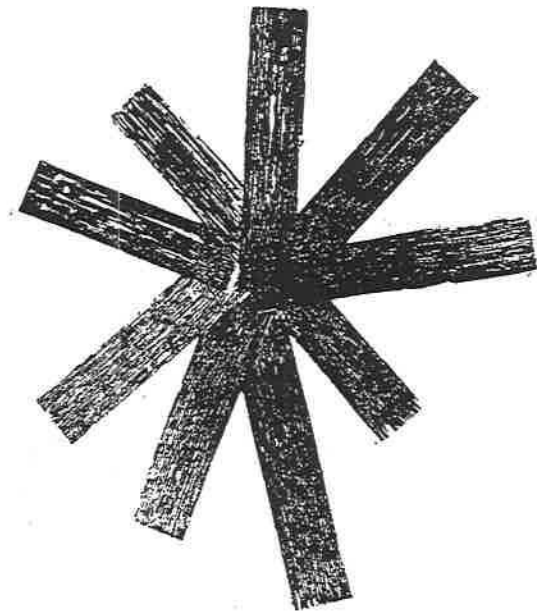


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ALBA HOUSE
a division of
St. Paul Publications
Staten Island, N.Y.

theology of revelation



**including a commentary on the constitution "dei verbum"
of vatican II**

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HISTORY AND REVELATION



A strong current of thinking, in contemporary Protestant theology, tends to oppose revelation-activity and revelation-doctrine, revelation-event of salvation and revelation-knowledge, and, as a result, a God who acts and a God who speaks. This current of thinking stresses the fact that Yahweh is a God who intervenes in the field of human history and that revelation is presented primarily as a series of events with God for their subject. Revelation is thus God's activity in human history.¹ The Bible, observes G. E. Wright, is not primarily the word of God, but the narrative of God's activity.²

It is true that the God of the Old and New Testament is a God who intrudes into the field of human history and there makes Himself manifest by the great works He accomplishes. The Old Testament recounts the wonderful deeds of God in behalf of His people. The prophets constantly refer to these deeds, the psalms praise them, and the liturgical feasts commemorate them. The New Testament is the good news which has arrived in Christ Jesus. This character of historicity is undeniable and Catholic theology also stresses it. But the disjunction between a God who acts and a God who speaks is not so obvious. Is it objectively based on Scripture? Or, to put the question in another way, what is the relationship between history and revelation? Is there an opposition between history and doctrine?

I. HISTORY, FRAMEWORK FOR REVELATION

It has become almost a commonplace to state that the Hebrews were the first to replace a cyclic conception of time with a linear conception; or that they were also the first to look upon history as a manifestation of God.³ It is in Israel that, for the first time, we find an encounter between revelation and history. Outside Israel, there

is no firmly established idea of a continuous succession of temporal events embracing past, present, and future, all unfolding according to a direction and towards a goal. Among the ancient polytheistic peoples, attention is directed first of all to *nature*. Attentive to the rhythm of the stars and the seasons (the rhythm of birth and death), man looks for security by integrating himself into this rhythm and its annual repetition. The religions of India, China, and Persia are centered on a wisdom rather than on a history. Indian time is cyclic time. More precisely, as M. Eliade distinguishes, in the Indian concept of time, there are three planes: *individual time* which is a continual flux of unreal instants; *cosmic time*, eternal repetition of the same rhythm (creation, destruction, re-creation), operating within a series of enormous cycles whose numerical terms are staggering; and finally, the *intemporal instant*, outside time, immobile, eternal present. What is really important is to be delivered from cosmic time by transcending it. Time is thus devaluated with respect to eternity; what is more, it is an obstacle which must be overcome in order to be freed from it. Time, for the Indians, is measured, but it has no center; it is barren.⁴ Hellenism, in its general aspects, is trapped within a cyclic conception of things. The Greek concept of time is one of despair: without origin, without any privileged moment, without meaning, without any bond with freedom and human salvation. History, as it is conceived by Herodotus and Thucydides, has movement, but not *teleology*. In order to escape the fatal cyclism which holds even the gods captive, the individual must escape from time. Salvation, for the Greek, could never result from an historical event.⁵

Israel was the first to break this fatal circle of seasons and repetitions in which the ancient world was so enclosed; it broke with change that is only perpetual new beginning. For Israel, time is *linear*: it has a beginning and an end. Salvation is accomplished in temporal history: it is bound up with a succession of events unfolding according to a divine plan and leading towards one unique fact, the death and resurrection of Christ.⁶ For Israel, life is framed in the cosmic context but the focus of its attention is *history*. What counts is not so much the annual cycle in which everything begins anew as what God *does*, what God *has done*, and what God *will do* according to His promises. Promise and accomplishment make up the dynamism of this time in a threefold dimension. The present heralds the future which is announced and promised in the past.⁷ The annual feasts (Easter in spring, the feast of tabernacles in autumn) are not so much acts in the cyclic drama of nature as they are a reminder of the salvific work of God.

If Israel managed thus to break the cyclic conception of time, it is because she recognized God *in history*. Israel proclaims that God intervened in her history, that this encounter took place on a *given day* and that it turned her whole existence upside down. Her God is not submerged in nature: He is a personal, living God, with sovereign freedom, and He manifests himself precisely where freedom can be shown, that is, in the history of events. The Old Testament revelation does not take place in any mythical time, "at the extra-temporal instant of the beginning" but in the framework of historical continuity.⁸ Moses received the Law at a certain place and on a certain date; it is an irreversible event, which cannot happen again, just like the other manifestations of God.⁹ *History is thus the framework for revelation*. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the only religions which thus claim a revelation on the basis of history.¹⁰ In this conception of a living God who reveals Himself in history is to be found the essence of Israel's faith in God.¹¹

This conception of revelation *in history* has two effects. First of all, it *gives value* to history. If God intervenes in history and manifests His will, historical events themselves acquire a new dimension: they become the bearers of God's intentions and give history a meaning, a sense of direction. Since the other peoples did not know the God of history, they had no way of interpreting history; they are unconscious of their role and, in periods of crisis, they do not know how to orient themselves.¹² The idea of a revelation *in history* thus gives revelation an intense character of *actualization*. God is He who, at every instant, can intervene and change the course of events: He is near, He is there, unforeseeable in His interventions as well as in His effects. Always, man must look to His coming.

II. HISTORY OF REVELATION

Regarding the interventions of God in history, we neither say nor predict anything. Everything depends on His free decision. Nothing, in God, demands an intervention at one given moment rather than another, more frequently or less frequently. Neither is there anything in man to demand that God converse with him. Revelation is a free and gratuitous event. The interventions of God stretch out over the course of many centuries. God did not say everything nor do everything all at once, He intervened at opportune moments, chosen by Him. The time of the Old Testament is a succession of meaningful moments. "It is not every part of the continuous line of time which forms the history of salvation properly so called, but rather the *kairos*,

those isolated points in the whole course of time".¹³ Thus there is a *history of revelation* and this history does not coincide with universal history. Revelation is made up little by little, progressing in quantity and in quality, as the centuries unfold and God intervenes (Heb. 1:1). These interventions of God in universal history are, as it were, outcroppings of the divine in time. But they are not isolated points, without relationship: they present an intimate coherence. From Abraham to Jesus Christ, there is one single line, one single plan appearing little by little, the divine plan, the economy of salvation. In each of the interventions of God only one part of this economy is involved. This plan, restricted to Israel first of all, enlarges to the proportions of all humanity, then, in the Church, tends to incorporate all men of all times.¹⁴

If God has intervened at certain determined moments, we can then trace a *history of revelation*, that is, successive interventions of God. What is this history which is properly speaking the history of salvation?

At the beginning of Old Testament revelation, there are first of all events which mark the birth of Israel as a people and which reveal God as the God of history, at work in history.¹⁵ These events are those of exodus, covenant, entry into the promised land. These events are not independent, but closely bound together. The primordial fact is the *deliverance* of Israel, snatched away from the bondage of Egypt. This deliverance is the work of Yahweh, for it is He who forced the Pharaoh, through the plagues of Egypt, to set Israel free (Ex. 12:31-32), and it is He who, by letting loose the waters of the Red Sea, completed the Egyptians' defeat (Ex. 14:27-28). At the very moment of Exodus, God manifests Himself as an all-powerful and saving God (Ex. 14:31). The experience of this first encounter with God left a profound mark upon the consciousness of Israel; and thus from the very outset she qualifies revelation as historical.¹⁶ Never again will Israel cease to consider herself as the "people of *deliverance* through Yahweh."

This deliverance and this setting apart are in view of an overall plan. The traditions of Sinai (Ex. 19-25) show that the goal of this deliverance is covenant. Election, exodus, and even the gift of the promised land, are in view of covenant. It is covenant which gives exodus its meaning and turns the tribes delivered from Egypt into a religious and political community.¹⁷ God associates with a people whom He has literally created (Ez. 16:1-9), just as He created Adam at the beginning, and the Church after the coming of Christ. Israel is saved by *grace* to become the people of Yahweh.¹⁸ God makes a

people for Himself and, in order to indicate the intimacy of this society, He reveals His *name*, that is, His personal being. God reveals Himself as a Person who can be called upon and who will respond to man's call. The covenant thus inaugurates an interpersonal relationship between God and His people. On the other hand, it also implies a relationship of *obligations* based on the fact of deliverance.¹⁹ Israel commits herself to be faithful to the clauses of the covenant, that is, to obey the law of Yahweh (Ex. 19:3-6; Deut. 7:7-14). Fidelity to the law will make Israel a holy people, consecrated to Yahweh (Deut. 7:6; 26, 17-19), called to glorify His name among the nations.²⁰ The entry into the promised land will be the culmination of what God has begun in Egypt. It is the accomplishment of the promise made to Abraham (Gen. 17:3-8) and the first testimony of Yahweh's fidelity to His covenant. In this first encounter between Yahweh and his people, everything is *grace*: deliverance, covenant, the gift of the promised land.

If, in addition to these events which constitute the germ of Old Testament revelation, we add the concepts of kingdom and royal messianism, the Temple and the presence of Yahweh, the exile and restoration, we have the essential core of historical events which will never cease to nourish the religious reflection of Israel.²¹ What remains is only its organic development, its homogeneous fructification. Prophetic revelation does no more than re-assert and apply the implications of the rule of the covenant to the whole unfolding of human history. It is in expressing the will of God on the events of their times, in the light of the covenant and the Holy Spirit, that the prophets make the knowledge of God grow in depth and extent. They are always calling to mind the first encounter between Yahweh and His people. At the time of exile primarily, Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah take up the theme of Exodus and promised land. There will be a new desert, a new shepherd, a new Moses. Deliverance will be a new Exodus, followed by a new covenant.²²

This, obviously, is revelation of a very concrete type. As a result, Israel's professions of faith are also very concrete. The most ancient creeds of the Old Testament are nothing more than the succinct recital of the salvific acts of God.²³ The essential theme is always the same: God has chosen our fathers and promised them the land of Canaan; the descendants of Abraham have become a great people, but, after a long sojourn in Egypt, this people has been reduced to servitude. God had pity on His people and delivered them; through marvelous works of His power, He led them through the desert and made them enter into the promised land. Such are the facts confessed

in Deut. 26:5-9; 6:20-24; Jos. 24:2-13. The psalms themselves, which are Israel's prayer, frequently take on a *narrative* form. Israel incorporates her own history into her prayer and finds in this recollection a further motive for contemplation, for confidence, for recognition, for contrition (Ps. 78; 105; 107; 77; 114; 136; 44).

III. REVELATION THROUGH HISTORY

God acts in history; He reveals himself *through history*. But, this statement demands a more precise explanation. In what sense can we speak of history as *revelation*? Let us say first of all that by history we understand not the simple course of human events and their material record, but only those events which, by reason of their importance for the Hebrew community, deserve to be preserved. But this first distinction is not enough. In order to speak of *revelation through history*, two realities must come together: event and word.

The events can be of a quite unequal nature. There can be real miracles, such as are necessary for the establishment of a supernatural religion; but it can also be events which result simply from the play of natural causes, according to ordinary divine operation. An historical event can be at the same time a miracle and a providential event, the two elements being inextricably joined: for example, in the case of exodus. In addition to this type of event of the physical order, we must also include events of the political, social, or moral order, such as victories or defeats of armies, crimes and the hard-heartedness of kings, collective unfaithfulness; all of these God can take as the occasion for making known His will.

It is true that there exists an objective divine activity in history (either providential or miraculous), and it is also true that Old Testament revelation is presented as the experience of this activity of a sovereign power directing the cause of human history and individual existence. This activity, however, does not become fully intelligible as revelation unless it is accompanied by the word which expresses the meaning of the divine activity. At one and the same time God establishes the fact of salvation and develops its meaning; God intervenes in history and explains the meaning of His intervention; God acts and comments on His own action.

From the beginning of her history, Israel lived through a certain number of events: deliverance from bondage, wandering through the desert, entry into Canaan. But what would these events be without the word God spoke to Moses, in secret (Ex. 3-4; 6:1), and without the word of Moses who, in the name of God, makes known to Israel

the meaning of this history and explains its supernatural dimension? The deliverance from Egypt would no doubt be nothing more than a migration of peoples, one among many; it would not have become so fundamental a fact without Moses' interpretation (Ex. 14:31).²⁴ This interpretation itself has become an event which determined the course of future history. Through Moses' interpretation, God revealed Himself to Moses' contemporaries and to future generations.²⁵ The structure of revelation is sacramental: facts, events, enlightened by word.

The prophet is the qualified witness and interpreter of history, the man who explains its supernatural meaning. There are two complementary lines in the Old Testament: the line of events and the line of prophets who interpret events, proclaiming, in the name of God, what they mean. God reveals Himself through history, but through history as divinely interpreted by the prophets. History is not manifest as *history of salvation* unless it is commented on authoritatively by the word of the prophet who explains to Israel the presence and content of God's activity. This activity, hidden within the historical event, needs to be complemented by a word if it is to be *fully* grasped. Through the word of the prophet Israel becomes aware of the salvific activity of God in her history. The historical event, as revelation of God, must receive its meaning from the spoken word of the prophet (Am. 3:7; Is. 42:9).²⁶ We must distinguish, on the one hand, the *historical event* (real, objective) and on the other hand, the *event of the word* (real, objective) which accompanies the historical event, and we must stress that it is this event of the word which "consecrates" the historical event as an event of revelation, for it is the word of the prophet which explains the event and proposes it to Israel's faith as an event of salvation, attested by God.²⁷

The process of revelation, in its totality, is thus made up of the following elements: A. Historical event. B. Interior revelation which provides the prophet with an understanding of the event, or at very least the reflection of the prophet directed and illuminated by God. C. The prophet's word, presenting the event and its meaning as objects of divine testimony. It is the complementary character of historical event and event of the word (God's word to the prophet, and the prophet's word to the people of Israel), that makes revelation grow. Thus the moments of revelation in the history of Israel are always marked by the appearance of one or several prophets. The presence of prophets always means that God is at work in history.²⁸

The structure of revelation, in the New Testament, is not essentially different from that of the Old. Christ is He who has come, accom-

plished the work of the Father and who, for this reason, has been exalted to the Father's right hand. The first credos of christianity are the statement of these historical facts and their bearing on salvation. The most simple forms have to do with Christ's resurrection and exaltation as Lord and Son of God (1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 10:9; Acts 8:37). The more elaborate forms tell how Christ lived, died, rose from the dead, in order to work out the salvation of the human race. The liturgical profession of 1 Tim. 3:16 sums up in one simple formula the principal phases of the history of salvation. Likewise, the discourse of Peter, in Acts, mentions all the principal facts on which Christianity is based, as well as their supernatural meaning (Acts 2:23-36; 3:12-26; 10:34-43). The first apostolic preaching, says J. Schmitt, has for its object a history viewed in the light of the Spirit.²⁹ The substance of this first kerygma is bound up with the following points: the time of the fullness announced by the prophets has been inaugurated with Christ: salvation has arrived through the death and resurrection of Christ, in full agreement with Scripture; Christ, by His resurrection, is lifted up to the right hand of the Father, as Christ and Lord, and the actual existence of the Church testifies to the coming of the Holy Spirit; as a result, each individual must repent, receive baptism and the Spirit in whom this new life is inaugurated. What is preached through the apostles is the *history of salvation* through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In Him, the history of salvation is completed and culminated. Ever after, Christ is the focal point of history: not only the history of salvation, but all history; for the coming of God in person into our history turns even profane history into something sacred.

The historical character of the revelation of the New Testament is thrown into relief by the use of Old Testament vocabulary to express the salvific work of Christ. Christ is the new Adam, the new Moses, the King according to the heart of Yahweh, the Suffering Servant, Daniel's Son of Man, the Priest according to the order of Melchisedech. His work is *deliverance* from the *bondage* of sin (Col. 1:13-14). The shedding of His blood seals the new covenant (Synoptics). His miracles recall the *marvels* of Exodus (Saint John). But whereas, in the Old Testament, revelation appears as something spread over the course of the events of several centuries, here it is contracted and condensed in the life and activity of Christ. Everything takes place in the one unique event of Christ; everything is said in the word of the Son. Since the Old Testament did not have the human word of the Son, explaining the Father's plan of salvation in human words, the doctrinal character of revelation is less apparent; the

historical character is predominant there. The Incarnation of the Son precipitates the rhythm of history: God expresses Himself once and for all, fully (Heb. 1:1).

Thus, in the New as well as in the Old Testament, revelation is presented under the form of history, but a history whose fullness of meaning can be grasped only through the event of the word. The event of the Cross, like that of Exodus, is not fully revelation unless the word *interprets* and *proposes* it to our *faith*. Without this *testimony*, bearing at once on the event and its meaning for salvation, there is no revelation in the full sense of the word.

IV. THE IMPLICATIONS OF A REVELATION IN AND THROUGH HISTORY

The admission that revelation comes to us primarily in history and through history also implies a certain number of consequences which we must now examine.

1. The first concerns the *nature* and *progress* of revelation. Revelation is not given as a system of abstract propositions concerning God, but it is incorporated in events of history. God, His attributes, His plan, are all known to us, but only through the events of history. We see thus in what sense we can speak of a history as well as a doctrine. Doctrine is viewed here under the form of the *meaningful events* of God and His plan; it does not derive from pure speculation on God. Scripture has not set up a philosophical system, but rather recounts the concrete facts to which a religious and supernatural meaning is attached. Reciting the creed means recapitulating what God has done to save humanity. The events of this history have such a *dimension*, such a *fullness of sense*, that explaining them means telling the whole *economy of salvation*, explaining the *doctrine of Christianity*, that is, what Christianity professes and what it teaches. It would be incorrect, however, to maintain that history and interpretation of history exhaust the whole content of revelation. If the historical character of one part of the object of faith is incontestable, it is equally certain that this object contains far-reaching explanations whose historical bonds are much less immediate: for example, the teaching of the poetic and wisdom literature, the moral teaching of Christ, as developed in the Sermon on the Mount. The revelation of the mystery of the Trinity is accomplished by the word rather than by history. Still, historicisation remains the characteristic and predominant trait of Christian revelation.

The *progress* of revelation is equally bound up with history. Consider, for example, the *attributes* of God: at the time of Exodus,

God revealed Himself as a personal God and Savior; at the time of entry into the promised land, as the all-powerful Warrior; the prophets insist on the spiritual and moral attributes of God (love, justice, holiness), in reaction against nationalism within and naturalism without. The exile puts Israel into contact with the nations: God, in Deutero-Isaiah, reveals Himself as the God of the nations, and Israel becomes aware of her missionary call. The knowledge of God grows deeper and more purified, but always through the medium of history.³⁰ The events of Exodus, covenant, conquest, royalty, all make up a sort of prototype of the relations of Yahweh with His people, which is a sort of key to the whole prophetic interpretation that will follow. Beginning with these facts, Israel never stops reflecting on her history, always discovering new dimensions. This reflection, always directed by the prophetic office, makes revelation progress both quantitatively and qualitatively. *Salvation* is primarily deliverance from Egypt, then from the enemy who is at the national frontier; but little by little, the punishments which strike Israel make her aware of another and deeper bondage: social injustice, the infidelity which is at the heart of man. The *covenant* is understood first of all as a pact which assures the protection of Yahweh, once the conditions He imposes have been fulfilled (Am. 5:14; Is. 28:15). Then, the multiplied infidelities of Israel, in contrast with the constant faithfulness of Yahweh, call attention to the gratuity of the covenant, show that God's whole activity has been dictated by His love for humanity; finally, under the pressure of national disaster, the conception of the covenant spiritualizes and becomes a covenant within the heart of man. The new covenant announced by Ezekiel will be a regeneration of hearts accompanied by the gift of the Spirit (Ex. 36:23-28). It will not be concluded with only one people, but with all nations.³¹ We have already seen that Israel arrived at the idea of *creation* on the basis of history. He who showed Himself master over the lawless powers of nature (Red Sea, plagues of Egypt, trek through the desert); He who showed Himself as the Lord of the peoples, using them as His instrument, and then punishing them for their pride, must also be the Creator of peoples and of the cosmos. Only creation can explain so sovereign a domination. The notion of *remnant* is the fruit of reflection on history. Israel has lived through the bondage of Egypt, the desert, the wars of occupation, the exile, the dispersion. Israel has seen in this that divine activity which spares and saves a remnant of her nation. Finally, in the doctrine of *messianism*, it is noteworthy that each of the social structures of Israel's history has undergone a reidentification in terms of messianism: the king during the royal

era; savior at the time of prophecy; priest in the times of the priestly theocracy, after the exile.³² But always, and it is important to insist on this fact, this forward progress of revelation is realized only by the word which accompanies history and explains its bearing upon salvation.

2. A second implication concerns the *particularism* of revelation. It is repugnant to certain minds for God to have revealed Himself to one particular people: to the Jews rather than the Egyptians, Greeks, or Romans. Toynbee, for example, does not refuse the idea of revelation, but he does resist the idea of a revelation to one *privileged* people. The Incarnation of God, unique, definitive, in one people, seems to smack of something both arbitrary and unacceptable.³³

This difficulty is not a new one. Celsus already had the Christians saying, in a mocking tone: "It is to us that God reveals and announces all things. He is not the least bit concerned with the rest of the world; we are the only persons with whom he speaks".³⁴ This difficulty can be answered first of all by pointing out that if the *facts* plead in favor of a revelation to one people rather than to another, we must, in faithfulness to history, write them down that way. It is not ours to decree *a priori* what God ought to do or what he ought not to do in the economy of salvation. Now the tradition of Israel puts us in contact with one absolutely unique fact in the history of nations: the fact of prophecy and of this particular prophecy. The continued religious progress of Israel, over the course of centuries, under the influence of prophets, remains without comparison in the religious annals of humanity; just as the fact of Christ and the Church, which in its way is a logical development of the fact of prophecy.³⁵

Actually, the scandal of the particularism of revelation is inseparable from its historical character. If revelation is given to us in history and through history, as an event, it necessarily follows that this event is subject to the conditions of history: it must happen here rather than there, now rather than later, in one group rather than in another. In the Incarnation, revelation is even more *particularized*: it takes place not only in *this* given community, but also in *this* given person who lived in Palestine and died in the days of Pilate.³⁶ But for the event to take place in Israel rather than Egypt or Greece, this remains a *mystery of grace* which is explained neither by the religious genius of Israel nor her faithfulness to the conditions of the covenant (Is. 1:4). We might add that the election of the chosen people takes place primarily with a view towards *service*. Revelation is entrusted to Israel, but, through Israel, revelation is to come to the entire world. It comes through Jesus Christ, but Christ, through His death and resurrection,

becomes the center of a community which bursts the boundaries of time and space. Revelation takes place in Israel, but with a view towards its extension to all nations; it is concentrated in Jesus Christ, but with a view towards *universalization*.³⁷ The Gospel must be preached to every creature. This economy of the *mediation* of individuals and peoples is a *constant* element of divine activity which wants men to be conscious of their community in revelation and in salvation. Finally we might point out that the election of Israel as mediator of revelation is primarily an election to a *responsibility*. On the material plane, the election offered Israel only a few advantages (excepting for one very brief period). Israel never knew the power of great empire, only persecution, deportation, exile, hate. The election of Israel as *depository* and *witness* to the word means primarily obedience to that word. This is a privilege little sought after by a humanity bound to earth and flesh. Israel, for the most part, showed herself unfaithful to the word. The Bride of Yahweh turned adulteress. And the love of Yahweh, shining out in his choice of Israel, shone out further in His mercy towards His unfaithful bride. Election is not a scandal, but a mystery of grace.

3. A third implication concerns the *validity* of a revelation given in time. How can a revelation which is given to us through the way of history be valid for all men and for all times? How can it escape the *relativism* inherent in history? Even if we claim that it comes from God, it is necessarily received in the categories of a given era, a given mentality; consequently, how can it enter into history, without being mutilated, deformed, exposed to all the vicissitudes that history cannot escape? Such seem to be the necessary conditions of historical revelation.³⁸

This is a serious difficulty, and would be practically unanswerable if we were speaking of a human doctrine. But, in this hypothesis, it is not a human doctrine at all we are discussing, but a divine doctrine. Still, it is true that a doctrine, even a divine doctrine, if it comes to us in history and through history, will be affected by the conditions of history. But here once again, revelation takes place in conditions such that it seems that God himself foresaw and resolved these difficulties.

Long in advance, God prepared the human mind into which His words must enter: by the election of a people which would be the depository of revelation; by a long, patient, and progressive preparation of that people; by His continuous intervention throughout a long series of prophets; by a long elaboration and purification of the concepts which would serve to express His divine message. We need

think only of the notions of kingdom, Messiah, covenant, salvation, justice, sin, law, etc. Centuries of history prepared the categories of revelation. And, most important of all, the fullness of revelation does not come to us through the relatively ordinary medium of a prophet, but through the extraordinary medium of the Word Incarnate. Christ is the Man-God, perfectly conatural to human language as well as divine thinking. As Creator, He dominates man and is familiar with all his psychological make-up and his every human resource; He dominates history and knows all its ins and outs. And it is He, the Man-God, who chooses the analogies which can serve as likenesses to the divine mystery. *What is more*, He does not leave His doctrine to the chance of history and individual interpretation. He protects it first of all by handing it down through a charism of *inspiration*, then He entrusts it to a Church which He fortifies with a charism of *infallibility* to preserve, defend, propose, and authentically interpret revelation. The Church, which is the Bride of Christ, possesses His word as a deposit which she meditates and assimilates unceasingly, in the light of the Spirit. Without this divinely established magisterium, and without the special assistance of the Spirit, we gladly concede that it is impossible to conceive of a doctrine, even though divine in its origin, which could escape the fluctuations of history.

The role of the Church, in particular, is to determine what, in concrete revelation, is properly revealed material and what are the relative elements which are the vehicle of every historical expression. Since doctrine is expressed by means of the conceptions of a given era, it is necessary to distinguish truth itself from its mode of presentation: such is the case with the doctrine of creation, proposed in terms of the sacred author's concept of cosmogony. We must also take into account the literary genre which is used: thus the doctrine of last judgment comes down to us under the description of an apocalyptic genre. An oratorical device of the prophets must not be treated as a strictly didactic expression. It is for the Church to *explain* and *interpret* revealed doctrine, according to its authentic meaning, and also to apply it to each generation, so as to keep it always identical, and still always up to date.

No doubt such a set of conditions is unheard of, unique. But Christianity and Christ are also unique in history. If it is true that a revelation, given in history and through history, cannot escape the vicissitudes of historical change, we must nonetheless carefully consider the very particular conditions of this revelation: in its preparation (election), its progress (prophecy), its definitive communication (Christ, Incarnate Word); in its transmission (inspiration) and in

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its preservation (Church, charism of infallibility). The *specificity* of Christian revelation keeps it from being treated like any ordinary human doctrine.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it would be well to list the various senses in which we can speak of *historical* revelation:

1. Revelation does not take place outside time, nor in a mythical time, the extra-temporal instant of beginning: it is an event which can be located in time. Through revelation God takes a role in human history, and His entry can be dated. Revelation makes history.

2. Revelation does not stand out as a unique point in the succession of time, but as a *succession* of discontinuous interventions. It is a progressive event: there is a *history of revelation*, that is, a history of the divine initiatives which make revelation progress quantitatively and qualitatively up to the death of the last apostle. In this history there is a *peak*, which is the coming of God in the person of Christ. This peak is an event which can be understood only in its *preparation* throughout the course of centuries. The events follow each other, but also *prepare* for each other. Over the course of centuries, God comes close to man and draws man close to Him. The history of revelation is an *economy*, a disposition, a plan of divine wisdom. It is directed towards an end; it is a teleology.

3. Revelation is accomplished *through history*, but not without the interpretation of the word. It is presented as a complex of meaningful events proceeding from God and His plan for salvation. It follows that revelation is at once history and doctrine. It is doctrine about God, but a doctrine made up on the basis of God's activity in history. It is an essentially concrete type of knowledge.

In the last analysis, if revelation, in both the Old and New Testaments, comes to us through history and in history, it is because the word of God, by its essence, is an efficacious word, always active. It effects what it says; it accomplishes what it promises. When God reveals his plan of salvation to humanity, He puts this plan into effect at the same time. The noetic order is always accompanied by the order of activity and life. The word always comes in the power of the Spirit:

