the expressions of a reaction which very naturally followed upon a period of cold Rationalism which threw doubt upon everything claiming to transcend the limits of man's theoretical reason.

II

The truly religious person, while acknowledging that what he receives as revelation, is a genuine increase of knowledge, thus never confuses the progress of the mind toward new truth and its discovery, with revelation, or considers the two equivalent. Also the recent, and still largely prevalent positivistic trend, with its indifference to metaphysical questions, is increasingly producing a reaction in the direction of an acknowledgment that there must be something significant that lies beyond the scope of empirical analysis. Söderblom summarizes this present situation so well that it will be fitting to quote him at length:

"The generations immediately preceding ours and we ourselves have lived through a period in which metaphysical problems have been thrust aside, both because of fatigue after the heat of an age of creative effort, and also because of

an intensive concentration on the empirical and technical perhaps unique in the history of civilization. We are now experiencing along the whole line a double phenomenon. On the one hand we are not satisfied with merely using the methods of natural science to benefit mankind by inventions and by the art and technique of medicine and surgery. We are examining the worth and the meaning of knowledge itself. And this is being done not only by professional philosophers and critics in the field of the knowledge-process. Even those who pursue the exact and descriptive sciences turn about and examine their own methods asking: What can these methods, these experiments and theories really give us? From all this has come the insight, that the basic theories of natural science have meaning and value only in the degree in which they are conceived as tools for the control of nature, but that they become contradictory if one expects through them to arrive at knowledge of what reality really is. No one can halt at the mere insight and hypothesis of natural science in certainty, silent or expressed, that we have found in the atoms or in the ether the mystery of reality. The critical examination of science itself has driven the scientists of our day out of such a position.

But not only this. At the same time there has come a great wave of interest in the problem of reality itself. What are we and whither are we moving? Can we be certain of anything? If we can, what is the nature of that reality upon which our thought and faith can obtain a foot-hold? . . . The tendency of the thought of the age is to inquire as to the possibility, yes, to feel the vital necessity of insight into the nature of reality itself. But we have lost much of our confidence in the methods of knowledge with which both rational idealism and materialism have worked."[1]

The human heart has always asked for the living, throbbing reality, which man's whole being has told him exists, even if he did not know how to reach it. The intrinsic conditions of man's life, bespeaking limitedness and finitude, and accentuated rather than diminished through the increase of knowledge in all spheres, has constrained him the more to an acknowledgment of what he has called revelation. The conditions of man's knowledge have required the emergence in his thinking of the concept of revelation.

But the practical needs of man's life likewise have demanded revelation of some kind. We ask the question: What is that which man has sought in religion, what has he been after here? The answer is: redemption from evil and the acquisition of that which is considered to be the highest good. All religions are in the last analysis redemptive religions.[1] All religious doctrine is in the end soteriological. To be sure, there has existed a great diversity of views with regard to the nature of the evil from which man has desired to be redeemed, and the nature of the good that he has craved. Some have con-

[1] Söderblom, Nathan, *The Nature of Revelation*, authorised translation from the Swedish (second) edition of 1930, by Frederic E. Pamp, Oxford University Press, N.Y., pp. 104–6.

Compare for a similar line of thought, Camfield, F. W., *Revelation and the Holy Spirit, an Essay in Barthian Theology*, Chas. Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1934, p. 25–7. He brings his remarks on this point to a close by declaring that "Science itself when it arrives at a true understanding of itself, must raise the question of revelation" (p. 27).

ceived this end physically, some ethically, and still others spiritually. But always in religion man has concerned himself with redemption, salvation. The great question in religion has always been: What must I do to be saved? Man has sought something in religion which no sensual passion or sense satisfaction, no science or art, no man nor angel, not the whole world could furnish him. In religion he has sought undisturbed felicity, eternal life, communion with God. But if this is so, then revelation has been decidedly necessary. Hence also from this standpoint it is clear that revelation has been the foundation of religion.

III

If we analyse the concept of redemption, this conclusion becomes still more obvious. All religious concepts which comprise the content of dogmatics move about three points. They contain a doctrine about God, a doctrine about man in his relation to God (and that in two senses, as that relation actually is, and as it ought to be, in an empirical and in an ideal sense), and a doctrine about the means to restoration and maintenance of fellowship with God. Thus, in summary, we have a theology, an anthropology, and a soteriology. And again it is obvious that all three divisions are inseparably connected with the concept of revelation. If we are to know God He must reveal Himself. But revelation is also necessary for anthropology. For religious anthropology does not concern itself with human knowledge which is obtainable from the scientific studies of anatomy, physiology, and psychology; but it deals with the origin and destiny of man, his relation to God, his lost state, his need of redemption, and his hopes for the future. All this is a " terra incognita " for science, and can be cleared up for man only by revelation. And this is even more true in the field of soteriology. For here the means of restoration are the object of reflection, or rather, first of all, the mediators who restore the broken relationship with God are considered. Likewise this belief in mediators is a universal phenomenon in religions, and can be based upon nothing else than revelation. These are the most urgent questions that man ever faces, and he has always known that they cannot be answered without reference to that order of things which is beyond his knowledge.[1]

[1] For the suggestion of this line of thought I am indebted to H. Bavinck, op. cit., pp. 257–9.

We have seen that a consideration of the history of religions, the conditions of man's knowledge, and the practical vicissitudes of human life clearly indicate that the concept of revelation lies at the very heart of religion as traditionally understood. Both practical and theoretical considerations have always caused man to be religious, and therefore to look for a revelation of some kind. This has been a universal law of religions.

But ours is an age in which an increasing number of people claim that revelation, as thus understood, has little or no meaning for them. They either have a very indistinct sense of the divine or the supernatural, or have misgivings of one type or another against the thought of revelation as such, not to say the distinctively Christian conception of the significance, modes, and content of revelation. There are many in our day who doubt the validity of the concept itself, or at least have questions in their minds relative to it.

Of those who find themselves in this frame of mind Walter Lippmann, in his *Preface to Morals*, and John Dewey, in his *A Common Faith* may be taken as representative spokesmen.[1] Both address themselves to the question of the relation of religion and revelation and the difficulties entertained in their own, and in the modern, mind of these matters.

Let us consider the views of these two thinkers on the three phases of the question of the relation between religion and revelation as we have just discussed them. Is revelation still to be considered as of the very essence of religion, as has been the case in the past?

Both agree that this is the way in which the historic religions have viewed what they have had to impart to their adherents.

"The popular religion," says Lippmann, "rests on the belief that the kingdom is an objective fact, as certain, as definite, and as real, in spite of its invisibility, as the British Empire; it holds this faith is justified by overwhelming evidence supplied by revelation, unimpeachable testimony, and incontrovertible signs."[2]

In the opening paragraph of his book Dewey expresses the same thought when he says:

"Religions have traditionally been allied with ideas of the supernatural, and often have been based upon explicit beliefs about it."

[1] Lippmann, Walter, *A Preface to Morals*, The Macmillan Co., N.Y., 1929. Dewey, John, *A Common Faith*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1934.
[2] Lippmann, op. cit., p. 143.

And after pointing out that belief in the supernatural as entertained in various religions has differed widely, yet

"they agree in one point: the necessity for a Supernatural Being and for an immortality that is beyond the power of nature."[1]

Since therefore also these spokesmen of the modern mind agree that historically the terms religion and revelation (implying the supernatural) have been employed as corollaries, the question needs to be raised whether there is any problem, and if so, what it is.

Dewey makes it the particular object of his first chapter to show that though it needs to be admitted that traditionally the religious attitude has been linked with the concept of a supernatural revelation, it not only can, but does exist and does express itself apart therefrom.

Defining the religious attitude or experience as one of "adjustment" and "orientation" to conditions, both internal and external (pp. 15-16), Dewey claims that these experiences are as really effected apart from the religions as through them (p. 17). To be "religious" "denotes attitudes that may be taken toward every object and every proposed end or ideal" (not merely the supernatural or divine) (p. 10).

In a passage which so clearly reflects his revolt against all Platonic intellectualism in religion, and his own adherence to a realistic-pragmatic position, he declares that the religion of "natural intelligence" which he is advocating

"is that there exists a mixture of good and evil, and that reconstruction in the direction of the good which is indicated by ideal ends, must take place, if at all, through continued co-operative effort,"

not through reliance upon, or falling back upon supernatural aids. For

"There is at least enough impulse towards justice, kindliness, and order, so that if it were mobilized for action, not expecting abrupt and complete transformation to occur, the disorder, cruelty, and oppression that exist would be reduced."[2]

"Religious qualities and values if they are real at all are not bound up with any single item of intellectual assent, not even that of the existence of the God of theism."[3]

There exists in man a religious faith which has nothing to do with the idea of the supernatural as traditionally understood in the religions, namely,

"faith as the unification of the self through allegiance to inclusive ideal ends, which imagination presents to us and to which the human will responds as worthy of controlling our desires and choices."[4]

[1] Dewey, op. cit., p. 1. [2] Ibid., p. 47. [3] Ibid., p. 32. [4] Ibid., p. 33.

It is also Lippmann's thesis that for the modern man there can exist only religion without revelation. He believes that there is no parallel in history of the radical nature of the revolt against authority comparable to that of the modern man (p. 12), and little probability " for thinking that a new crystallization of an enduring and popular religion ", which will necessarily be based on the idea of revelation, is likely in the modern world (p. 14). Revelation has always had the connotation of something given to man. It is the modern mood to receive nothing beyond that which lies wholly within human experience. Man's happiness will consist, so he argues, not in conformity to an externally imposed pattern, but to the internal conditions of human life (p. 137). Whether or not religion has in the past always been associated with belief in a supernaturally-revealed doctrine of life, it is clear, so we are told by these writers, that for the modern man, and for the man of the future, the two will not be considered as synonymous.

IV

This radical reversal of conception with regard to religion and its always attendant corollary, revelation, alone would be sufficient to challenge the Christian thinker to re-examine the entire concept of revelation, both from the historical and the conceptual standpoints. But a similar shift of opinion is observable on the question whether the conditions of man's knowledge really require revelation.

Ours is a scientifically-minded age, and as such the most that can be claimed at any time in any field explored by the scientist is that such and such are the best conclusions possible to date. The scientist's conclusions are in the very nature of the case provisional and hypothetical. And yet, for all of that, he does not deem this incomplete status of his knowledge as sufficient warrant to turn for a completion of it to revelation. He has an unbounded confidence in the mind's inherent power, if persistent enough, to discover all the facts possible of being known on any given subject. The modern mind is increasingly becoming habituated to

" a new method and ideal: There is but one sure road of access to truth—the road of patient, co-operative inquiry operating by means of observation, experiment, record and controlled reflection."[1]

[1] Dewey, op. cit., p. 32.

So when any proponent of religion argues for the need of revelation because of the "unreliability of science as a mode of knowledge", Dewey says such an one misses the whole point for

"science is not constituted by any particular body of subject-matter. It is constituted by a method, a method of changing beliefs by means of tested inquiry as well as of arriving at them. . . . The scientific-religious conflict ultimately is a conflict between allegiance to this method and allegiance to even an irreducible minimum of belief so fixed in advance that it can never be modified."[1]

Furthermore he claims that where we frankly adopt this scientific method, also in religion, the change is liberating, for

"It clarifies our ideals, rendering them less subject to illusion and fantasy. It relieves us of the incubus of thinking of them as fixed, as without power of growth. . . . In the degree in which we cease to depend upon belief in the supernatural, selection is enlightened and choice can be made in behalf of ideals whose inherent relations to conditions and consequences are understood."[2]

Accordingly, the piety of the modern religious man seems to consist, not in the acknowledgment of his finitude and limitedness, which require him to look up for the light of a revelation to which by natural means man cannot attain, but will be measured by the degree and quality of his allegiance to the scientific method of inquiry. In the past man has thought that he required revelation only because human knowledge was misunderstood or underrated. There was an unfounded pessimistic belief in the corruption and impotency of natural means. But to-day, it is claimed, a more just understanding and appraisal of man's possibilities and ways of knowing has severed the concept of revelation from religion. Hence, on this front also, the Christian thinker is challenged to rethink the idea of revelation.

What about the practical needs of man's life? Does modern man agree with the teachings of historical religions, that these needs require him to resort to revelation, to something transcending his natural order? Dewey says that this has again been only too true, at least in the explicit teachings of historical religions, but not always justifiably so. Moreover he expresses doubt whether even adherents of religion have really lived by their professed reliances upon the supernatural and its attendant revelation. He expresses the belief that many of these lived by the satisfactions of the natural human relations. Reference to the supernatural as the source of life and salvation has not

[1] Dewey, op. cit., pp. 38–9. [2] Ibid., pp. 56–7.

only been superfluous, but positively harmful, "in that it has obscured the real nature of the true goods of life and has weakened their force."[1]

Similarly Lippmann believes that there always have been those, even within organized religions, who rejected

"the idea of attaining salvation by placating God; in one form or another they regard salvation as a condition of the soul which is reached only by some kind of self-discipline."[2]

These are the mystics. The practical needs of life, the sense of insufficiency and sin, which have so frequently caused men to look to a supernatural source for help, needs no longer to be the experience of the modern man, we are told. Because he has a sounder psychological understanding of himself, man knows that his

"only hope of salvation lies in a religion which provides an internal discipline."[3]

V

Thus at every turn there exists a decided reversal of view between that traditionally held on the relation between religion and revelation, and that which we are told is alone valid for our modern scientific world.

The problem to be faced is, in one form, that of scientific inquiry versus divine communication. Are these mutually exclusive? Does human autonomy exclude the divine initiative and the imparting of supra-rational knowledge? In one respect, this is the problem of epistemology. In another respect, it is the general problem of reason and revelation,—the latter conceived in terms of externally mediated authoritative truth. It is the problem of Rationalism and Supernaturalism. Can the scientific, inductive method in theology lead us to God? Can a world-view which allows no place for super-nature explain the religious fact implied in the idea of revelation?

Viewed from another angle it is the problem of ethics and history. Is revelation the experience of a dynamic power which works from within, or has revelation become crystallized in a more or less static, once-for-all accomplished fact of history? Is it true, as historical religions have always claimed, that historical facts alone can serve as the source for inner experience? Is revelation subjective or objective, dynamic or static? How are we to keep the object of religious faith and the subjective

[1] Dewey, op. cit., p. 71. [2] Lippmann, op. cit., p. 196. [3] Ibid., p. 197.

apprehension of that object in sufficient juxtaposition, so that the divine may not become imprisoned in the object, or be dismissed by the vagaries of the human mind? Is it possible to naturalize the supernatural?

Because Christianity has always claimed to be a religion of revelation, it becomes clear that, if it is to continue to advance this claim, it is of the highest importance that we rethink the validity of this concept along lines suggested by the dilemma of the modern mind, as we have outlined them.

PART II

I

Let us now come face to face with the central contemporary issue in the concept of revelation. As it has so well been expressed:

> "The problem (as outlined in our previous article) is to correlate this supernatural content with the historical process by means of which it has been revealed, and to do justice at once to the superhuman fact and content, and the human media and conditions of revelation."[1]

Now this is a particularly crucial problem in our modern world. For while belief in revelation is not rejected in modern thought, yet all thought-currents to-day predispose the modern man to identify God with the course of nature, with the immanent powers operative in the world-process. All revelation viewed in terms of origin is supernatural or divine. But the manner in which it comes to man, and the content which is mediated is viewed as thoroughly natural. This being the case, the question is: do we still have revelation in the proper sense at all? In reference to the thought of W. Lippmann and John Dewey, as reviewed in our first article, this is the modern complexion of the problem.

Hence to-day we again stand face to face with the task of solving the ontological problem in its relation to revelation. Our attention to-day is drawn almost exclusively to the organs, the modes, the media of revelation,—both the objective and subjective. And the pertinent question, which chiefly interests the modern man, is in what sense we can speak of a real presence of God in any of these media. That is, when we speak of the

[1] Thomas, W. H. Griffith, *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible* (One Volume edition), Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1914, article, "Revelation", p. 795.

so-called objective organs of revelation,—Christ, the Scriptures, the Church, nature, and history,—or the subjective media,—reason, conscience, feeling, and the experience of regeneration and faith: In what sense can we speak of the real presence of God here? The modern man has no objection to conceiving God as the world-ground, as long as that reality is sought in phenomena open to his experience. If God reveals Himself, he must do so in and through these media. But that re-opens the entire problem of ontology. Can revelation of the deity be spoken of at all when we cut loose from that view of the super-natural which conceives the divine as a super-historical reality, and frankly confine ourselves to the sphere of human experience and history?

At the threshold of Protestantism the problem did not stand out in such sharp outline as this. In place of the external authority of an ecclesiastical institution, as in Catholicism, Protestantism substituted the infallible Bible. This contained an historical revelation in which every experience of saving faith has its root. Human reason, though not fully able to comprehend this revelation content, was not believed to stand in contradiction thereto. Hence the problem whether the supernatural can be naturalized and revelation remain intact was foreign to the theological conceptions of this period. The possibility, and still less the need of a dualism which would assign an autonomous sphere to both the natural and the supernatural, after the model of Catholic theology, was rejected. But the critical proportions of this way of handling the problem of revelation only became a critical problem in later theological history. In the period of Protestant Scholasticism this living union of the subjective and objective became corrupted, and the essence of revelation was pushed more and more into the objective and static phenomena of the Scriptures and creeds. The divine content of revelation was stressed to the exclusion of any adequate recognition of the human media. The ethical aspect of revelation was sacrificed for the historical.

But with the autonomy which science and its tool, the human reason, increasingly came to claim in modern times, particularly from the seventeenth century onward, the natural, subjective, and ethical aspects of divine truth claimed the right of a hearing. Up till this time history had been considered an objective phenomenon, an external attestation of meta-

physical truth, an objective divine revelation. But now it came to be used as synonymous with personal experience. First introduced as such by Lessing, it was so understood also by the Ritschlians and the Barthians. Only that is historical truth which has become part and parcel of human experience; and if there is a transcendent reference, it is inserted as a postulate. Metaphysical categories are to be rejected. Even where there is a retention of the traditional theological terminology, its original transcendent reference became thoroughly rationalized and transformed into truths of human reason.

Consequently, in Lessing's century the serious error was made of sacrificing the divine, the supernatural content of revelation for autonomous, natural, and subjective media; identifying the revelation content with ethical and rational attainments. Consequently in the eighteenth century both features of the problem of revelation became crucial. Since reason and ethics are purely human and natural capacities, the epistemological problem presented itself in all its seriousness: How can any natural human organ serve as the channel of revelation? And a further problem was: How can reason and morality with their human content be considered related to the divine? This was the ontological problem raised by Lessing.

Schleiermacher did not resolve this problem. He shifted its terms to a different sphere. For him human self-consciousness served as the best index to the nature of reality (though he was so much of a Kantian phenomenalist that he claimed not to identify such consciousness with ultimate reality). No doubt, he was more keenly aware than Lessing had been of the need of somehow justifying the discovery of metaphysical properties only in phenomenal occurrences. His conviction was that the complex human personality, especially in its lofty states of consciousness gives us the best suggestion we can have of God, though we can never know God Himself,—we can only know His operations upon us. In fact it is only at this point that we can know God at all. So even Christ took on the form of an ideal symbol of the most exalted mystic experiences of union with the Infinite, rather than that He was received as the objective historical figure of orthodox theology.

This is a crystal-clear statement of idealistic philosophy, comprising an ontological as well as an epistemological dualism. When he set up the human self-consciousness as the best

index of the nature of God, it is clear that Schleiermacher continued the subjective line of thought which pervaded the eighteenth century. If Lessing is said to have rationalized revelation in the direction of ethicism, Schleiermacher may be said to have rationalized it in the direction of psychologism. The problem of revelation remained essentially the same, however: How can the divine be naturalized or humanized, and by so doing, how can any valid concept of revelation be said to remain?

II

This was the problem inherited by Ritschl and his school. For the Ritschlians never questioned this fundamental principle of Schleiermacher's world-view, that the ultimate or ontological aspects of reality are discoverable only in phenomenal occurrences. Ritschl does assert the need of preserving the divine initiative, the supernatural content, " the divine reference of all dogmas " in the concept of revelation. But he immediately adds that a psychological analysis of the knowing process puts us under constraint always to discover the divine content wholly in its reflection in human consciousness and experience. Apart from the spiritual assimilation and acceptance of deity by man there can be no talk about the reality of God. In the employment of this subjective method and in the prominence they give to the social character of revelation content, the Ritschlians confessedly continue the Kantian idealistic tradition in theology. In revolt against what they viewed as the stifling and presumptuous speculations of Hegelianism, they joined forces with Neo-Kantian phenomenalism or dualism, and expressed their loss of faith in metaphysical categories, resting content to find the essence of religion and theological truth in the phenomenal sphere.

Ritschl justified the adoption of this subjective approach by means of a special theory of knowledge, the main insistence of which was that " we know the thing in its appearance ". Though this theory did not deny the existence of a transcendent reference, a " Ding an sich ", it did embody an unresolved despair respecting the possibility that human knowledge will ever be able to lay hold on ultimate reality. This difficulty manifested itself specifically in the Ritschlian God-concept, in which God is conceived exclusively in relational or functional terms. God is the name we give to the experience of elevated

ethical and spiritual experiences,—possibly the "Source" thereof, but He is always known as the source only in the experience itself, and if thought of as possessing an existence or reality beyond experience, that existence must not only remain unknown but unknowable.

Ritschlianism leaves us in the same impassé that the Lessing-Schleiermacher tradition does. The question remains: When by psychological necessity we are confined to phenomenal appearances, how can the divine be thought of as given or revealed? The attempt here made to divide reality into two spheres: the theoretical, metaphysical, and natural, on the one hand; and the spiritual, practical, and ethico-religious, on the other hand, results in a delusory religion and a heartless and meaningless science, and does violence to the justified demand for a unified world-view.

Value-judgements and experiences of faith, while constituting the living, throbbing reality of religion, are meaningless and empty when they are not embedded in judgements of being and reality. When therefore, in Ritschlianism the realm of reality was left open to invasion from the side of the practical judgements only by way of postulation, no sufficient ontological basis was allowed for revelation. No valid theory of revelation could be established upon the basis of a fundamentally dichotomized universe such as Ritschlianism left us. And this one-sided emphasis upon experience, involving an underestimation and even rejection of metaphysics, left the Ritschlians our debtors for a valid ontology of revelation.

This the Barthian theologians have most recently sought to supply, especially by means of its concept of "the word of God". They are making an effort to restore to the revelation-concept a vital sense of the transcendent and supernatural,—the factor of the divine sovereignty, so lacking in the preceding idealistic theologies, particularly the post-Kantian theologies of Schleiermacher and the Ritschlians.

Barthianism reflects the modern German, or even European tendency no longer to allow itself the vain comfort of a complacent, self-satisfied, and therefore unfoundedly optimistic Idealism which naïvely assumed that the content of experience is also the content of reality. Instead, with earnest missionary zeal these theologians are calling us to repent for our audacious self-reliance, and call upon us relentlessly and fearlessly to

surrender ourselves to the single inescapable Reality: God, whom experience can never grasp, but before whom we can only bow in contrite humility.

They know how to throw out this challenge so that it will make its appeal to the disillusioned modern intelligentsia. For it is a part of the courageous Realism of this school to recognize that the latter have insuperable difficulties in accepting as revelation, anything which is so obviously subject to the laws of nature, the laws of logic, and the vicissitudes of history as that which theologians in this period of Idealism had entertained as not only the media, but the essence of revelation as well. In confining divine revelation to phenomena, Idealism had converted the concept of revelation into an entity most unplausible, particularly to the post-war mentality which has failed to find anything divine or revelatory of the sublime in the entire content of culture, religion included.

The Barthians are themselves such disillusioned moderns. Hence, to guarantee revelation, they look for and discover (or shall we rather say,—are discovered by?) reality to lie utterly beyond all finite conditions and phenomena. This makes their message so timely. It presents an apologetic for revelation meant to meet the irrepressible perplexities of the highly philosophical consciousness of the man of our day, who apparently experience an insuperable revulsion against the thought that the familiar conditions of nature, the course of time, and the changes of mortality can serve as the abode of the divine.

And it is for this man that the Barthian message is expressly framed, the general tenor of which is: Happy man, if you do acknowledge that you are undone, if you do recognize your confining limitations, the contradictions of your existence and that of all finite being, the acute crisis of all things human! For then, if it please God, you may become the recipient of an overwhelming sense of Reality, then God may suddenly reveal Himself to you. For only when all self-reliance is laid aside, can assurance of true Reality come to birth, only then does revelation in all its poignant reality emerge. Remember, too, that because you did not find it in your own possession, you may never lay claim to this Reality, this revelation, graciously imparted to you. It will always remain a gift over which God alone exercises exclusive rights, though you are the recipient thereof. If this were not so, but if it would ever pass into your

possession it would fall short of being revelation, contaminated as it would thus be by virtue of its being held in possession of a finite being. Revelation is never knowledge-content, it is given only in faith, in hope. As such it does not belong to the finite temporal world. When in faith it is given to you, you are thereby made an heir of a transcendent, super-historical, supra-rational kingdom. You "have" revelation as an eschatological possession only: as "having" and yet "not having".

This is the Realism of the Barthians,—a theological Realism, a Realism of faith. On the one hand there is the human sphere, with its quality of limitation and finitude. On the other hand is the divine kingdom, with its quality of absolute unrelatedness and lack of limitation or condition. And between the two is a precipitous abyss, so that there is no possibility of passage from the one to the other. Even faith does not effect a transition which imparts to the recipient, here and now, in his empirically analysable earthly life, a confident recognition that in the divine gift a reconciliation between the divine and the human is effected. Faith only risks the belief that this is, or will be effected. It does not confidently know it, it does not own it as a warm and living possession.

It is this unresolved antithesis of the transcendent and the empirical spheres which constitutes the problem of tremendous proportions which the Barthian school leaves on our hands. In a significant digest of the writings of important contemporary Christian thinkers, Dr. Aubrey recently concluded his discussion of Barth with a critical comment corroborative of the findings of our study when he says:

> "How, with (such a) disjunctive theology . . . can one live one's natural life in the world religiously? To act one's faith requires that some possibility of connection between the created world and the kingdom of God be provided. . . . What we want to know is this: what binds man as Christian to his world?"[1]

With the Barthians as guides, we suffer another keen disappointment in our search for a view of revelation which will at once do justice to the divine content, while at the same time recognizing the inescapable need of human media. Under the guidance of Lessing, Schleiermacher and the Rischlians we are constantly being led astray by virtue of such an undue stress

[1] Aubrey, Edwin Ewart, *Present Theological Tendencies*, Harper and Bros., Second Edition, 1936, p. 88.

upon the human media that the divine content stood in jeopardy of being lost. Barthianism, however, so de-humanizes the revelation concept that it is difficult to understand how revelation can be said to be given at all.

Since Barth claims to find in the Scriptures the ultimate criterion and norm for all his teachings, and in the doctrines of the Reformation the best digest or summary of their content, it is difficult to understand how, in the light of the Biblical and Reformation doctrines of creation, providence, incarnation, and resurrection, he can continue to deny an organic synthesis of the divine and the human in revelation.

We conclude that the Barthian theology continues to err with the systems of Schleiermacher and the Ritschlians in abandoning itself to the post-Kantian dualism. This is the philosophic assumption which controls the thinking of all these schools. The error of Protestant theological thought since the year seventeen hundred is therefore in essence one, namely, the adoption of a metaphysical or ontological dualism. Though the Barthian one-sidedness has been the exact opposite of that of its predecessors, it is like it in the putting asunder of what in a valid view of revelation may never safely be divorced, —the finite and the Infinite, the human and the Divine. It is a " sine qua non " of an adequate concept of revelation that such a juxtaposition be maintained between the divine content and the human media, that the divine be not lost in the human, nor the human be lost in the divine. Either error is fatal. The first mistake was committed in the period from Lessing up to the world-war. The Barthians are the contemporary illustration of a departure on the other tangent.

III

As was explained at the beginning of this article, the problem of revelation is to correlate the supernatural content with the historical processes by means of which it has been revealed, and to do justice at once to the superhuman fact and content, and the human media and conditions of the revelation. Thus the problem of necessity revolves around these two foci. For it is involved in the very conception of revelation that the human spirit is intimately related to the divine, and that there is an interaction between them. Because revelation, the disclosure of the divine, is always realized through some human media,

it has proved to be an ever recurring temptation for theologians in the modern period, to disentangle the divine elements from the human, and to determine what is truly authoritative, what is transcendent, and what is the passing medium. But it was in yielding to this temptation that the error of abstraction was too often made, either to the disadvantage of the divine or transcendent element, or to the neglect of the human channels. The obligation to disentangle the divine and human elements too frequently was taken so seriously that the necessity of maintaining an organic union of the two factors has been neglected.

In an important sense, and speaking broadly, this struggle has been one between faith and reason,—the Barthians championing the former and the Lessing-Schleiermacher-Ritschlian tradition representing the latter cause. The slogan of the first group may be said to be the classical utterance of Tertullian: " Credo, quia absurdum est," and that of the other group the more modern-sounding, but none the less classical formula of Abelard: " Credo, ut intelligam." Now if there is anything which the history of Christian doctrine in our modern period should have taught us, it is this: that it is invalid to set these two conceptions over against each other as mutually exclusive. This is not a case of ' either-or ' but of ' both-and '. It is a false and unwarranted antithesis to cut the two ideas asunder. It is true, and a conception for the emphasizing of which the Barthians, in our day, would be given due credit and honour: that faith involves the irrational, the incomprehensible, the paradoxical, the Wholly Other. Without this there could be no talk of revelation at all. But it defeats the very possibility of revelation to insist, as they do, that the divine is " absolutely " transcendent, that there is no point of contact (Anknüpfungspunkt) whatsoever between the divine and the human, no continuity whatsoever, even though it be the divine initiative itself that throws the connecting bridge.

Though it may be the accident of birth and ecclesiastical connection that predisposes the author in the formation of his personal conclusions on the subject of this study, it has seemed to him nothing less than remarkable that in what for convenience we may call the Augustinian-Calvinistic-Reformed tradition a remarkable balance and symmetry has been maintained respecting these two factors in the doctrine of revelation.

The fundamental principle of Augustine's philosophy is

"the principle of the immediate certainty of inner experience (selbstgewissen Innerlichkeit)",[1]

and when he speaks philosophically, the very idea of God is thought

"as immediately involved in the certainty which the individual consciousness has of itself".[2]

This is because in Neo-Platonic fashion Augustine believed that we may attain to

"the immediate perception of incorporeal truths"

through the employment of the higher capacity of reason or intellect (ratio, intellectus). Reason exalts itself above individual consciousness and thus attaches itself to something

"universally valid and far reaching",[3]

to God. From this it might appear that Augustine viewed the Deity as but the sum and essence of all truth, potentially resident within human self-consciousness and reason. However, though

[3] "'all rational knowledge is ultimately knowledge of God'".

"Augustine is far from regarding the intuitive knowledge of the intelligible truths as possibly an independent production of the mind out of its own nature; . . . he must, on the contrary, regard the illumination of the individual consciousness by the divine truth as essentially an act of grace in the case of which the individual consciousness occupies an expectant and purely receptive attitude. . . . Knowledge of the truths of reason is an element in blessedness, and blessedness man owes not to his own will, but to that of God. . . . Here, where the mind stands in the presence of its Creator, it lacks not only the creative, but even the perceptive intiative".[4]

In summary, then we may say that the following is the situation: Matching the divine essence, which approaches us from without, is the inner human self-consciousness, man's subjective capacity, which in response to the Deity assimilates a certain valid knowledge of the same, though in this earthly life never a complete knowledge.

"For his incorporeal and changeless essence (essentia) far transcends all forms of relation and association that belong to human thought."[5]

Nevertheless the two together constitute an organic whole, and without both, revelation is not possible in Augustine's view.

[1] Windelband, Wilhelm, *A History of Philosophy*, Tr. by James H. Tufts, Macmillan, N.Y., 2nd Ed. Revised, 1926, p. 276.
[2] Ibid., pp. 278–9.
[3] Ibid., p. 279.
[4] Ibid., pp. 281–2.
[5] Ibid., p. 279.

Since John Calvin (1509-1564) constantly quoted Augustine and eulogized him as he did none of the other Church Fathers, we might expect to find in his exposition of Christian doctrine a recurrence of this synthesis between the objective and subjective in the experience of revelation. And this proves to be the case. For in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,[1] is presented a more comprehensive exposition of the sources and guarantee of the knowledge of God and divine things than we find in any place in Augustine's writings. Especially the nine opening chapters of the *Institutes* bear on this problem of the relation of the divine and human in the experience of revelation. It will not be possible here to expound this important treatise. Its implications, however, are made clear in the ninth chapter.

Strongly as Calvin insists here that the truth of God's Word impresses itself upon us only when the " testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum " illuminates our hearts, he carefully guards against the mysticism or spiritualism of the Anabaptists of his day, who claimed to be " taught of the Spirit ", and who claimed to have come into possession of truth which supersedes and supplants that contained in the so-called " dead and killing letter " of Scripture (I. ix. 1). On the contrary, says Calvin,

" The office of the Spirit . . . is not to feign new and unheard-of revelations or to coin a new system of doctrine, which would seduce us from the received doctrine of the Gospel, but to seal to our minds the same doctrine which the Gospel delivers " (I. ix., 1)

" God did not publish his Word to mankind for the sake of momentary ostentation with a design to destroy or annul it immediately on the advent of the Spirit; but he afterwards sent the same Spirit, by whose agency he had dispensed his Word, to complete his work by an efficacious confirmation of that Word " (I. ix. 3).

" A very different sobriety (than that exhibited by the Mystics of Calvin's day) becomes the children of God; who, while they are sensible that, exclusively of the Spirit of God, they are utterly destitute of the light of truth, yet are not ignorant that the word is the instrument, by which the Lord dispenses to believers the illumination of his Spirit. For they know no other Spirit than that who dwelt in and spoke by the apostles; by whose oracles they are continually called to the hearing of the word " (I. ix, 3).

IV

The following is a summary of Calvin's theory of knowledge, classified in terms of the two elements which constitute the knowledge relationship in respect of things divine:

[1] Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, E. T. by John Allen, sixth American edition, revised and corrected, Presbyterian Bd. of Publication and Sabbath School Work, 1921.

The following is the Key to the system of numerical notations used in citing this work: e.g. I. iii, 3, means Book I, ch. iii, section 3, etc.

The subjective side of revelation consists of:

1. The ineradicable human capacity to know and worship the Creator, in spite of the universal abuse thereof.
2. The implantation of faith, i.e. the constraining inward operation of the Holy Spirit, whereby the objectively wrought manifestation of Deity is made internally effective in human lives.

The objective side of revelation consists of:

1. The divine glory as reflected in
   a. the mirror of external physical nature, and
   b. the human constitution (physical and psychical).
2. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which serve both
   a. as the key for the understanding of the otherwise unlocked mysteries and glories of nature, and
   b. for the exposition of the doctrine of salvation, centred in the life and work of Christ.
3. The historical manifestation of God Himself in the incarnate Christ.

In appears, therefore, that it is fallacious to reserve the term revelation only for the objective factors, and then either to call the original subjective element " natural religion ", or deny that it has any bearing upon religion or revelation at all. The inward, antecedent, or prior revelation, implicit in our very being, affords the point of contact between man and God. Without a common language there can be no instruction, and before God can speak his message, we must have the capacity for understanding Him.

Yet from the inward revelation alone man could never know God. Those instincts in him which reach out to something beyond would lie dormant, and could excite nothing more than a bewilderment and vague discomfort. The inward premonition begins to have meaning only when it meets with an answer. A message must come to it from without which makes it conscious of itself, as sounds come to a child and acquaint him with his sense of hearing. It is fact of experience that the consciousness of God has always to be quickened by an impulse from without.[1] These two aspects which even a sound psychology would seem to demand are not only preserved in the Calvinistic conception of revelation, but formed into an organic whole, a synthetic unity.

A contemporary Dutch Theologian says that in the revelation which God has made to mankind we may not abstract God from His work,[2] from history, from rational experience, from conscience, or any other so-called natural phenomena.

[1] Scott, E. F., op. cit., pp. 13–14.

[2] Hepp, Valentine, *Calvinism and the Philosophy of Nature*, Stone Lectures at Princeton, 1930. Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1930, p. 84.

For they all serve as the vehicles whereby God addresses Himself to us, and therefore, as integral parts, belong to the complete framework of revelation. And as the late Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck has put it, the Scripture does speak of an established order of nature, but does not make a sharp distinction between natural and supernatural revelation. The Scriptural view is that all revelation, also that through nature, is supernatural. For the word " revelation " does not include anything respecting the method whereby anything is revealed, but only declares that something which was previously hidden becomes revealed. All revelation is supernatural in that it assumes a world behind and above the world of phenomena entering into the latter and making itself known. Hence creation, providence, and the natural human instinct to religion, all serve as avenues whereby a supernatural revelation may be given, if a personal, self-conscious, self-determining being is therein disclosed.[1]

This same writer has so beautifully expressed the hand-and-glove relationship between the objective and subjective factors which it was discovered constitutes the present problem of revelation, that we give the passage in full:—

" Consequently, to the objective revelation of God, there corresponds in man a certain faculty or aptitude of his nature to recognize the divine. God does not leave his work half finished. He not only creates the light, but also the eye to behold that light. The external corresponds to the internal. The ear has been fashioned for the world of sounds. The ' logos ' in the items of created nature corresponds with the ' logos ' in man and makes science possible. Beauty in nature finds an answering echo in aesthetic sensibility. Likewise there is not only an external, objective revelation, but an internal, subjective revelation as well. The former is the ' principium cognoscendi externum ' of religion, the latter is the ' principium cognoscendi internum '. Both ' principia ' stand related to each other in the most intimate fashion, like the light to the eye, and like rationality in the world to the human reason."[2]

" Aan de objectieve openbaring Gods correspondeert dus in den mensch eene zekere ' facultas', ' aptitudo' ' zijner' natuur, om het goddelijke op te merken. God doet geen half werk. Hij schept het licht niet alleen, maar ook het oog, om dat licht te aanschouwen. Aan het uitwendige beantwoordt het inwendige. Het oor is aangelegd op de wereld der tonen. De ' logos ' in de schepselen correspondeert met den ' logos ' in den mensch en maakt wetenschap mogelijk. Het schoone in de natuur vindt weerklank in zijn schoonheidsgevoel. En zoo is er niet alleen eene uitwendige, objectieve, maar ook eene inwendige, subjectieve openbaring. Gene is het ' principium cognoscendi externum ' van de religie, en deze het ' principium cognoscendi internum.' Beide principia staan ten nauwtse met elkaar in verband, zooals het licht met het oog, de gedachte in de wereld met de reder in den mensch."

Only when these two elements are clearly apprehended as complementary, not as exclusive, are we assured of a sound

[1] Bavinck, Herman, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 4 Vol., J. H. Kok, Kampen, 4th unaltered Edition, 1928, Vol. I., pp. 278–9.

[2] Bavinck, H., ibid., Vol. I., p. 253.

concept of revelation. Nature and grace, creation and recreation, the world of reality and the world of value-judgements are not two, but indissolubly one. To think otherwise has been the error of the theology dominated by the critical Kantian philosophy. In these systems revelation has been illegitimately bifurcated into two spheres. This may not be done. For without a genuine divine revelation in nature, history, and conscience the so-called special revelation of supernatural or spiritual truths loses contact with the whole of cosmic reality.

V

The single issue to which our entire study has led, is the discovery of the fatal fallacy of divorcing the subjective and objective in revelation. The necessity of maintaining a conjunction of these two elements is the perennial obligation of the Christian Church. Failing this, we shall have a warped, and therefore untrue conception of that which constitutes the very essence of religion, and of Christianity in particular. For religion is bound up with the idea of revelation. But religion, even in its crudest forms, assumes the existence of a different order, which we cannot know unless it is revealed. The Holy One who is enthroned above is known also as the pervading presence in the world around us. He is at once the Majesty in the heavens, whom men are to worship with infinite awe, and a God near to us, with whom we can hold the closest fellowship. Both conceptions are felt to be necessary, and a danger arises when they are kept separate. When all stress is laid on God's transcendence, as in Barthianism, He becomes unreal and remote; when He becomes purely immanent, as He frequently threatens, and often in reality does become in the period from Lessing to Barth, we have the pantheistic confusion of God with moral achievements and with enthusiasm for scientific research (as in Lessing), with a mystical absorption of the soul into itself or into the All (as in Schleiermacher), or the release of values and ideals inherent in man's moral nature (as in Ritschlianism). Instead of this unnatural severance, the two conceptions must go together. They are but two different modes of apprehending the same reality, which is at once the ground of all being, and stands apart from it.

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