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Divine revelation in the Judeo-Christian tradition

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Abstract. The fundamental idea of God's revelation to people is expressed from a theological and semantic perspective through the concept of Revelation. The revelation of the Old Testament must be interpreted in a missionary vision with a universal character, especially when it comes to the fields of theology, anthropology, and ecclesiology. Here, messianism, that is, the expectation of God's salvation for all peoples, finds fulfillment in the historical context. The Old Testament is presented as the main way God communicated with the patriarchs and prophets using various means. This communication was achieved through theophanies, that is, visible manifestations of His presence in the form of phenomena such as fire or wind, but also through dreams, visions and by supporting the Israelites in their liberation from Egypt and in the conquest of the promised land.

Keywords. Tradition, God, revelation

The essence of God's revelation to people is expressed theologically and semantically through the notion of Revelation. Always in search of the truth about himself, the man of faith grows in knowledge and complex human experience, fills himself "not only through his questions, but also through his practical answers to God's love, deciphered in His answers embodied in the things and persons of the world and in the new circumstances produced by God for the faithful man and according to his level each time"¹, because by faith we understand that the ages were founded by the word of God, since the things that are seen were made out of nothing (Hebrews 11, 3).

The revelation of the Old Testament must be received in a universal missionary perspective, especially in terms of theology, anthropology and ecclesiology through which messianism, i.e. the expectation of God's salvation by all peoples, is fulfilled in history. The idea of revelation was also developed within the Judeo - Christian tradition. According to the doctrine of Judaism, the Old Testament appears as the main revelation that God transmitted to the patriarchs and prophets through various means: theophany, that is, through the visible phenomena of his presence in the form of fire or wind, through dreams, visions, as well as by helping the Israelites get out of Egypt and conquer the promised land.

¹ Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Dynamics of creation in the Church*, in rev. Orthodoxy, XXIX (1972), no. 3-4, p. 285.

The Old Testament offers the image of the monotheistic religion that manifests itself gradually, highlighting its special, unique missionary valences, which the history of salvation discovers according to the noetic, volitional and affective capacity of man to be in relationship with a God, Who spoke to Moses, "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14). In the Old Testament the direct speech of God is quoted, but it stands out clearly in his revelation addressed to the prophets as well as in the revelation on Mount Sinai.

Moses and other prophets are seen as chosen spokesmen who communicated God's will and plan to the entire people of Israel. In some cases they received revelations in the form of visions (including dreams), in others through an angel. The highest form of revelation was marked by Moses, who spoke directly to God while fully conscious. His inspired words were to be received with love and humility as the Word of God.

St. John Chrysostom tells us: "God did not speak through writings with Noah, with Abraham and his descendants, with Job and Moses, but spoke with them face to face, because he found their souls pure. But when the whole people fell into grave sins, then yes, then there was a need for writings, blackboards, the writing down of all the deeds and words of God"².

The Christian tradition is the fullness of revelation continuously relived by the Church through practice and memory, memory knowing the anchoring of its continuous practice, practice making memory alive, ontological. The Church lives Christ through memory, through present connection and through eschatological waiting and preparation. The Church is by tradition a bridge between the past and the future. The Church is itself a living tradition, a practiced tradition or the integral revelation lived continuously. The Church reads the Scriptures about the life of Christ and keeps the teachings of the Apostles about Him, aware of its duty to faithfully keep in memory the saving deeds of Jesus; practice the mysteries in order to meet the same Christ today and move forward with hope towards Christ, who will appear to us in glory again at the end, when we too will have reached the resurrection.³

The Christian tradition means not only a continuous living at the same level of spirituality of the mystery of salvation, but also an advancement in living and understanding, without this, however, meaning a passage over the mystery of living in Christ, over the mystery of salvation and perfection in Him. Tradition thus means not only a "living memory", always relived of the Church, but a transcendence towards the eschatological goal, an advancement in the transparency of the divine reality, experienced uninterruptedly in the Church⁴.

Holy Scripture not only talks about natural revelation (Ps. 18, 1-4; Rom. 1, 19-23), but also indicates that God reveals Himself to each person through his conscience. The author of the Book of Ecclesiastes claims that God "put eternity in the mind of man" (Eccl. 3, 11), while the apostle Paul speaks of nations who "show that the work of the law is written in their hearts, by the testimony of their conscience and by their judgments, who accuse them or defend them" (Rom. 2, 15). Moral responsibility is a universal understanding of the difference between good and evil, seen as a manifestation of God in human consciousness. The responsibility towards oneself had to be manifested by each individual, through the effort to grow internally, by multiplying the knowledge and love of God, by filling the soil of the heart with the grace, power and light of the Holy Spirit, in order to be able to work and master it so that, by deifying it, to

² St. John the Golden Mouth, Homilies to Matthew - Homily I, vol. 23, in col. PSB, Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, pp. 15-16.

³ Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, The Orthodox conception of tradition and the development of doctrine, in rev. Orthodoxy, XXVII (1975), no. 1, p. 5.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

be able to show their responsibility towards the entire creation, that is, to unify in them all the divisions of the created world in order to transfigure it. It thus becomes clear that the responsibility towards God, which has its roots in the love that the person bears, is the basis of responsibility towards oneself, towards one's fellow man and towards the entire creation⁵. The awareness of the obligation to respect the moral order presupposes that this order is required by the achievement of a supreme goal. Responsibility is closely related to the good, the moral order and the ultimate goal. Everywhere we turn, we see God's handiwork everywhere and feel God's presence. Paul told the Athenian philosophers: "For in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17, 28).

In his revelation, he reveals himself as a God of men, as one who wants to have fellowship with them and enter into a relationship with them. Man is a great and honorable thing, man is the icon of God, man must become like God, man is the flower of creation, man is the flower of God and must bear the likeness of God, bear deification!⁶

Saint Gregory of Nyssa, interpreting the Song of Songs, "says that our soul seeks God as the bride seeks the bridegroom. For God alone, truly, has sweetness and desire and love. The continuous tasting of God becomes the cause of an even greater desire, because it intensifies the appetite by participating in goods. And the resemblance to God has no limit. For the Logos says to the awakened soul: Get up, and after the soul has come close to Him, it hears above: Come! Thus, the soul that really rises to God, will never stop rising"⁷.

In the four gospels, the word of God is transmitted by Jesus Christ, as the Christian tradition sees in it a divine revelation to the apostles. In Christianity, the idea of inspiration gives the works of the saints a sacred character.

Father Stăniloae, deepening the meta-theology of the Presence, emphasizes: "Revelation is not only the communication of a teaching about God. It is the manifestation of the presence and work of God himself. And this manifestation takes place through Word and Power. These are the inseparable means of revelation in God"⁸.

The Word therefore has an overwhelming role for Revelation. But he is always full of a Power that has its source in God. In the prophetic picture, God is represented as gathering the nations to Jerusalem (Joel 3,1-2; Ezekiel 38, 16-23; 39, 1-7), and through the attributes of *Missio Dei* he warns them because they rebelled against His authority (Jeremiah 25, 31-33), and for this He could judge them (Joel 3, 9-17) and destroy them there (Isaiah 34, 1-8; 63, 1-6; 66, 15-18). Thus, the earth would be rid of those who opposed God (Zechariah 14, 12-13). And the act of God's Power is at the same time an illuminating act, because God does not work in the dark.

In order to be the subject of Revelation and the object of man's theologizing and contemplation, God himself somehow had to come out of himself, to show his glory, to transfigure his soul and the entire Universe through his power, through his light. These considerations reached, in the 15th century, the core of the Palamite synthesis, because the

⁵ Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. II, Second Edition, Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1997, pp. 233 - 234.

⁶ Idem, *Orthodox Anthropology*, in rev. Landmarks of Orthodox anthropology, in "Annals of the University of Craiova - Theological Series, 1999, p. 119.

⁷ Rev. Prof. Dr. Isidor Todoran, The paradisiacal state of man and the one after the fall, in the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant conception, in rev. *Orthodoxy*, VII (1955), no. 1, p. 36.

⁸ Rev. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, the Holy Spirit in Revelation and in the Church, in rev. *Orthodoxy*, XXVI (1974), no. 2, p.216.

distinction between the transcendent being of God and "His uncreated energies" was, above all, the formulation of a revelatory, contemplative experience of the hesychasts. Saint Gregory's opponents defended the divine simplicity, making God a simple essence, in which even the hypostases receive the character of relations of the essence. In general, the idea of this simplicity of the Divine, also manifested in Revelation, through the essence-energy distinction, does not destroy the divine simplicity, but will be the way in which He shows Himself within the limits of the apprehensible; No one, man or angel, has seen God (John 1, 18) and will never see Him, because every creature sees only through its senses or its mind; however, people could theorize the balance between the transcendence and the immanence of the Godhead, ruling out ab initio pantheism and at the same time supporting the direct reality of personal communion with God through the revealed way⁹.

The virtualities or potencies that man received as gifts from God, of which he often does not even know that he possesses them, can be revealed first to the person and then to the others around him, in a continuous definition and improvement. That harmonious synthesis that must be relaunched between divine and human, Biblical Revelation and classical culture, love and reason¹⁰, through an energetic reaffirmation of the fundamental Truth of European Christian humanism, Jesus Christ, the God-Man, is necessary. A Truth that says that man's life is his Life with and in God.

Christianity holds that the manifestation of revelation culminated in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, his unchanging Word and his perfect image of God¹¹. As the Son, "who manifests the Father", being "the glory of His brightness", reveals this glory to people, through His appearance in the flesh. "The Son reveals the Father in a real way. This mission of real revelation of the Father is completed by the Son throughout time. Where He dwells in the heart, He comes at once with the Father"¹².

Because the Son "knows and preaches and investigates the Father", He "is thus the Word of the Trinity", having "among the Persons of the Holy Trinity, the purpose of revealing God to persons." The Christian tradition sees revelation as an event that manifested directly through the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the revelation was fully embodied in Him, and He revealed to the people God, whom "no one has ever seen" (Jn. 1, 18).

Only with the coming of the man-God Christ "was life revealed"; "eternal life" was revealed to us, hopeless mortals, the wretched slaves of death (cf. 1 John 1, 2) Only in this is true, real love: "that God sent his only Son into the world, as let us live through him" (1 John 4, 9) and in him eternal life. That is why "he who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5, 12).

Our only true life is life in the one true God and the Lord Jesus Christ, because it is completely eternal and stronger than death. Faith in Christ "unites man with the eternal Lord, Who according to the measure of man's faith fills his soul with eternal life, and then he feels and understands himself as eternal. This happens all the more as long as man lives according to this faith, which gradually sanctifies his soul, heart, conscience, entire existence with the divine

⁹ Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, SJ Edward Yarnold, Study of Spirituality, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986, p. 251.

¹⁰ Virgil Nemoianu, Divinity Games. Thought, freedom and religion at the end of the millennium, ed. II, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi, 2000, p. 119.

¹¹ Prof. A. Nolainen, Nature and Christian man, in "Mitropolia Moldovai si Suceva", XLIX (1973), no. 5-6, p. 219.

¹² Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Jesus Christ or the Restoration of Man, Publishing House Omnicop Craiova 1993, p.399.

energies of grace. With man's faith increases the sanctification of his nature; as man becomes holier, he acquires a stronger and more vivid sense of his own personal immortality; he gains an awareness of his own life and the eternity of all things. Indeed, man's true life begins with his faith in Christ, a faith that surrenders to the Lord all his soul, all his heart, all his mind, all his strength. He does not sanctify, transform, and deify all these gradually. Through this sanctification, transformation and deification, the Lord spreads in man the divine energies of grace, which give him the omnipotent sense and awareness of his personal immortality and eternity. Indeed: Our life is as much life as there is life in Christ¹³.

The position of the apostles in Christianity is similar to that of the Jewish prophets. While preaching the Gospel, they were responsible for writing the holy books under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Revelation is, in fact, also a meeting, the event of the divine kenotic descent to man to receive him in the horizon of divine communion love in the knowledge and experience of the spiritual, sacramental union in the Church, our final meeting with the Son of God, Who returns to The Second Coming, a meeting that will materialize the presence of God's¹⁴ people in God's kingdom.

The terms ultimately express the same idea of revealing something mysterious, something still inaccessible to direct sight and knowledge. The sciences and philosophy given by God were meant to reach the Greeks, a good of all people, grafted, sometimes, on faith. The idea that Clement of Alexandria sought to accredit, and largely succeeded, was that science does not exclude faith and vice versa. Their goal is partly common: the sciences and philosophy to know the truth from the material world through demonstration for the benefit of earthly life, and the highest degree of initiation is the body and blood of the Word (Jn 6, 53), that is, the understanding of the divine power and being through The deified Body and Blood of Christ crucified, dead and resurrected, exalted at the right hand of God the Father with His humanity, in eternal glory forever as the Son of God: Taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 3, 8)¹⁵.

The Holy Fathers emphasized that, for the true Christian, transcendence and immanence, as orderers of the path, are both complementary in God. Through the man capable of being sanctified, God reveals his transcendence and calls to a pure religious-moral life, and through the blessed one the immanence, the abundant outpouring of His uncreated energies in the world, reveals His love, goodness, inexhaustible generosity, His mercy towards man and calls to dialogue, to communion "in the liturgical celebration where He really is, the place where praises and thanksgivings are brought to God"¹⁶ during the liturgical time of the celebration.

In fact, the Old Testament and, above all, the New Testament by hearing the words and seeing Christ God and Man, is a real dialogue in history between God and man created by Him, who desires naturally, as he has a face that it is revealed and seen by the one next to him, close to his father, as if God were to show him His face.

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus would highlight a hidden economy in the saving events of Revelation that harmonizes the transcendent will of the Holy Trinity and the ontology of

¹³ Nichifor Crainic, *The Sanctification of Human Fulfillment*, Trinitas Publishing House, Iasi, 1993, p.235.

¹⁴ Saint John the Golden Mouth, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans of Saint Paul the Apostle*, Homily XI, trans. P.S. Theodosie Athanasiu, 2nd edition, Christiana Publishing House, Bucharest, 20, p. 197.

¹⁵ Saint Clement of Alexandria, *Writings, Part II, Stromata* (XXII, 13, 1; 147, 4), trans. Dumitru Fecioru, in col. *Church Fathers and Writers*, vol. V, Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1982, pp. 181-186.

¹⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx, *L'histoire des hommes recit de Dieu*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1992, p. 59.

knowledge, especially when he tells us: "The Old Testament clearly showed the Father, but not clearly the Son . The New Testament revealed the Son and introduced the divinity of the Spirit. Today the Spirit lives among us and makes himself known more clearly. For it would have been dangerous, when the divinity of the Father was not recognized, to openly preach the Son and as long as the divinity of the Son was not admitted, to impose, if I dare say so, as an addition, the Holy Spirit... It was appropriate rather that, by partial additions and, as David says, by risings from glory to glory, the glory of the Trinity may shine progressively"¹⁷.

That is why we affirm that, just as there is only one God, the Holy Trinity, there is also only one Revelation, itself an eternally open horizon in the culminating divine-humanity revealed of the Savior Jesus Christ, the Archetype through which the singularity of the perfect epiphanic egomorphosis generates its the fundamental attributes in the Chalcedonian formula. When we talk about the Revelation, due to its phenomenological complexity, in an implicit way, the expository procedure that was chosen can be assimilated to the will and wisdom of the biblical hagiographers who were aware of the apprehensive limits inherent in the human being¹⁸.

In this case, the theologians have shown that, regarding the Revelation, the cornerstone, capable of giving stability to the definition and patristic relevance to the formulation, is found in a syntagmatic utterance, attributed by Tradition to Saint Maximus the Confessor, who, in an effort of conceptual clarification, considered the supernatural Revelation only an incorporation of the natural Revelation in historical persons and actions, beginning with the Edenic Revelation, then passing like a red thread through the history of the people of Israel towards the eschaton of the Parousia, expressed through a metaphysical phenomenology sublimated in miracles and signs of the manifestation of God's Power and the interventions of God's Providence, also emphasized in the blessings of Moses: Blessed are you, Israel! What people is like you, saved by the Lord? He who helps you will protect you with protection; your sword, your praise! (Deuteronomy 33, 29).

In conclusion, Revelation - as an action of God's descent to man - is transmitted through Tradition. In Tradition, the culminating Revelation in Jesus Christ is active and shares the grace and life of Christ to Christians. The dogma protects the truth of faith of the Revelation during the generations in history and thereby stimulates the sharing of the grace and life of Christ to the believers or the authentic Christian life.

In the transmission and updating of Revelation, the Church does not establish itself as an independent magisterium because it experiences a double limitation that guarantees its persistence in the truth and in the transmission of the right faith. An inner limitation, in the awareness that although she is closely united with Christ in the Holy Spirit, Christ is always above her as her Lord and Master, she being "the body of Christ" (Colossians 1, 18). Hence the awareness that her authority regarding the truth of faith is not the last authority, this being only Christ Himself, the One who works and speaks through her. The Church does not decide on the truth, on the content of faith, but receives it following prayer and its search. Her authority refers to the believers who receive the truth of Christ through her and live in her community. This internal limitation is materialized in an external one, by the fact that the Church remains linked

¹⁷ St. Gregory the Theologian, vulgo Nazianzeni, Archbishops of Constantinople, *Orationes XXXI* (Theological V), par. 26-27, volume XXXVI, col. 161-162, in *Patrologice cursus completus, Series Graeca, Accurate et recognoscene J.-P. Migne, Turnholti (Belgium) Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii*, 1886.

¹⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God*, trans. in Romanian by Măria Cornelia Oros Introductory study deacon. Ioan I. Ică jr., Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 1995, p. 87.

forever to the original testimony of the Revelation fixed in the Holy Scripture and in the Holy Tradition, the two ways or ways of preserving and transmitting the supernatural Revelation, through which Christ conducts the dialogue live with the Church¹⁹.

Revelation is par excellence addressed to man, because it aims at his salvation. The Church preaches its truth, gravitating around the Revelation and touching on one problem, but which encompasses them all - the relationship between God and man.

Why Man – Church – God? Because He Himself says "you are the Church of the Living God" (2 Cor 6, 16). Revelation offers answers, quenches the thirst for knowledge of human nature, leading it to the Supreme Mystery - the Existence of God, and "the existence of God is not doubted by those who receive the Holy Scripture"²⁰, and the Holy Scripture is nothing but the expression and the face of Revelation. This interweaving between Scripture, the Church, the believer is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ.

Working with grace and accepting Revelation becomes the key to unlocking divine human mysteries, because "the wealth of the wise and humble is the word of God."²¹

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