

Chapter 11

IDEA OF REVELATION IN MODERN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

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Introduction

If we understand theology as *faith seeking understanding*, the concept of revelation should be considered as the primary source of theology and one of the main categories in theological thinking. It principally has three dimensions: cognitive, ontological and ethical. In the Bible, *revelation* in general means “unveiling” “unmasking” of what was previously unknown. The Hebrew and Greek terms in the Bible that refer to revelation vary from theophanies to apocalyptic events, from historical deeds to God’s grace in the human heart. Although there was not a fully articulated doctrine of revelation in the pre-Enlightenment period, the idea that God’s communication with the humanity and humanity’s access to the divine has always been present.

During the first centuries of Christianity and throughout the Middle Ages, the fact of revelation was hardly challenged. The fullest medieval statement on revelation was realized in the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). According to the Council, the doctrine that leads to salvation is mediated first through Moses, then the prophets and others; at the end it reached its fullness in Christ (Latourelle, 1994, pp. 923-924). As a result of the Enlightenment, the possibility of supernatural revelation, its existence and object were widely discussed. The Enlightenment, as Pannenberg notes, destroyed the old concept of revelation which belonged to the 17th century orthodox dogmatics, namely the identification of revelation with the inspiration of the Holy Scripture in addition to the understanding of revelation as the transmission of supernatural and hidden truths (Pannenberg, 1969, p. 4). Consequently, modern Christian theology proposes varying categorizations, or models of revelation which will be the topic of this chapter. In what follows, I will initially introduce the biblical account of revelation in relation to the theme of covenant. Further, I will give an overview of the concept of revelation as it is understood in modern Christian theology.

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have proposed various models of revelation according to the needs and contexts of their period. While the Evangelicals and Catholic neo-scholastics view *revelation as proposition*, those who hold *revelation as inner experience* argue against this. For the latter, revelation is neither words as in proposition, nor in deeds as suggested by the *historical model*. Those who hold *revelation as dialectical presence* also argue that neither the Bible, nor historical events are themselves revelation; words and events are revelation as long as God chooses to speak through them. The model that holds *revelation as history* argue against direct self-revelation of God and suggest that God is revealed indirectly through his deeds in history. For those who support *revelation as new awareness*, it should neither be reduced to religious experience or history, the Bible or the Church; but should be sought in the totality of life and experience. Building upon the strengths of each model Dulles, a Catholic theologian, tries to harmonize them and employs symbol as a dialectical means. Within his symbolic approach to revelation, Dulles also proves that each of these models have not been created in a vacuum but in accordance with the context. Hence, these models or understandings of revelation are in historical dialogue with each other and are consecutively inter-dependent rather than contradictory.

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