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The Christian conception of divine revelation

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Abstract. The fundamental idea of God's communication with people is expressed theologically and significantly through the concept of Revelation. In the continuous search for the truth about himself, the believer grows in knowledge and lives a complex human experience. He fulfills himself not only by the questions he asks, but also by the way he practically responds to divine love, which is manifested in the things and persons of the world and in the new circumstances created by God for each believer, adapted to his specific context. Thus, we believe that the world was created by the Word of God, and that all things came into being out of nothing, as stated in Hebrews 11, verse 3. As there is one God, the one and holy Trinity, there is also one Revelation. This Revelation is itself an eternally open reality in the divine-human sphere, culminating in the profound discovery of the Savior Jesus Christ. He is the Archetype through which the perfect epiphanic singularity manifests its fundamental attributes as expressed in the Chalcedonian formulation.

Keywords. Divine revelation, God, Christianity

The Old Testament message was progressively revealed and recorded. God spoke, God acted accordingly, the human response to the acts of the words of God became the historical setting for further revelation. Through Revelation, the world becomes part of the relationship and dialogue between God and humanity, which is why, starting from the divine foundation of the historical act captured in the words of Scripture, the spiritual-noological frameworks of the "meeting between God and man"¹ bear the stamp of experiences significant spiritual because in the phenomenology of the supernatural Revelation, the synchronization of Absence with Presence takes place or, according to the definition of the Holy Fathers, concealment in non-concealment.

There are various biblical scholars who insist that the message contained in the Old Testament was written as Scripture after human beings became aware of historical acts, deeds, or events.² Thus the Old Testament is strictly a human book written by keen observant men of historical activities past and contemporary. It should not be denied, or even ignored, that the Old Testament records human observations and responses to perceived historical events. But,

¹ Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Revelation through deeds, words and images*, in "Orthodoxia", year XX, 1968, no. 3, p. 377.

² Brevard S. Childs, *Indicates that he so understood Wright's position*. Cf. *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) p. 102

to insist that men are to be regarded as the initiating agents of biblical revelation is to express opposition to what the Scriptures record. This opposition has its roots in philosophical and scientific presuppositions in which the divine dimensions of life, past and present, are considered ir-relevant, if at all actual, influences.

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"³ because by faith we understand that the ages were established by the word of God, since the things that are seen were made out of nothing (Hebrews 11, 3)

As there is only one God the One, the Holy Trinity, there is also only one Revelation, itself an eternally open horizon in the revealed culminating divino-humanity of the Savior Jesus Christ, the Archetype through which the singularity of the perfect epiphanic egomorphosis generates its 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 being.

Therefore, "the discovery of God, from the Old and New Testament periods, was understood by man, and human expression made use of a language that was not only made up of words, but also of visions. These amazing and very specific prophecies were written hundreds of years before the arrival of Jesus (Isa al Masih, peace be upon him) and they were fulfilled exactly. We also note that all these sayings were recorded in the holy books of the Jews (and are still there)⁴.

Scripture teaches that through the action of the Spirit, our intelligence can be "opened", "renewed", that our "eyes" can be "enlightened"⁵. But by this divine action God does not reveal to us what He has already revealed to the authors of the Bible. For these authors were placed by a special action of God in a condition which enabled them to hear His Word in detail. The action of the Spirit upon our spirit is limited to enabling us to understand and accept what He has already revealed.

"God, in his goodness and wisdom, decided to reveal himself and make known the mystery of his will so that through Christ, the Word made flesh, people would have access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and become partakers of the divine nature. In this revelation, the invisible God, out of love, addresses people and communicates with them to receive His communion".⁶

The first step in God's revelation is creation, in which He constantly bears witness. God makes himself known through creatures to all men of all times and lets them experience his goodness and perfection. Created in the image and likeness of God, man discovers God most

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

⁴ Rev. Prof. Dr. Petru Semen, *Biblical Prophets*, Trinitas Ed., Iasi, 2005, p. 34

⁵ Rev. Anton Budău, *Prophetic literature*, Ed. Sapientia, Iasi, 1996, p. 30.

⁶ Corneliu Sârbu, "Jesus Christ as the supreme prophet," MB 1-3 (1974), pp. 19-28.

clearly of all creatures⁷. However, God wanted to reveal himself as a personal being through a history of salvation, creating a people and training them to keep his word to people and prepare the incarnation of his word - Jesus Christ. In it God reveals the mystery of his triune life and the Father's plan to gather everything together in his Son, to choose all people and establish them in the Son (cf. Eph 1,3-10; Col 1,13-20), gathering them together to share in his eternal divine life through the Holy Spirit. God reveals and fulfills his plan of salvation through the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit in history⁸.

Revelation contains both natural truths, which man can know in himself only through reason, and truths that go beyond human reason and which he knows only because God reveals himself in his goodness freely and without guilt. The main content of divine revelation is the non-abstract truths about the world and man. Its essential content is that God communicates to us the mystery of his personal life and invites us to participate in it.

Divine revelation is accomplished through words and deeds. It is both a mystery and an event. On the one hand, it has an objective dimension (the Word that reveals truths and teachings) and, on the other hand, it also has a subjective dimension (the personal Word that confesses and invites dialogue). This revelation is therefore understood and communicated as truth and as life. The people of Israel, through divine inspiration, throughout the ages recorded in their history the testimony of God's revelation and linked it directly to the revelation of the one true God to our fathers. Through what is recorded in Scripture, God speaks to us in human words, until finally His Word itself assumes human nature. In addition to the writings of the people of Israel, which were adopted by the church as the Old or First Testament, there are also the written testimonies of the apostles and the first disciples about the revelation of God, which came in fullness in his word (In Christ). They were witnesses of Jesus' walk on earth and especially of the Paschal Mystery of his death and resurrection. This is how the books of the New Testament appeared.

The creator of heaven and earth, is found mostly in the "Books of Wisdom." They point beyond the borders of the people of Israel and arouse interest in humanity's common experience of the great existential themes: from the meaning of the cosmos to the meaning of human life (The Book of Wisdom); of death and what follows and our earthly ministry (Book of Ecclesiastes); from family and social relationships and the virtues that God the Creator intended to regulate, to the question of how the fullness of one's humanity can be attained (Book of Proverbs, Jesus Sirah, etc.). God is the author of the Holy Scriptures, written by the holy authors (hagiographers), who are also the authors of the text, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. "For the writing of the Holy Books, God chose men who, using their own faculties and powers, would serve him to write as authentic authors all that he wished to write working in them and to transmit through them"⁹.

Whatever the holy writers affirm can be taken as affirmed by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, "the books of Scripture must be confessed in order to learn with certainty, with faith and without

⁷ George Daniel Petrov, The human being – a being of grace and a dialogical structure, in ICOANA CREDINȚEI, No. 18, Year 9/2023, ISSN 2501-3386, ISSN-L 2393-137X, <https://doi.org/10.26520/icoana.2023.18.9.64-75>, p. 67. <https://www.ifiasa.com/ifijisr>

⁸ Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985, p.24.

⁹ Rabbi Rene Samuel Şirat, *The message that the Bible conveys to contemporary man*, in rev. TV, New Series, Year LXXXIV (1998), no. 5-12, p. 66.

error that truth which God willed to be recorded in the Holy Scriptures for the sake of our salvation"¹⁰.

As a dialogue in which God invites people to participate in his personal life, revelation proves from the beginning to be a "covenant" from which a "history of salvation" unfolds¹¹. But since God "wanted to open the way to supernatural salvation, He also made Himself known to man from the beginning. After their fall, he raised them up with promises of salvation in the hope of salvation. He cares for mankind unceasingly, to give eternal life to all who seek salvation through perseverance in good works. Later he called Abraham to make a great people, whom he then educated after the patriarchs through Moses and the prophets to recognize him alone as the living and true God, caring father and righteous judge, and to wait for the promised Redeemer. In this way he paved the way for the Gospel throughout the ages.

God's covenant with man is announced with the creation of the ancestors and their elevation to the life of grace, by which they received a portion of God's innermost nature. It continues in the cosmic covenant with Noah and later ends expressly with Abraham and especially with Moses, to whom God hands the Tablets of the Law. Both the numerous posterity promised to Abraham, in which all the nations of the earth are to be blessed, and the teaching of the law of Moses with its sacrifices and priests, which characterize the divine worship, are a foretaste and a picture of the new and everlasting covenant, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, realized and revealed through His incarnation and His Passover sacrifice. Christ's covenant frees us from the sin of the first parents, who by their disobedience had rejected God's first covenant offer.

Some spiritual teachings may exceed our human reason and give us the impression of contradiction, but this may simply be an indication of the weakness of our intelligence that cannot make a synthesis. To submit to God is to freely adhere to what is truly good, to what is absolutely right, to what is completely true. In relation to God we always remain free, even when we submit to Him.

In the Hebrew Bible, the five books of Moses called the Torah (the Law) are followed by a group of books called the "previous prophets"¹². This group includes the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings. After the group of previous prophets, in the Hebrew Bible follow the "posterior prophets"¹³, i.e. the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and the 12 minor prophets.

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, ordered the books differently. After the Pentateuch (ie the 5 books of Moses) comes the group of historical books. These are the same as the previous prophecies, to which are added the book of Ruth, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, Esther and the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles.

The word prophet has often been taken in a narrower sense: a man who predicts, no doubt because prophecies (in the broad sense) often contain predictions. When God inspired men like Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, He did so to draw the attention of the people of Israel to future events and the consequences of their attitude.

¹⁰ Rev. Prof. Ion Pop, *The historical development of divine revelation*, in rev. ST, Series II, Year IV (1952), no. 1-2, p. 79.

¹¹ Fr. drd. Ioan Bude, *The Chosen People and its role in the history of salvation, according to the New Testament biblical teaching*, in rev. GB, Year XLVI (1987), no. 6, p. 74.

¹² Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Abrudan, *Prophets and their role in the history of salvation*, MA., no. 3 – 4 (1983), pp. 139 – 149.

¹³ Maurice Coganac, *Biblical Symbols*, Ed. Humanitas, Bucharest, 1996, p.107.

The prophecies most often concern the future of the people of Israel and the coming of the Messiah, that is, Christ. Daniel predicts the exact date of the coming of the Messiah (9. 25, 26) and the rise of the Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman empires (Dan. 7)¹⁴.

The prophecies concerning Nineveh (Zech. 2. 13-15), Babylon (Isaiah 13), Egypt (Ezekiel 29) and many other cities (Zech. 9) were literally fulfilled.

A particularly striking example is that of Tyr. When we read the prophecy of Ez. 26. 3-14, it is seen that all the details were faithfully fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar marched on Tyre, besieged it, but it took thirteen years for it to fall. The rich locals took their treasures to an island a mile out to sea, so Nebuchadnezzar could not find the riches he had intended to seize. In his rage, he completely destroyed the city and executed all the inhabitants. After his departure, no attempt was made to rebuild the city; was left in ruins. Only the island remained inhabited and prospered. Thus the first part of the prophecy was fulfilled: "The nations... will destroy the walls of Tyre, they will break down its towers... He will kill your people..."¹⁵

Joshua proved that he was truly a prophet of Jesus Christ who, in a greater and deeper sense, would bring his people safely from this life to their eternal home.

Yahweh spoke to Joshua about the need of the Israelites how to perform the sacrament of circumcision and how to celebrate the Passover. And through Joshua the people were assured that their past (Egypt) was forgotten. With the celebration of the Passover, they ate food from the promised land. The manna, food from the desert, was no longer to be eaten (Joshua 5:1-12).

Elijah was the main prophet during the reign of Ahab. It is recorded that the word of the Lord God came to Elijah and that the Angel of the Lord spoke to him.

The Lord God protected Elijah after revealing Yahweh's plan to bring a drought during the reign of Ahab (1 Kings 17,1-5). Then the Lord gave him the power to increase the unleavened bread and flour for a widow (17,13-14) and to raise her dead son. Elijah was commanded to meet with Ahab to assure him that Jehovah God would end the severe drought (18,1-45). The Lord God revealed his presence through Elijah through the fire and the rain that fell.

An angel appeared to Elijah, who offered him food and commanded him to eat and prepare for his forty-day journey to Mount Horeb. Once there, Yahweh appeared to Elijah and commanded him to stay on the mountain. Then, the Lord God spoke to him about anointing Jehu as king of Israel (19,1-18) and appointed Elisha to succeed him (19,19-21)¹⁶. Elijah received the Lord's word again when Ahab killed Naboth to gain control over his vineyard (21,15-19). Elijah pronounced Yahweh's judgment on the king, who then humbled himself and was told that judgment would be delayed until his son became king (21.28).

Another prophet, Micah, was also active in pronouncing judgment on Ahab. Micah contradicted the advice of other prophets who assumed that they spoke the word of Yahweh God (22,17-28). Judgment came upon Ahab because he was killed in battle, as had been prophesied (22, 24-29).

The history of salvation is an expression of a great divine pedagogy that leads to Christ. The prophets, constantly recalling the covenant and its moral requirements, speak of him, the promised Messiah, in a special way. They announce a new, spiritual and eternal covenant that will be written on hearts. Christ will reveal it through the beatitudes and teachings of the Gospel and will proclaim the commandment of love as the fulfillment of the whole law.

¹⁴ Prof. Dr. Ion Popescu-Mălăiești, *Old Prophets*, Bucharest, 1906, p. 82.

¹⁵ ***, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, revised version according to the Septuagint by V.B.Anania, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p.18.

¹⁶ A. A. MacRae, „*Prophets and Prophecies.*” *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. I, edited by M. C. Tenny (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), p. 879.

Jesus Christ is both the mediator and the fullness of revelation. He is the Revealer and the revelation and the content of the revelation: "At many times and in many ways God spoke to the fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he made heir of the universe and through whom he also made the world" (Hebrews 1, 1-2). God has told us everything through His Word: "Therefore the Christian ordinance of salvation, which is the new and final covenant, is irreplaceable, and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ"¹⁷.

The fulfillment and fullness of divine revelation are especially evident in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, that is, in his passion, death and resurrection. They are the definitive Word in which God reveals the fullness of His condescending love and renews the world. Only in Jesus Christ does God reveal to people who they really are and allows them to recognize the highest dignity and destiny to which they are called¹⁸.

Faith as virtue is man's response to God's revelation. It is a personal connection with God in Christ, determined by the words He speaks and the deeds He does. The credibility of the revelation is based above all on the credibility of the person of Jesus Christ, on his entire earthly life. His position as a mediator, the completeness and the foundation of the credibility of the revelation distinguish the person of Jesus Christ from all other founders of religions. None of them require his disciples to believe in him, and none claim to be the fulfillment, the fulfillment of what God wants to reveal, but only act as mediators in making that revelation known to men.

Divine revelation is contained in scripture and tradition. They form a single repository in which the Word of God is kept. They are interdependent: tradition transmits and interprets Scripture, which in turn clarifies and confirms what is experienced in tradition¹⁹.

Tradition, based on the preaching of the apostles, testifies and transmits in a living and dynamic way what Scripture has fixed in a text. "This Apostolic Tradition, aided by the Holy Spirit, knows a progress in the Church: the understanding of the things and words transmitted increases through the meditation and study of the faithful who ponder them in their hearts, through the inner discernment that comes from experience, through the proclamation of those who have received the charism sure of the truth.

What the apostles received and passed on to their successors, the bishops, "includes everything that will help the people of God to live a holy life and increase faith. Thus, the Church, in doctrine, life and worship, continues throughout the ages and transmits to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes"²⁰.

The totality of divine revelation as truth and life means that the object of transmission is not only a teaching but also a way of life. Teaching and example cannot be separated. What is conveyed is actually the living experience of the encounter with the risen Christ and what this event meant and continues to mean for the individual's life. That is why the church, when it speaks of the transmission of revelation, speaks of *fides et mores*, of faith and habit, of doctrine and conduct. "But the task of making the Word of God binding, whether it is written or

¹⁷ Rev. Professor Petru Rezuș, *Orthodox Teaching about the development and fulfillment of divine Revelation*, in *Orthodoxy*, XI (1966), no. 1., p. 131.

¹⁸ Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Holy Scripture and Apostolic Tradition in the confession of the Church*, in *Orthodoxy*, XXVI(1980) no. 2, p. 112.

¹⁹ Vladimir Lossky, *Tradition and traditions*, in *Theological Studies*, XVI (1970), no. 7-8, p. 72.

²⁰ Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *The permanent and mobile character of Tradition*, in *Theological Studies*, XXV (1973), no. 3-4, Bucharest, pp. 149 – 164.

transmitted, is entrusted only to the living organism of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ"²¹.

The teaching service of the church is therefore in the service of the divine word, it is exercised for the salvation of souls. Therefore, "he is not above the Word of God, but he serves it, he only teaches what has been transmitted, because he hears the Word of God with piety through the divine assignment and with the help of the Holy Spirit, he keeps it holy. and he interprets it faithfully and because he extracts from this one treasury of faith all that he presents to believe as revealed by God"²². The Church is the most important "place" in which the apostolic tradition is reflected.

Holy Scripture, Holy Tradition and the Church thus form a unity, so that none of these elements can exist by itself²³.

The foundation of this unity is the Holy Spirit, author of Scripture and protagonist of the living tradition of the Church. The Church is founded by Christ, in whom the Revelation of deeds and words culminated and was concentrated. But the Revelation continues to be completed in it, in its part concerning the form in which it can crystallize as the union of believers with Christ, that is, in the form of its essential structures, organically linked to the content of the Revelation, as its most appropriate application. The Church has its being, as well as its final goal, in the bosom of Revelation. The Church is nothing but Revelation incarnate, a revelation that makes its presence clear through the mysteries of the Church.

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²¹ Vladimir Lossky, *Tradition and traditions*, in *Theological Studies*, XVI (1970), no. 7-8, pp. 134 – 163.

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