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DEI VERBUM AND DIVINE REVELATION

This contribution starts by looking at Dei Verbum and at the Holy Scripture. To deepen the understanding of revelation, it recalls Dulles' "Models of Revelation." In concluding the author offers a Word-Spirit-approach, inspired by some evangelical theologians. The article limits its scope to few, but very basic aspects of revelation, trying to underline once more the importance of Dei Verbum for developments in theology through the past 50 years.

When in the 1990s I first read *Church: The Human Story of God* by Edward Schillebeeckx,¹ I was already fascinated by the beginning of his foreword: "A small boy is said to once have remarked, 'People are the words with which God tells his story.' ..."² The book did not disappoint me—it is exactly about this, people in and through whose stories God is telling God's story. Revelation is not about magisterial propositions, but about human experiences of the divine. And these experiences happen in the midst of this world of ours and radiate the deep human longing for liberation and salvation. *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II permits a new approach to revelation. It starts with God speaking to humans as friends ...

1. *Dei Verbum*

The Second Vatican Council in the preface of its dogmatic constitution on divine revelation *Dei Verbum*³ recalls words of the first letter of John which express the subject, the manner, the mode of trans-

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¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, London: SCM Press 1990.

² *Ibid.*, xiii.

³ *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum*, solemnly promulgated by his Holiness Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965 (DV).

mission and, finally, the ultimate goal of revelation: “We announce to you the eternal life which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we announce to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our common fellowship be with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn 1:2-3). The “Word of God,” giving its programmatic name to *Dei Verbum*, is not primarily the written word (of Scripture) or some dogmatic information about God, but it is the WORD made flesh, the son of God, who is sent by the Father to include all peoples in the Holy Spirit into the Trinitarian loving fellowship of God. The *content* of revelation is “eternal life,” i.e. God. The *manner* of revelation is the historical event Jesus Christ who by his living presence reveals God the Father. The *transmission* of this revelation happens through witnessing of those who have seen and heard. The *goal* of revelation is communion of people with God and among themselves.

The council “takes its direction from these words of St. John”⁴ and consequently this line of thinking continues:

“In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph 2:18; 2 Pet 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col 1:15, 1 Tim 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.”⁵

Dei Verbum presents “Divine Revelation” in five chapters. Here we offer only a short overview:

Chapter One: Divine Revelation Itself. God wants us to know his love for us. Revelation is not just words about God; it is a living expe-

⁴ DV 1.

⁵ DV 2.

rience of God. God does not just reveal in word how best we should live, but God reveals himself as well. As revelation unfolds, we become more aware of how God is ultimately over all things and God is complete in himself. In coming to know more what God is like, we come to understand the purpose of our human existence. Besides dying to save us, Jesus makes known our human connection to God. Jesus is both message and messenger. Jesus reveals that God has called us to himself and promises that salvation will ultimately lead to divine closeness. The Father sent the Son so he could tell us about the inner life of God. Jesus is not only the Word made flesh; he leads us to eternal life. Jesus is revelation in its completeness. There is no greater or necessary revelation than this. All things are made full in Jesus. The Holy Spirit was sent to bring us to completion. The Holy Spirit provides us with God's grace so God's revelation takes root.

Chapter Two: The Transmission. In the very early church they preached and taught orally. They set an example by the way they lived. In time it became necessary to be inspired by the Holy Spirit to write down God's message. The Apostles handed on the authority to teach to the bishops who took their places. Through the unending line of succession the bishops are to secure and protect the Word of God and to see that it is kept intact to the end of time. The Word is the gift of faith, freely given by God, and faith develops through the Holy Spirit. Development of faith happens when we study, contemplate and put belief into action. This is why Sacred Scripture and church tradition are closely connected and important for the growth of one's faith. Scripture is the Word of God—the Old Testament and the New Testament. Tradition is the Word of God passed on to us in various forms: liturgy, prayers, and the teachings of the Apostles and their successors. The bishops are charged with the duty to hand on the Word of God entrusted to them. The magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but its servant. All the members make up the church and all have a role to play in communicating God's Word.

Chapter Three: Divine Inspiration and Interpretation. Those chosen wrote down words inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit revealed what God desired to be written. None of the Scripture writers were robbed of human intelligence or knowledge, but in a special way their human characteristics, including their limitations, were used to deliver God's message faithfully.

Chapter Four: The Old Testament. Israel was chosen by God to establish a covenant of love with humankind. They were chosen to experience divine love and through this experience become an example for all nations. The Old Testament remains significant because it communicates how God remained active in human history and because it reveals

the plan of God to prepare for the coming of Jesus. The Old Testament offers us a wealth of prayers and insight into God's relationship with God's chosen people. The mystery of salvation is in the midst of the Old Testament and so has enduring value.

Chapter Five: The New Testament. The Gospel writers told the story of Jesus in such a way that the present church in its own time and place would understand the truth of salvation. In the New Testament salvation is completely released. In Christ the kingdom of God becomes already a reality, though not yet completed. Jesus reveals the Father and completes God's plan. The four Gospels are at the center of the New Testament. They present new ways of relating with God; they invite us to understand how our lives are meant to be lived. The other books of the New Testament show the development of the early Christian community and its theological reflection.

Chapter Six: Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church. Scripture and Eucharist are both celebrated in liturgy. The Word of God supports the church and strengthens it. The true story of theology rests in Scripture. We must come to know Scripture more and more, for through Scripture we meet Christ. To be uninformed of Scripture is to lack serious knowledge of Jesus and his message. The Word of God wants to give a direction to life and animate Christians to live and act accordingly. This Word has to be translated into and connected with the many and diverse human contexts.

In *Verbum Domini* we read: "Everyone is aware of the great impulse which the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* gave to the revival of interest in the word of God in the life of the Church, to theological reflection on divine revelation and to the study of sacred Scripture."⁶ This contribution will, encouraged by *Dei Verbum*, look at some points about revelation in Scripture and ask the question about how to deal with revelation today. *Dei Verbum*, 50 years ago, presented a new perspective that was already in 1966 commented on by René Latourelle in his *Theology of Revelation*,⁷ a reflection we are still grateful to have.

2. In Revelation God Speaks to People

Any individual Christian's understanding of God's revelation is conditioned by a great variety of factors. These include the person's ecclesi-

⁶ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini. On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Rome 2010, Nr. 3.

⁷ René Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation*, New York: Alba House 1966.

astical tradition, personal context (sex, age, marital status, education), social position (social “class,” profession, wealth, environment), personality, and culture (worldview, language, etc.). Traditionally we have recognized the existence (even if not the validity) of only the first factor, that is, the differences caused by ecclesial traditions. In more recent years we have begun to accept the role of culture in religion and religious experience. The other factors are, however, equally (if not more) important. A black migrant worker in Johannesburg, for instance, may have a perception of Christian faith very different from that of a white civil servant in the same city, even if both are members of the Dutch Reformed Church. A peasant in the Nicaragua of President Somoza, as Ernesto Cardenal’s *The Gospel in Solentiname* has illustrated so graphically, may understand the gospel in a way that disagrees profoundly from that of a New York businessman, even if they both happen to be Catholics. In each case the individual’s self-understanding plays a crucial role in his or her interpretation and experience of the revelation.

Edward Schillebeeckx speaks about “the experience of radical contrast in our human history.”⁸ There are important human experiences that he calls negative experiences of contrast: “They form a basic human experience which as such I regard as being a pre-religious experience and thus a basic experience accessible to all human beings, namely that of a ‘no’ to the world as it is.” He refers to everyday realities—“what we experience as reality, what we also see and hear of this reality daily through television and other mass media, is evidently not ‘in order’ ... The reality is full of contradictions.”⁹ And he continues to underline that there is much in this reality that is basis and source of a fundamental “no” that people say to their actual situations. On the other side, there is goodness and beauty ... “But all these fragments of goodness, beauty and meaning are constantly contradicted and crushed by evil and hatred, by suffering ... by the misuse of power and terror.”¹⁰ Such experiences of reality result from the contexts of our globalized world. And it is in this world that people experience God’s presence that makes them talk about and believe in divine revelation.

Revelation in its *colloquial* meaning is the unexpected experience of a significant fact. Revelation means that something hidden, a thing, a person, or a mystery is being revealed (lat. *revelare*), made knowable,

⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, 5ff.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

approachable. Because the truth is the un-concealed, revelation has always something to do with truth ...

In a *religious studies* perspective, it is the appearance or influence of the divine in the world. Etymologically, revelation is neither a Christian nor a purely religious term. On the other hand, the term is not limited to Christianity if it is used in a religious sense. All religions exist in their essence because of the fact that God or the divine reveals itself to human beings and that human beings strive to live accordingly ...

The term “revelation” shows that each religion in its self-understanding is not a human creation, but of non-human origin. Revelation is also the knowledge which, according to the religions, doesn’t grow out of human perception and cannot be controlled by humans, including, for example, norms for a certain way of life, etc. The origin/beginning of revelation is in all religions the non-human, the divine ...

In the *Christian theological* sense, it is the radical and total self-communication of God as the absolute mystery, a self-communication that occurs in history through words, deeds, and events and that reaches its climax in Jesus Christ. This divine self-communication is mediated through the Holy Spirit and unfolds its efficacy for salvation when it is accepted in faith by human beings.

3. Revelation in Scripture¹¹

The Bible shows us God “speaking,” and it is the characteristic of spoken language not merely to communicate a message, but also to reveal the personality of the speaker. Furthermore, the process of speaking is a two-way process, because it involves a listening and it invites a response. Speaking reveals the speaker. When God spoke to Israel, he revealed himself as a “living God,” whose vitality was apparent in his actions. Thus revelation for the Hebrews was the self-manifestation of God—a real meeting with him. It was the historical self-communication of this God to a people who were made particularly aware of his presence and his activity, a people deeply marked by extraordinary religious experiences. Since this self-revelation was historical, it was bound by the limitation of a language, a culture, a particular time and place. Reading the Bible, we become contemporaries of the ancient Israelites and we, too, meet God through their culture and their history.

¹¹ Cf. Aylward Shorter, *Revelation and Its Interpretation*, London: Geoffrey Chapman 1983.

Revelation as presented in the Bible involves a number of related ideas. Revelation is fundamentally God himself in his own self-manifestation; but it is also the process of that self-manifestation. This process involves the human experience of God's self-manifestation and it also involves the disclosure of a message, purpose or plan for humanity. Revelation takes place through and within human experience, an experience which invites reflection, understanding, concern and, ultimately, decision. The notion, already at the etymological level, of revelation denotes an "unveiling" of something hidden, a mystery that requires a special perception in order to fathom it. It has an ambiguous quality and it is an invitation to probe further. The call of God revealing himself is aptly depicted in the fascination of Moses on Mount Horeb or Sinai (Ex 3:2-4).

Revelation is given especially to a few, chosen, perceptive or charismatic individuals who develop a special relationship with the divine and a consistent response to it. This response they feel compelled to communicate to others so that others become aware of the actuality of God's presence, of his will and his promise, and they, in their turn, "see" and "hear" something of what has first been revealed with such intensity. They also receive the message and the interpretation of the historical events they are experiencing.

However, more than mere communication of meaning, of truths or propositions, more than the communication of a divine vitality, biblical revelation is interpersonal. It is a personal communion between God and the human person. It is the discovery of who Yahweh is and what he is like. It is a non-verbal self-disclosure. God is known, as we know other persons—through a relationship of affection, of loyalty, of acceptance. Even more than this, it is *belonging* to the other, being completely possessed by someone or something beyond ourselves. It creates trust, security and joy, even in suffering, incomprehension and trials. God is blessedness for us, "a physical totality," as Walter Eichrodt calls it, which awakens not merely our curiosity, but enlarges our understanding of a mystery, the mystery which underlies all else in our whole experience—God's self-giving to us.¹² This personal communion between God and his chosen one(s) implies two important further ideas—those of election and covenant. The second of these belongs, perhaps, more properly to a detailed consideration of Israel's history in a later section of this chapter, but the first can be conveniently treated here.

¹² Walther Eichrodt, *A Theology of the Old Testament*, London: SCM Press 1961, 40.

God's revelation or gift of himself is a completely, an infinitely, free act. Although God is presented in the Old Testament as the Holy One and the source of holiness itself, this is not really a question, as Eichrodt shows, of an elevated moral standard.¹³ God is holy because he is "other" and "separated." His holiness is an overwhelming power, an unapproachable majesty which is simply one of his qualities as God. In the priestly tradition of the Bible which places the emphasis on worship, God's holiness appears as "perfection," as cultic purity and integrity. In this tradition the various taboos or prohibitions which surrounded the Temple worship and gave physical expression to God's holiness and otherness were given a conscious meaning and an eventual moral explanation. It was only by slow degrees that the idea of Yahweh as being "moral" and "good" permeated the religious thinking of Israel and acted as a corrective in its ideas about how he behaved.

In Israel's experience of God as a person, the concept of election was dominant. Whenever God acted it was the voluntary engagement of his sovereign freedom. God had unlimited power and yet he freely limited that power and bound himself by promises when he chose a person or a nation and committed himself in fidelity to them. Moreover, Yahweh did not choose anyone because of his or her merits. No one deserved to be chosen. On the contrary, Yahweh's fidelity was only matched by the recurrent—one might say, the constant—infidelity of those he chose. Even Moses, the "first missionary" to Israel, the one who spoke "face to face" with Yahweh, was unfaithful and was not allowed by Yahweh to enter the Promised Land. It was eventually the prophet Hosea who reflected most deeply on the motive behind God's paradoxical choices and who saw that motive as one of love—a love that was unrequited, the wooing of a "wanton." This idea was carried over into the Deuteronomic revision of the Law which stresses God's love and his pure favor of grace in choosing Israel. God's free choice was exercised in love. His choice was disconcerting and unexpected. He chose a rootless and enslaved people, a people wandering and lost in a desert wilderness. He chose prophets in spite of their reluctance, or even against their will: Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah. He chose leaders from their childhood, even from their mother's womb, Samson and Samuel for example. He chose Saul as king from the smallest tribe, that of Benjamin; and he chose David, the shepherd boy, whom everyone had forgotten, to be Saul's royal successor. God's favor made weak people strong and gave them victory against all odds. All these stories celebrate one basic idea—the sovereign freedom of God.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 276.

The Bible itself points out that “no one has ever seen God” (Jn 1:18). And yet we talk *about* God and *in the name* of God all the time. From where do we derive our “information” about God? How does God communicate with us? Under what conditions and circumstances does such communication occur? How can we be sure that we have, in fact, been “in touch with” God rather than with our own wish-projections and imaginings, as Freud contended? Does God communicate with others besides ourselves? Or is God hidden, by deliberate design, from great segments of the human family?

3.1 Revelation in the Old Testament

Karl Rahner represents the whole biblical age from Abraham to the birth of Jesus Christ, some two thousand years in all, as nothing other than the brief moment that inaugurates the Christ-event.¹⁴ Of all human history, it is the most immediate and proximate preparation for the life and death of Christ. It is Christ’s pre-history, and for Christians that is its value. If God speaks his word to us in the collective memory of the Christian tradition, then we must go back to the history of ancient Israel, to Moses and to Abraham, in order to understand that tradition and the process as well as the product of that revelation.

What characterizes the religion of the Old Testament is its claim of an intervention on the part of God in history, an intervention due solely to God’s free choosing. This intervention is conceived of under the form of an encounter between two people: one person speaking and the other person listening and answering. God addresses people as a master does servants; God asks a question, the human person, hearing God, answers by faith and obedience. The fact and content of this communication are called revelation.¹⁵

Divine revelation in word and deed is central to the Old Testament: “The deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them.”¹⁶ At the heart of Israel’s faith are the conviction and affirmation that God has intervened in history, modifying the course of Israel’s historical experience and the lives of individuals within Israel.

¹⁴ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd 1978, 166-167.

¹⁵ Cf. Latourelle, Chapter I: Revelation in the Old Testament, 21ff.

¹⁶ DV 2.

Although the Old Testament does not use the technical term *revelation* to describe this process, the expression “word of Yahweh” seems to come closest in meaning. Even in the case of the *theophanies* (e.g., Yahweh’s appearance in human form to Abraham to announce the birth of Isaac and the destruction of Sodom, Gen 18:1-33), it is not the fact of *seeing* God that is primary in importance but rather the fact of *hearing* God’s word, as manifested in the events of history.

Early creedal statements (Deut 6:20-25; 26:5-10; Josh 24:2-13), hymns (Ex 15:1-18), psalms (Ps 78, 105, 106), and narrative accounts (Joshua to Kings) affirm God’s self-disclosure in history. God is also revealed in the glory of nature (Ps 8, 104) and in religious experience, especially in a liturgical setting (Ps 18:6; 48:9).

*3.2 Moments of the History of Revelation*¹⁷

René Latourelle presents eight moments of the history of revelation in the Old Testament.

1. *The most ancient phase of revelation seems to be primarily bound up with theophanies and manifestations of an oracular nature.* The earliest stage of revelation in the Old Testament is characterized by the predominance of theophanies and oracles. Yahweh appears in order to conclude an alliance and changes the name of Abram to Abraham (Gen 17:1-22; for other appearances to Isaac and Jacob see Gen 26:2; 32:25-31; 35:9). It is impossible, however, to determine precisely the nature of such manifestations. At times they are presented as if they were external visions and at other times as internal ones. In general, the Old Testament reflected its own Oriental milieu. That is to say that the Bible employs techniques that were characteristic of its cultural environment: e.g., divination, dreams, omens. These were, of course, purified of their polytheistic or magical connotations. Before a war or the conclusion of a treaty, Israel would “consult” God through its seers and especially its priests (1 Sam 14:36; 22:15). Israel acknowledged that God could be revealed in dreams (Gen 20:3; 28:12-15; 37:5-10; 1 Sam 28:6; 1 Kings 3:5-14). Joseph excelled in the interpretation of dreams (Gen 40-41). Gradually, Israel began to distinguish between dreams by which God truly communicated with the prophets (Num 12:6; Deut 13:2) and those of the professional seers (Jer 23:25-32; Isa 28:7-13).

2. *The covenant at Sinai is a decisive moment in the history of revelation.* It can be understood only in the light of the whole historic process of which it is the goal and fulfillment. Through this covenant

¹⁷ I am following here Latourelle, 22-29.

Yahweh, who had proved His power and faithfulness to Israel, makes this people his property and becomes the head of the nation. The Sinai Covenant is a decisive movement in the history of revelation, but it can be appreciated only in the light of the entire history of salvation. Through the Covenant, Yahweh became head of the nation and delivered Israel from Egypt. In return, Yahweh exacted a pledge of fidelity to the Law (Ex 20:1-17) or to the “ten commandments” (Ex 34:28). The Law discloses the divine will. Obedience brings blessings; transgression brings malediction. The whole destiny and subsequent history of Israel was now tied inextricably to the will of God as manifested in the event by which Israel was liberated from the bondage of Egypt. The prophets never ceased to apply to the events of their own day the implications of the Sinai Covenant. Whatever legislation followed was considered a prolongation of the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments.

3. *Prophecy represents a new stage in the history of the word.* The phenomenon of prophecy also enters into the Old Testament’s basic notion of revelation. *Moses* is the prototype of the prophets (Deut 34:10-12; 18:15.18), but it is only with *Samuel* that prophecy becomes a frequent occurrence in the history of Israel (1 Sam 3:1-21). *Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah*, the prophets who preceded the Exile (which lasted from the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. to the Edict of Cyrus in 538 B.C.), conceived themselves as guardians and defenders of the moral order prescribed by the Covenant. Their preaching is always a call to justice, to fidelity, to the service of the all-powerful God. But because of Israel’s frequent infidelity to the Covenant, the divine word uttered by the prophets more often than not brought condemnations and warnings of punishment (Am 4:1; 5:1; 7:10-11; Hos 8:7.14; 13:15; Mic 6-7; Isa 1:10-20; 16:13-14; 28:13; 30:12-13; 37:22; 39:5.7). *Jeremiah* occupies a particularly important place here because he attempted, differently to the others who did not discuss it, to determine the criteria by which the authentic word of God could be recognized: (1) the fulfillment of the word of the prophet, i.e., what the prophet announces to happen, happens (Jer 28:9; 32:6-8; Deut 18:21-22); (2) the prophecy’s fidelity to Yahweh and to the traditional religion (Jer 23:13-32); and (3) the often heroic witness of the prophet himself (Jer 1:4-6; 26:12-15). For Jeremiah, the word of Yahweh is always superior to himself and to everything else. Yahweh places the word in his mouth as if it were a material object (1:9). At times it provides delicious nourishment (15:16); at other times, it is a source of torment (20:9.14). Through the word, Israel is summoned to fidelity to the Law and the Covenant. It is a word of independent and irresistible dynamism and force: “Is not my word like

fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" (23:29).

4. *Deuteronomy* stands at the confluence of two currents. Under this double influence, both theology and law gain in depth. With the book of Deuteronomy the two currents, legal and prophetic, converge. The connection between *Law (Torah)* and *Covenant* is emphasized more than ever. The history of Israel is the history of its fidelities and infidelities to both. If Israel wishes to live, it must put into practice every word of the Law (Deut 29:28), for this Law from God is the source of all life (32:47). Deuteronomy also enlarged upon the meaning of the "word of Yahweh" already given in Exodus. It no longer applies only to the Ten Commandments but to every clause of the Covenant (28:69), i.e., to the whole corpus of moral, civil, religious, and criminal laws. It placed everything under the heading of the Mosaic Law (28:69; 30:14; 32:47). The word of the Law is something to be interiorized: "No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe" (30:14). The Law consists precisely in this: "You will seek the Lord, your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your whole heart and soul" (4:29).

5. The *historical literature* (Judges, Samuel, Kings) is a history of salvation and a theology of history. Parallel to the prophetic and Deuteronomic currents is the historical literature (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings), which places the word of God in an even more thoroughly historical context. Hereafter, Israel would never think of its religion apart from the category of *history*. It is the word of God which makes history and renders it intelligible. Throughout the long history of the kings, the words of Yahweh penetrate the course of events and express their religious significance (e.g., 1 Kings 2:41; 3:11-14; 6:11-13; 2 Kings 9:7-10; 21:10-15). A particularly significant text is the *prophecy of Nathan* (2 Sam 7) which provides the foundation for royal messianism. By reason of this prophecy the dynasty of David became directly and forever allied to Yahweh (2 Sam 7:16; 23:5). This prophecy, furthermore, is the point of departure for a theology, elaborated by the prophets, which is eminently one of *promise*, turned always toward the *future*, in contrast to the theology built on the Sinai Covenant, whose demands are meant to apply to the present moment.

6. At the time of the *exile*, the prophetic word, without ceasing to be a living word, *becomes more and more a written word*. The word, confided to *Ezekiel* is inscribed on a scroll which the prophet had to assimilate before he could preach its contents (Ezek 3:1-3). It remains always a word of *judgment*. Ezekiel repeats the refrain that Yahweh does acts of judgment in order that Israel might know that their God is Yahweh, that it is Yahweh who acts, and that Yahweh is holy

(6:14; 7:9, 27; 11:12; 12:20; 13:23). Ezekiel meantime attempts to form a new Israel during its period of exile. His word is also a word of *comfort and hope* (33:1-9). But it is never enough simply to hear the word; one must live it (33:32). In Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40-55) the word is boldly personified as a dynamic reality which creates history itself. It dominates history (45:19; 48:16). “So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (55:11).

7. The *sapiential literature* represents a very ancient tradition in Israel ... Yahweh is revealed, finally, in the *wise conduct of the faithful of Israel*. The wise person is the one who fulfills the Law of God (Sir 15:1; 19:20; 24:23; Eccl 12:13), for all *wisdom* comes from God (Prov 2:6). The wisdom of God is manifested in the works of God and is communicated to those who love God (Sir 1:8-10; Wis 9:2; Job 28:12-27). Wisdom comes forth from the mouth of God from the very beginning of the world (Sir 24:3-31). Thus, wisdom is itself identified with the word of God. It is at once creative and revealing (Wis 7-9). Indeed, *creation* itself discloses the reality of God. The whole created order gives echo to the word of the One who named its creatures, and these created beings manifest the divine presence, majesty, and wisdom (Ps 19:2-5; Job 26:7-13; Prov 8:23-31; Sir 42:15-25, 43; Wis 13:1-9).

8. *The Psalter* is primarily an answer to revelation; but it is revelation, too, for the prayer of men, through the sentiments which it expresses, gives revelation its full scope and breadth.

3.3 Revelation in the New Testament¹⁸

The notion of revelation, in the New Testament, presents a complexity and richness of tone far superior to that of the Old Testament. Between the two covenants, one pivotal event has taken place: “*God, who at sundry times and in divers manner spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all in these days has spoken to us by His Son*” (Heb 1:1). In Jesus Christ, the inner Word of God, in whom God expresses God totally and knows all things, was made flesh and became Gospel, word of salvation, to call humanity to salvation. In Jesus Christ, Incarnate Word, the Son is present in our midst and in human terms that we can understand and assimilate, He speaks,

¹⁸ See also: Shorter, in Shorter, *Revelation*, 102 ff.: Jesus, the “exegete” of the Old Testament.

preaches, testifies to what He has seen and heard in the bosom of the Father. Christ is the summit and fullness of revelation ...¹⁹

Reversing Rahner's dictum that the Old Testament is the "pre-history of Christ," René Latourelle has called Jesus of Nazareth the "exegete" of the Old Testament. In other words, while the New Testament cannot be understood except with reference to the Old Testament, it is the New Testament which is normative.

The Old Testament begs for fulfillment and it is abundantly clear that the texts of the New Testament regard Jesus of Nazareth as being—in a very special way—the "fulfillment" of the Old Testament ...

Jesus, unlike the Old Testament prophets, was not a mere "speaking tube" for God. He was himself the epiphany or manifestation of God. In him, in his very own person, in his humanity and in the events of his human life and death, his contemporaries had a direct experience of God. James Dunn says that Jesus was thought of as "the climactic embodiment of God's power and purpose ... God's clearest self-expression, God's last word." Jesus did not merely reveal what God was like, he revealed God. Edward Schillebeeckx describes Jesus as communicating in his person the communion of God with humankind, the unexpected grace of God's free and benevolent love.²⁰ It is this loving favor of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, that the author of the prologue of John's gospel opposes to the Mosaic law. For the New Testament writers, this particular event—the historic life of Jesus of Nazareth—was an event of decisive importance for the salvation of the world. "Jesus Christ," writes Walter Kasper, "is the final self-definition of God, of the world and of man." The Christ-event was "the moment of final truth," the *kairos*, the fullness of time.²¹

There is, therefore, a specifically Christian exegesis of the Old Testament—not the only possible exegesis, but the only possible one in the light of Jesus Christ's life and death. Many of the specific New Testament claims that Jesus fulfilled this or that "prophecy" or "promise" appear superficial to us. Many ignore the original context, or smack of manipulation, to make the events fit the prophecy. It would be naïve for us, nevertheless, to dismiss the argumentation as irrelevant or untrue. The specific instances of fulfillment cited by the New Testament writers are indications of a deeply rooted faith that Jesus is the fulfiller of the Scriptures in a profoundly relational and organic sense. The fundamental claim is being made that God's active involvement

¹⁹ Read: Latourelle, Chapter II: Revelation in the New Testament, 45ff.

²⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, London: SCM 1980, 468.

²¹ Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, London: Burns & Oates 1977, 185.

with human history and the created world, instanced over and over again in the Old Testament, is now centered upon the human life and death of Jesus. *He interprets the Scriptures for us, but he also “interprets” us!* He confronts and challenges us through the New Testament texts, forcing us to a decision. Jesus, therefore, is “our” exegete also, telling us who and what we are and what our destiny is, what choices lie before us. It is this central position of Jesus in our history that gives the Old Testament an importance for Christians and which allows us to see God’s final self-revelation as having its beginning in the history and culture of Israel.

4. Models of Revelation

Jesuit theologian Avery Dulles discerns five basic “models” or types of theological understanding of revelation in contemporary theology. While these types are only intended as schematic generalizations, they uncover the principal issues debated in current thought about revelation. After examining each in detail, Dulles draws upon all of them to suggest a contemporary theology of revelation based on the concept of symbol.²²

4.1 Summary of the Models

A short look at these five models may give an idea of developments in the theology of revelation. For each model also negative as well as positive conclusions will be indicated.

Model 1. Revelation as Doctrine

According to this view revelation is principally found in clear propositional statements attributed to God as authoritative teacher. For Protestants who accept this approach, revelation is generally identified with the Bible, viewed as a collection of inspired and inerrant teachings. For Catholic representatives of this approach, revelation is to be found, at least most accessibly, in the official teaching of the Church, viewed as God’s infallible oracle. The truth of the teaching is held to be recognizable by external signs (miracles and the like), but some proponents of this position, both Protestant and Catholic, regard interior grace as a necessary precondition not only for the response of faith but even for perceiving the force of the evidence.

²² Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1983.

According to this model, revelation does not initially occur in the form of propositions, still less that of prefabricated propositions miraculously inserted into the human mind. Nor can revelation be adequately transposed into any determinate set of propositions. The statements in Scripture and tradition represent valid though limited aspects of revelation as seen from particular points of view.

Revelation has cognitive value that can be expressed, to some content, in true propositions. The truth of these propositions is permanent and universal in the sense that, if they are ever authorized by revelation, they at no time or place become false in their own terms. The propositions help to establish the context in which the symbols yield their revelatory meaning.

This model can be found in neo-scholastic theology, based on the understanding also of the First Vatican Council.²³

Model 2. Revelation as History

This type of theory, proposed in conscious opposition to the preceding, maintains that God reveals himself primarily in his great deeds, especially those which form the major themes of biblical history. The Bible and the official teaching of the Church are considered to embody revelation only to the extent that they are reliable reports about what God has done. Although some adherents of this approach look upon biblical and ecclesiastical teaching as revelation in a derivative sense, most prefer to say that the Bible and church teaching are rather *witnesses* to revelation.

Revelation is not a series of events in the remote past, recoverable only through historical-critical method. While historical investigation can always be useful, it does not by itself yield revelation. Granted the nature of the biblical materials and the antiquity of the events, dispassionate, academic history is rarely capable of reconstructing the revelatory events in detail. The process whereby revelatory meaning is discerned in the events is not a matter of formal inference, but a synthesis of subsidiarily known clues. The events of biblical history, as seen in the framework of Scripture and Christian tradition, are disclosive of God.

²³ Vatican I (1869-1870), *Dei Filius*: What is revealed is God and the eternal decrees of the divine will. The content is accepted on the authority of God, with the help of divine grace, not on the basis of rational argument. Cf. J. Neuner/J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, New York: Alba House⁶1996, Chapter I: Revelation and Faith, 33-88; 42ff.: *Dei Filius* and Revelation.

The chief symbols of biblical and Christian revelation are given in a specific history mediated to every generation through the canonical Scriptures, read in the light of living and ongoing tradition. The events, attributable in their specificity to God as agent, convey a divinely intended meaning, discernible with particular clarity and assurance by prophetically endowed interpreters.

Representatives of this model would be German Protestant theologians W. Pannenberg, J. Moltmann and Catholic theologian J.B. Metz.²⁴

Model 3. Revelation as Inner Experience

For some modern theologians, both Protestant and Catholic, revelation is neither an impersonal body of objective truths nor a series of external, historical events. Rather it is a privileged interior experience of grace or communion with God. Although this perception of the divine is held to be immediate to each individual, some proponents of this position say that the experience of grace depends on the mediation of Christ, who experienced the Father's presence in a unique and exemplary way.

Revelation is not an ineffable mystical encounter between God and the individual soul. While mystical experiences of union may sometimes be authentic, they do not by themselves yield a determinate revelation. For them to be interpreted in a theistic or Christian sense, one must rely on the mediation of Christian symbols, traditions and doctrines.

By evoking participation, the revelatory symbols mediate a lived, personal communion with God, which is, in its way, immediate. This may be described as an experience of God or of grace, provided that God or grace is not depicted as an object to be encountered but as a horizon within which inner-worldly objects are encountered.

Edward Schillebeeckx may be mentioned as representative of this model.²⁵

Model 4. Revelation as Dialectical Presence

A number of European theologians, especially in the years following World War I, repudiated both the objectivism of the first two

²⁴ See, for example: W. Pannenberg, *Offenbarung als Geschichte*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1982; J. Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung*, München: Chr. Kaiser 1985; J. B. Metz, *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag 1992.

²⁵ Cf. Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*.

types of revelation theology and the subjectivism of the third. God, they insisted, could never be an object known either by inference from nature or history, by propositional teaching, or by direct perception of a mystical kind. Utterly transcendent, God encounters the human subject when it pleases him by means of a word in which faith recognizes him to be present. The word of God simultaneously reveals and conceals the divine presence.

Revelation is not an unintelligible word or an absurd message to be accepted in a blind leap of faith. It has a content beyond the mere fact of revelation itself. It does not occur in a time wholly incommensurable with chronological time nor without continuity with other events in history.

The words of Scripture and Christian proclamation are dynamic. They are, under favorable circumstances, imbued with the power of God who speaks and acts through them. The word is an event as well as a content, and the word-event exceeds all that can be said about it in a clear propositional speech. Especially when the revelatory events are seen as visible words, the word takes on characteristics like those we have attributed to symbol.

German Protestant theologian Karl Barth is the most known representative of this understanding of revelation.²⁶

Model 5. Revelation as New Awareness

Especially since the middle of the twentieth century, an increasing number of theologians have felt that prevalent theories of revelation were too authoritarian and that the “inner experience” model, which tries to correct this, is too individualistic and unworldly. These thinkers hold that revelation takes place as an expansion of consciousness or shift of perspective when people join in the movements of secular history. God, for them, is not a direct object of experience but is mysteriously present as the transcendent dimension of human engagement in creative tasks.

Revelation is not a mere invitation or impulse to adapt one’s attitudes and behavior to the needs of a particular phase of the evolutionary process. The meaning of revelation does not change so radically from one age to another as to contradict the previous meaning.

Revelation is not merely speculative truth. It has implications for human existence and conduct. Demanding obedience, it brings with it

²⁶ Cf. Hans Waldenfels, *Einführung in die Theologie der Offenbarung*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1996, 110ff.

a new horizon, a new consciousness. The full significance of revelation can be perceived only by those who respond, with personal commitment, within a community of faith.

Here we may mention Romano Guardini, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Rahner.²⁷

4.2 A Word-Spirit Approach

No single model may be called an adequate, all-encompassing expression of divine revelation. We must say that God reveals Himself (*Deus revelatus*), but remains hidden within the very act of revelation (*Deus absconditus*). The act, account, experience or event of revelation will never be exhaustive, for God will remain mysterious, even in our knowledge of Him. Thus, we may not say that the Bible, salvation history, religious experience or dialectical presence is revelation *per se*, for that would be to presuppose unmediated revelation. These may be classified as revelations from the triune God, but not necessarily revelations *of* the triune God.

It may be that the strengths and weaknesses of each system are seen only in relationship to the others. These common approaches may be more symbiotic than competitive as they don't exist in hostile disjunction, but in historical dialogue with one another. Alister McGrath reminds us: "It must be stressed that these [models of revelation] are not mutually exclusive. The affirmation of one does not imply the negation of any one or all four of the remainder. Correctly understood, they represent different emphases within the Christian understandings of revelation."²⁸

What these models do teach us is that God has, in fact, revealed Himself. Revelation is the Archimedean arm by which God moves the world. John Webster echoes this truth in his definition: "Revelation is the self-presentation of the triune God, the free work of sovereign mercy in which God wills, establishes and perfects saving fellowship with himself in which humankind comes to know, love and fear him above all things."²⁹ This unmasking of the face of our majestic God *is* revelation.

God can be found to speak in the pages of Scripture, he shows himself to be sovereign over a history that draws toward the escha-

²⁷ Cf. Waldenfels, 123ff.

²⁸ Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 52011, 183.

²⁹ John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*, Cambridge: CUP 2003, 13.

ton, and he is made known through our experience of him, that personal encounter which occurs in Christ Jesus our Lord. These emphases are based upon the presupposition that revelation does occur and through that revelation the Triune God can be known. A unifying principle in this discussion, one that will be faithful to both the ancient biblical and modern existential requirements of revelation, is found in the Word-Spirit principle as articulated by many of the great theologians and confessions of the Church's past.

Evangelical theologian Millard Erickson uses an incarnational model to best summarize what he feels revelation to be—Jesus' life and speech. The word became flesh (Jn 1:14) by the agency of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Thus, the life of Jesus of Nazareth was a Word-Spirit act. The God-man also claimed to speak with the authority of God only after his baptism and subsequent anointing by the Holy Spirit, another Word-Spirit act. Erickson comments: "Jesus both spoke the Father's word and demonstrated the Father's attributes. He was the most complete revelation of God, because he was God."³⁰

Kevin Vanhoozer sees the trinitarian revelation of God as being the *res sine qua non* in fruitful discussions between the world religions. If Christianity is to remain distinct and if Christianity is to further develop and deepen intercultural competence, then the Spirit must be conceived not as the ambiguous *Geist* of Hegel, but as the Spirit of Jesus Christ who was incarnate, who died, and who rose from the dead. Vanhoozer remarks: "It is time to reclaim the ... emphasis on the inseparability of Word and Spirit, and in particular its doctrine of the testimony of the Spirit, for a theology of religions."³¹

To speak of a theology of Word and Spirit or Spirit and Word is to reintroduce into theology the critical role of the experience of faith. To affirm a theology of Word and Spirit is to affirm that the experience of faith is correlative with God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

These two powers, the Word of God and the Spirit of God, must be present and efficacious for the Triune God to meet humanity. The Word ensures the faithfulness of the revelation to the nature of divine reality while the Spirit takes that revelation and effectively applies it to all of humanity. Mindful that this proposal warrants neither scholastic fundamentalism governed only by an objectified word nor ecstatic charismaticism driven only by a subjective spirit, the Word-Spirit principle may open up new possibilities of talking about

³⁰ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 1998, 216.

³¹ Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity 2002, 69.

revelation today, keeping us at the center of Scripture and thus the center of revelation: Jesus Christ.

In revelation, we have a personal encounter with the word, Jesus Christ, as he is portrayed in the word, the Bible, though the miracle of the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit which breathes new life into humans, opening blind eyes and deaf ears. Through revelation we can see the acts of our covenant God in salvation history as he orchestrates and oversees the sojourning of a redeemed race. By revelation we are given consciousness of an unmasked God who is not only Creator and Redeemer, but Father. In, through, and by revelation we are being conformed to God's image, an image which was previously held in wholeness and has since been forfeited and fragmented, but an image that now is known through the eyes of faith will one day be sight.

We may close where we started, with *Dei Verbum* 2: "... Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself."

ABSTRACTS

Der vorliegende Artikel beginnt mit *Dei Verbum*, schaut auf die Heilige Schrift und auf „Modelle der Offenbarung“, bevor er mit einem Wort-Geist-Modell abschließt, für das einige evangelikale Theologen den Anstoß lieferten. So ist dieser Artikel sehr begrenzt – nur wenige, aber grundlegende Aspekte von Offenbarung werden genannt, um so noch einmal die Bedeutung von *Dei Verbum* für die theologische Entwicklung der vergangenen 50 Jahre zu unterstreichen.

Esta contribución comienza por mirar a *Dei Verbum* y a la Sagrada Escritura. Para profundizar en la comprensión de la revelación recuerda los “Modelos de Revelación” de Avery Dulles. Para concluir, el autor ofrece un acercamiento de Palabra-Espíritu, retomando sugerencias de teólogos evangelicales. El artículo se limita a pocos aspectos muy fundamentales de la revelación e intenta subrayar, una vez más, la importancia de *Dei Verbum* para desarrollos de la teología a lo largo de los últimos cincuenta años.

Cette contribution jette un regard sur *Dei Verbum* et sur la Sainte Écriture. En vue d'approfondir la compréhension de la révélation, il se réfère aux « Théologies de la Révélation » (Models of Revelation) du célèbre théologien nord-américain Avery Dulles. Pour conclure, l'auteur propose une approche Parole-Esprit, inspirée par certains théologiens évangéliques. L'article limite sa portée seulement à quelques aspects fondamentaux de la révélation et tente de souligner une fois de plus l'importance de *Dei Verbum* pour le développement de la théologie au cours des cinquante dernières années.