

Topic 11: Revelation in Theology

I. Toward a General Understanding of Revelation: One serious problem arose because of the 18th century Enlightenment understanding of reason. The question is raised: Can a particular, historically mediated revelation that is available to only some people be the medium of salvation for all people?

A second problem appeared in the 19th century as a result of historical consciousness and pluralism: In the context of a variety of different religious traditions, each with their own revelations, how can Christianity lay claim to being the definitive revelation? An anthropological tension appears that is embedded in the very structure of revelation between the universal and subjective character of revelation and the historically mediated and objective character of revelation

Out of a deep appreciation for religious pluralism a historical tension arises between an open attitude to the possibility of genuine revelation in radically other traditions, and the inner logic and dynamics of the desire for ultimate truth

II. The Structure of Revelation: The universal and subjective element in the structure of revelation comes to light through the correlation of two elements, one philosophical and the other theological: The philosophical element: transcendental analysis discloses the universal structure of faith. Human subjectivity is characterized by the unlimited self-transcending of human existence and a reaching out for ultimate and permanent being.

The theological element: God's grace (or presence as Spirit) is introduced as a theological postulate reflecting upon a faith encounter. Within the context of an experience of revelation grace signifies the love of a personal God for human beings. This love reaches out and engages human existence for its salvation.

Behind this account of Christian revelation we find a fully developed theology of grace: Christian experience: God's grace is universal and intends the salvation of all. Christian experience: grace is God's free and gratuitous gift. Christian symbol of the Spirit: God is present to and active in God's creation. This divine presence is personal in that God loves, nourishes, sustains and engages God's creation. God's presence makes God present (i.e. reveals God) to human consciousness not as an object but as the horizon of human action in its search for ultimacy.

The historically mediated and objective element in the structure of revelation: The epistemological axiom: Human knowing gains access to material-historical reality through the senses (Aquinas.) That is, in the act of human knowing, sensible

data is exceeded without being left behind. Thus, human knowing has a transcendental character but remains grounded in the world. Implication: the experience of transcendence is historically mediated. Hence, all revelation is historical. This means that God deals with human beings through the finite media of the world and the contingencies of history.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. 18th and 19th century issues were discussed to explain the development of a revelation. Can you describe any 20th or modern-day issues that would create a new definition of revelation?
2. Reflect on the elements creating the Christian "theology of grace". Have you experienced God's grace in a way not explained?
3. How did your experience with God's grace change the way you feel as a Christian?