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Revelation and Religious Experience: A critical study of René Latourelle's theology of revelation

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Abstract:

This article is a critical study of René Latourelle's concept of revelation who conceives of it as Word, testimony and encounter. The theological thesis that I would like to advance in this article is that, whatever the analogy of God's revelation, it is always fundamentally rooted in the experience of human openness to the highest value of his/her life in this world. Revelation itself is the analogical word of the most significant human experience in the world. The historical intervention of God is always experienced symbolically and considered plausibly according to the criterion of universal reason. Every understanding of the mystery is a human experience which in its essence is conditioned by the mystery itself. In this sense, it can be said that every concept of revelation is constructed from any interpretative and significant experience of the human being. This fundamental aspect of Christian revelation does not appear in Latourell's theological reflection.

Keywords:

Revelation; Word; testimony; encounter; religious-existential experience

Introduction

René Latourelle, in his book *Theology of Revelation, Mystery of the Epiphany of God*, attempts to answer one of the critical questions of modern human being regarding the modality of revelation as God's intervention in human history. Latourelle proposes a theory of the triple form of revelation: word, witness, and encounter. He accounts for

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revelation as a complex phenomenon that encompasses a multiplicity of forms and means, and full of paradoxes[1].

While realizing the complexity and paradoxical facts of revelation, Latourelle in the whole path of his reflection, started and stopped in the Christian theological scriptures and traditions, and so he ignored the important and fundamental aspect of the Christian revelation, that is, the aspect of human experience or at least the aspect of the human capacity to experience or accept that intervention of God in history[2].

Indeed, the holy scriptures and all the magisterial theological traditions of Christianity are valid doctrines of revelation. However, all are not possible as doctrines without human experience and the capacity to formulate or construct them as valid doctrines of revelation. Moreover, with a fact of his starting point, Latourelle tends to deny the revealing aspect of human existence, and thus proposes a concept of God's intervention in history as purely comes from the outside, and does not take seriously the creative and continuous presence of God in the whole universe and history of humanity[3].

The problem is not that he reduces and exhausts God's revelation in biblical formulations, but the fact that he did not seem to realize (or perhaps he was afraid to say) that the formulas are the results of human

[1] René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, Cittadella Editrice: Assisi, 1996, 14, 508-511.

[2] On the theme of the modernist crisis, Latourelle clearly shows his opposition to modern theological concepts that seriously accept human experience as an important element in the event of God's revelation. Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 275-281; cf. Max Seckler / Michael Kessler, "Die Kritik der Offenbarung", in Walter Kern, H. J. Pottmeyer, M. Seckler (eds.), *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie, Traktat Offenbarung,* vol. 2, Herder: Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1985, 29-59; cf. Henri de Lubac, "The Doctrine of Father Lebreton on Revelation and Dogma according to His Anti-Modernist Writing", in his book *Theology in History,* Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1996, 322-325; cf. Avery Dulles, *Modelli della Rivelazione,* Lateran University Press: Roma, 2010, 62, 183-185; cf. Karl Rahner-Joseph Ratzinger, *Rivelazione e tradizione,* Morcelliana: Brescia, 2006, 23; cf. Karl Rahner, *Uditori della parola,* Borla: Roma, 2006, 60-62.

[3] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 11-12; cf. Max Seckler, "Extrinsezismus und Intrinsezismus", in Walter Kern, Hermann J. Pottmeyer, Max Seckler (eds.), *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie, Traktat theologische Erkenntnislehre,* Herder: Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1988, 511-513; cf. Maurice Blondel, *Storia e dogma,* Queriniana: Brescia, 1992, 46-54; cf. Edward Schillebeeckx, "Experiences of revelation in everyday-human, secular language", in his book *Church, The Human Story of God,* Crossroad: New York, 1990, 22-23.

religious experience, which for what I have seen in other theological reflections and I agree with them, both as the existential root of scriptures and all Christian traditions.

The theological thesis that I would alternatively make in this article is that revelation itself is already an analogical word for all existential and religious experience. If it is understood as God's intervention in history, then it should be experienced symbolically and considered plausibly according to the criterion of universal reason[4].

God as the creator of the universe is not an absent Present, as Latourelle affirms it. But the presence of God in human history, or the affirmation that in the events of revelation God has come out of his mystery, does not eliminate the mystery of God. The reality of God, even after the incarnation, remains forever as an absolute mystery[5].

The mystery does not mean that we cannot understand anything of that, but we always understand it through different symbolic signs of the human being's self-experience. Any understanding of the mystery is only the experiential participation of man in the reality of the mystery itself. Every understanding of the mystery is a human experience which in its essence is conditioned by the mystery. It can be said that every concept of revelation is constructed from any interpretative and significant experience of a human being[6].

Biblical Starting Point and Resistance to Dialectical Concepts

Latourelle's reflection on revelation is introduced with two biblical quotations (Heb. 1, 1, and John 1, 18) which both affirm the concrete presence of God in human history. These two quotations follow a statement that tends to go against the dialectical concept of revelation, that is, God is not an absent Present. With this statement, Latourelle reiterates that the intervention of God in human history is not dialectical, but as if it were an exhausted presence in the concrete human person in Jesus Christ as the Son of God[7].

[4] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 25; cf. "Die Kritik der Offenbarung", 47-48.

[5] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 5.

[6] Cf. Max Seckler, "Der Erfahrungsbegriff Offenbarung", in Walter Kern, Hermann J. Pottmeyer, Max Seckler (eds.), "Die Kritik der Offenbarung", 68.

[7] In the last part of his book, Latourelle talks about the 7 paradoxes of revelation. Cf.

The definitive criterion of this position is a Christological category, in which God has definitively spoken to human beings through the Son, that is, Jesus Christ. Jesus as the Word, from the beginning, has already spoken in the creative activity of God, in the prophecies of the prophets, in the construction of the elected people, and ultimately in the incarnation of the Son[8].

Regarding the content of Christian revelation, Latourelle's reflection should be appreciated. This is truly a reflection of a Catholic dogmatist that it would do a lot for Catholic people to build a secure foundation of the Christian faith. But, like apologetics of the Christian faith on revelation in the face of the various questions of modern men and women, this reflection is not enough. It also tends to weaken the adequate argument of Christian revelation. Revelation is indeed the primary foundation of Christianity, also the original foundation of all Christian theology. However, Christianity is not the only event of revelation. Christianity is one of the interpretative-significant forms of God's revelation[9].

God's revelation is always wider than Christianity and all of its history; wider than the sacred scriptures and Christian theological traditions. Sacred scriptures and all Christian traditions are part, or one could say as crystallization, of the religious experience. They have been called "Christian" because they are centered on the experience of the event of Christ. Therefore, in speaking of the fact and content of revelation, one cannot overlook the aspect of human religious experience[10].

Historical-Experiential Foundation of the Christological Category

The Christological category as a doctrinal-definitive category of Christian revelation is not formulated and fallen from "heaven", and so a human being has taken it like a formula written on a piece of stone. The affirmation of the incarnation event, God became man in Jesus Christ,

René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 508-511.

8 Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 508-511.

9 Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 6; cf. Hans Waldenfels, *Rivelazione,* Milano: San Paolo, 1999, 224-226; cf. Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ,* T&T Clark International: London & New York, 2011, xvi.

10 Cf. Joseph Ratizinger, "Rivelazione e scrittura", in Karl Rahner-Joseph Ratzinger, *Rivelazione e Tradizione,* Brescia: Morcelliana, 2006, pp. 36-38; cf. J. Ratzinger, "Cristo, la rivelazione di Dio", in Karl Rahner-Joseph Ratzinger, 40-42.

is not the affirmation that was written or recorded when the event itself happened like there was an angel as a specialized reporter of that event. This statement is undoubtedly historical, experiential, born or built from the paschal faith (experience) of the apostles[11].

The fact of that event has already been foretold by the prophets, also in this sense, in its link with the event of the incarnation of Christ, is an interpretation of the paschal experience of the apostles. Explaining the fact and content of Christian revelation without going into and taking seriously the experiential aspect of every biblical statement does not do much to make the theological concept of Christian revelation plausible. Because, the fact of revelation does not come from any biblical formula, but vice versa, every biblical formula comes from revelation.

Revelation is the mysterious act of God, who never revealed himself purely as God. The incarnation is indeed a revelation of true God, but it is not of pure God. It is true that in Jesus Christ all have been given and revealed to us, and it is all about the revelation itself. Jesus Christ is the revealed God himself. But Jesus Christ is not a pure God, but a true God-man. This dialectical essence of Christ assumes in itself an anthropological mediation of the act and content of divine revelation. The anthropological mediation means that every act of divine revelation works in human being's religious experience. We said "revelation" only in the context of human experience. It is a Word that expresses the actualization of human's openness to his meaning in the mystery of his future in God himself[12]. Because God can only reveal what man can hear (experience)[13].

The intelligibility of the incarnation as revelation lies precisely in the human self-experience. Even if God in the event of the Incarnation expresses himself, in himself, and for himself, or the Son is the self-expression-of-God out-of-himself, or the Christ is the qualified witness of the divine mystery, and all the other affirmations of the absolute God, could not be intelligible without the experience of human acceptance of that purely divine manifestation[14].

[11] Cf. Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ,* 118-128.

[12] René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 414; cf. Hans Waldenfels, *Rivelazione,* 220-224; H. Waldenfels, *Teologia fondamentale nel contesto del mondo contemporaneo,* Milano: San Paolo, 1988,178-181.

[13] Cf. Karl Rahner, *Jesus the Christ,* 153-154.

[14] René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 415, 417, 422.

Revelation as the Phenomenon of the Word

After analyzing the biblical concept of revelation in the Old and New Testaments, then he tried to classify the theme of revelation in the theologies of the church fathers and the magisterial tradition of the church, Latourelle made his theological reflection as the conclusion of all that he had investigated about the revelation.

He found that the main phenomenon of revelation, at least according to what he had investigated in Christian scriptures and theological traditions, is the phenomenon of the Word. That Word enlightened the prophets so that they had a true and just knowledge of the divine reality, and also the Word itself made flesh in the person of Jesus as the Son of God, the living God, and so God has already come out of His mystery, He spoke concretely with humans, and called them to participate in His divine life[15].

The revelation, according to Latourelle, is presented as a phenomenon of the Word. This statement is based on the biblical phenomenon of revelation, in which God is remembered who broke the silence, came out of His mystery, turned to human being, revealed the secrets of His personal life, and spoke to humanity. This phenomenon occupies both the Old and New Testaments[16].

The term "word" in the use of Latourelle is very technical. It refers both to the phenomenon of the inner illumination of the prophets, with which they were able to know the divine thoughts, as to the testimony of Christ in His gestures and His words. In Jesus Christ the Word receives its definitive fulfilment, that is, the Word became a person who speaks to us, preaches, and teaches the essence of God and the human being.

The power of the Word moved the apostles to proclaim, announce, and testify to all they saw and heard from Jesus. This Word is not empty or utilitarian but has its content or motive, that is, the salvation of human being who accepts it with faith. Salvation is the encounter with the living God[17].

[15] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 41-45.

[16] René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 363, 5.

[17] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 179 and note number 1, 363.

Latourelle deepens his argument with an attempt to see the dynamic aspect of the Word as the right analogy for divine revelation. He criticizes the scholastics' analysis of the concept of the Word being too static. Instead, Latourelle sees the dynamic and altruistic aspect of the Word, both human and divine Word. The act of speaking, according to Latourelle, is not just expressing one's thoughts to someone.

God who speaks to us not only to propose his thoughts to men and women, but there is a will to communicate himself to them. Each word has not only an object of thought but also the aspect of questioning and personal disclosure. A word is not only a concept of an object but also a provocation to interpersonal communication[18].

With that triple aspect of the word, a human being, when he/she speaks, does not speak of the world but to the world. One talk always turns to another. Talk is an act of interpersonal communication. In the act of speaking normally, a human being not only expresses his or her thoughts but expresses it with a desire to communicate with another. The word is addressed to another, it is established between an I and a You. In this sense, silence is also an act of speaking, where a human being proves to be in communion with himself or herself. The word, says Latourelle, is the search for a personal, authentic presence[19].

Each human word is also an appeal that provokes a response, or a dialogue with the other tends to establish a circuit of questions and answers from others. That appeal can take different forms: command, prayer, promise, explanation, or testimony. The answer depends on the form of the appeal. The answer to a command is obedience, to a prayer is fulfilment, to a promise is trust, to an explanation is attention, and to a witness is faith.

Latourelle realizes that even if the human word tends towards communication, that tendency is not always effective. The human word can be purely utilitarian or pragmatic. A human word could only be like taking advantage, it could even be a means of exploiting something from others. At the highest level, the human word is the expression of the person, the unveiling of the personality.

Therefore, an authentic word is not just simple information or instruction, but a revelation of the person in his singularity. Like an

[18] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 364.

[19] René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 365.

unveiling of the person, each articulated word does not exhaust the whole human personality. The personality of every single human is also revealed through gestures. A gesture could be a help to deepen and better understand the profound meaning of the human person[20].

Based on the analysis of the human word, Latourelle develops the theological thought of Thomas Aquinas on the meaning of the Divine Word. According to Thomas, the Divine Word is the action with which God enters into an exchange of thought with human. The Word is the divine thought acting in the mind of the prophets. So, what the prophets think is nothing other than the divine thought, it is the Word of God. However, according to Latourelle, this thought of Thomas is too static[21].

Latourelle proposes four qualitative acts of revelation as a phenomenon of the Word:

Creative Word, which is God himself

Considering the data of philosophy and psychology of language, he developed it and added a generic, dynamic aspect to the meaning of the Divine Word. The Divine Word is not only the divine thought that enters and acts in the minds of the prophets, but it is God himself, the living God who addresses human beings, who communicates himself to enter into an interpersonal relationship and vital dialogue with them. This Word calls them to the obedience of faith, to the communion with the living God. This Word is a living God that dwells among human beings, a Word of salvation that calls them to enter the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of love. This Word is operative, it changes the situation of humanity, it gives new life to human beings. The Divine Word is an active, effective, creative Word[22].

Word of friendship and love

The Divine Word is not utilitarian as a human word, but always as a Word of friendship and love which is shown in different ways. This means, God, addresses human being, not for himself, not only to prove that He is the almighty God. The revelation of God as Word is not like a practice of selfie, that He does something for his satisfaction. The act of God in revelation as Word is an altruistic act, that is, the act of love for the salvation of human beings.

[20] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 366-367.

[21] René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 179.

[22] René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 367.

According to Latourelle, if God wants to reveal himself effectively, it can only be to establish bonds of friendship and to associate Himself with human beings. On the other hand, if He wants to enter into a relationship of friendship with them and associate Himself with the life of human being, it is because He wants to reveal Himself. The fact of revelation and the fact of our supernatural vocation coincide with God[23].

Thus, revelation as Word manifests God's will for the salvation of human being. Human being's salvation is God's will. This is what God wants from the beginning and forever. The Word that dwells amid humanity is a Word that eliminates the distance between God and the human being and calls human being to enter into an interpersonal encounter with God. The living Word becomes the God who is very close, the God with us, Emmanuel. This gesture of the living Word in Jesus Christ expresses God's will, thought or free plan for salvation, to establish bonds of friendship and love[24].

Word of divine secrets

God's intention to save human being is not conditioned by human need but is a free act of God as love. In his love, God seeks human being who has distanced himself from Him. For this reason, God becomes in solidarity with the human being to the point of incarnating Himself to raise a human being to his level. Latourelle has taken the term "incarnation" in its broadest meaning, which indicates the action, gesture, behavior of the Word. The intention of love also shows us the secrets of divine life, the mystery of the Trinity. It is the divine secret *par excellence*. The Word in Jesus includes in itself the secret of divine intimacy. Jesus as the Son knows the Father, as the Father knows his Son (Mt 11, 27; Jn 1, 18). No one knows the secrets of God but the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2, 11). For this, the living Word is a self-giving of the Trinitarian God[25]

Word of charity

As the gift of God's love, the Word in Jesus Christ not only manifests divine secrets, but God's love in charity was also practiced throughout his life, especially with His passion and death. Christ on the cross tells the father's charity (Jn 1, 18). The Word of God is exhausted to the

[23] René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 368.

[24] René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 367-368.

[25] René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 367-368.

point of silence. His death and His silence are the expressions of the love offered to humanity. The Word of love was given entirely to human beings[26].

Revelation as Testimony

The second analogy of revelation in Latourelle's theological reflection is the testimony. With this, the dynamic aspect of the Word has been affirmed and deepened. The Word not only acts in the mind of the prophets to know the divine secrets but also at the same time it is a divine witness as a Trinitarian reality. It could be said that revelation is a divine testimony, the action of God to bear witness to Himself[27].

All Scripture contains this divine action, like an economy of divine witness. God chooses privileged men and women to bear witness to his truth. With this statement, the dynamic aspect of the Word in the practice of the economy of testimony has been demonstrated. Revelation or the Word of God is truly a dynamic Word that does not stop in itself as an inner Word or only as an abstract thought in the mind of the prophets, but has come out in the outer words, the spoken and gesticulated words of the prophets, and especially in the words and deeds of Christ, in all the testimony of Christ. Thus, Jesus is the witness of God the Father, and the apostles are the witnesses of Jesus. The apostles invite all men and women to believe what they have seen, heard, experienced of the Word of life. Those who accept the testimony of the apostles, through baptism, enter the new society, the Church[28].

The concrete dynamics of the Word in witness stopped in the testimony of the apostles. Latourelle sees the position of the Church as the final result of the dynamic act of the Word in witness. Thus, the Church has only one mission of preserving, protecting, proposing, explaining, interpreting, and understanding ever better the entire deposit of divine testimony[29].

Latourelle also affirms the link between revelation as a witness and the manifestation of the Trinitarian life. He affirms Scripture as a mutual witness of the Trinitarian God. God came into the world through the Son who testifies to the life and saving will of the Father through his

[26] René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 369.

[27] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 369

[28] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 369-370.

[29] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 369-370

words and deeds, and the Father in turn testifies that Christ is his Son. And then the Son testifies to the Holy Spirit and promises to send him as a comforter and sanctifier of the world. The Holy Spirit testifies to the Son because he makes him know the fullness of all the works of the Son. Latourelle concludes that testimony is the secret link between eternity and time, between heaven and earth[30].

The authoritative aspect of divine revelation is also demonstrated with the effective dynamics of the Word in witness. In the many documents of the magisterium, it is often stated that revelation is a Word of authority, in the fundamental sense of that word, that is, a strength or possibility of making good things grow in general, and especially in faith in God. Like a divine authority, testimony makes a faith, a trust, which is good for a human being's life, grows in the heart[31].

The Christian faith is not like adherence to science but as a homage, that is, the act of submission before the Lord, God the Savior. The homage of faith is possible only by the power of revelation as *locutio Dei attestans*. It means that God's revelation is not only authoritative teaching to make human being knows God but more than that, God's revelation is an attestation that makes human being capable of submitting himself/herself to the authority of God who teaches him/her His truth. In the word of attestation, on the other hand, the auditor gives his assent to the authority of the speaker; he/she believes in the word because of the knowledge and truthfulness of him who speaks[32].

There are two models of testimony according to Latourelle.

The human model

The essential and specific element of this model is the invitation to believe. This invitation comes from God, from the loving authority of God that makes human being able to place their trust in God, in all His teachings. The guarantee of this invitation is the truth of God himself, that is, God's love and will to save human beings. Therefore, this invitation is truly credible because it is guaranteed by the truth of God's love[33].

[30] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*,370-371.

[31] Cf. *Dizionario illustrato della lingua italiana,* Sansoni Editore: Firenze, 1990, 95.

[32] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 371.

[33] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 371

This is an invitation to faith, a response prompted by a witness. Thus, faith is a decision or judgment based on the truth of the testimony. The criterion of the truth of the testimony is the authority of the witness who undertakes to tell the truth. Authority is not in itself the ultimate guarantee of truth. Authority always needs to be accompanied by objective signs[34].

The divine model

The essence of the divine witness is the manifestation of the mystery of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's witness. He speaks of the mystery of his person. The apostles are the witnesses of all that Jesus Christ said and did[35].

There are two differences between these two models. The first is that divine testimony not only affirms the truth but at the same time also affirms the absolute infallibility of the testimony. Because God is pure testimony. God, Himself is the guarantee of the truth of the testimony.

The second difference is that the divine witness takes place in a double way: external and internal. The external way is this: God, through the prophets, Christ and the apostles, notifies human beings, in distinct terms, His plan of salvation and invites them to faith. Interior way is an entirely interior action, or as an interior illumination, which God can act directly in the soul. God also can infuse the human spirit with a light by which he attracts human being to confirm his/her knowledge to divine knowledge[36].

Revelation as encounter

The third analogy of revelation according to Latoruelle is the encounter. It happens between an "I" and a "You". A word as inner illumination is an encounter between the human mind and an object, between a man/woman who hears and God who speaks. In this sense, every word, says Latourelle, is an existential delegation: an ego leaves in search of "a You" charged with the existence of the one who utters it. The word becomes a reality in the encounter. I could say, the encounter is a testimony or attestation of the reality of the word. Each word tends to establish a contact, an authentic dialogue, and also a communion built

[34] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 372.

[35] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 374.

[36] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 374

by an I and a You. An I and a You could be in authentic communion only in a loving encounter. Therefore, dialogue in love is the essence of an encounter[37].

It could not be an authentic encounter without loving dialogue. Revelation as an authentic encounter is truly a dialogue of love between God and man/woman. On the part of man/woman, this encounter is found in faith, that is, human acceptance of the invitation of God's love and friendship to enter into the communion of life with God himself. Faith is man's/woman's step towards God.

Faith is like the smile of friendship in human dialogue, the encounter with the personal God in his Word. Therefore, the encounter as the analogy of revelation and faith are essentially interpersonal. Thus, the act of faith always requires the mind's adherence to the message of God who speaks to men/women with a guarantee of the authority of love. That adhesion is finalized by the encounter with the living and personal God, it inaugurates in dialogue and will complete in vision[38].

While realizing that faith inaugurates dialogue as an encounter with the living God, Latourelle also recognizes that faith is a global attitude. In this case, he follows the path of St Paul and St John. But this does not mean that he recognizes the religious existence of all humanity and all men/women. I will return immediately to this topic in the critical analysis, the next part of this elaboration[39].

There are three characteristics of the encounter conceived as the analogy of revelation.

God's free initiative

In his journey following the way of St Paul and St John, Latourelle was interested in affirming that the encounter is operated by faith. This statement does not mean that faith is fundamental for the encounter and universal in the experience of all men/women. With that affirmation, Latourelle defends God's initiative in the encounter, as well as defends the teaching of grace.

[37] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*,375-376.

[38] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 375-376.

[39] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 375-376.

The encounter of faith and in faith is initiated by God. God is the source of everything, initiator, creator of everything. In revelation and faith, everything is grace: the action of God that comes out of his mystery, the economy of the word, the message of salvation, the ability to respond to the message and to encounter God in faith.

Faith as the return movement towards God has its beginning in God. God imprints in human intelligence a tendency, a supernatural impulse towards the first Truth, which is God himself. But the initiative of God does not harm human freedom. God's initiative is not a command, but always a free invitation to be freely answered by man/woman[40].

The human being's free option

The encounter of faith is an encounter between two freedoms: freedom of God and a human being. God has his free initiative and human being has the option of accepting or rejecting God's invitation to enter His divine life. In this sense, God's invitation puts the human being in a crisis, that is, a significant moment to discern the true meaning of his/her life, to find a just and meaningful way to salvation. Because the God's Word gives meaning to our existence. It is not a question of making minor modifications to our value system; it is a question of orienting the whole being differently[41].

The Word of God is an orientation towards a true meaning of life, that is, God himself. It needs a judgment or discernment on the part of a human being to enter and walk in the light of that orientation. Faith is therefore a decision for God, an uprooting of the human self and a taking root in Christ, a death for oneself for a new life in the meaningful and vital encounter with God[42].

Communion with God

The term encounter, closely linked to the meaning of communion. One could say the encounter is a reunion, a communion of at least one I and one You. Revelation as Word, testimony, interior illumination, or as an invitation to believe, all these affirmations point to this one saving reality, that is, man's communion with God as creator and savior of the

[40] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 377.

[41] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 377.

[42] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 377.

universe and all humanity. This is precisely the fundamental meaning of man's salvation.

Salvation means, being or living with God, living in communion with God through faith in his Son. He who receives the Word of Christ and abides in this Word passes from the condition of a servant to that of a son and friend (Gal. 4: 4-6); he shares knowledge and love with the Father, the Son and the Spirit[43].

The human being, in faith in Christ, lives in communion with God, which in its essence is a Trinitarian communion of love. The encounter that leads a human being to communion with God is the encounter of faith operating in charity. Charity or unifying love is a fundamental aspect of revelation. Nor as a Word, as well as witness and encounter, does revelation always refer to a single fact: God is love (Jn 4, 8-10). Revelation and faith are the unifying works of love that creates a new world of covenant, of communion between God and human being, between all men and women in faith in Christ[44].

Critical Analysis in Light of Avery Dulles' Models of Revelation

Latourelle's theological reflection on God's revelation is truly a great work, in the sense that it now becomes one of the important references in the fundamental theological field of study. Thus, it should be recognized as a great work with its important contribution to the theological-Christian tradition. Especially his biblical historical approach. If someone wants to know the history and the biblical-dogmatic foundations of Christian revelation, he/she should not leave his book to read, even should not ignore his theological reflection.

Thus, according to a criterion of fidelity to the Bible and the Christian tradition, Latourelle's theological reflection on revelation, in my opinion, should be a great champion in the dogmatic-historical theological field rather than fundamental. Also, according to Avery Dulles' classification of models of revelation, without falling into the fundamentalist position, his reflection is a good example of a double historical doctrinal model. This means accepting the bible as revelation without denying the presence of God throughout the history of the Christian tradition[45].

[43] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 378.

[44] Cf. René Latourelle, *Teologia della rivelazione, mistero dell'epifania di Dio*, 379.

[45] Cf. Avery Dulles, *Modelli della Rivelazione,* 7, 62, 74.

Three analogies of the revelation that he uses in his reflection: word, witness, encounter, all are exclusively the biblical terms and the exclusive heritages of the Christian theological-magisterial tradition. Thus, Latorulle's theological reflection on revelation could be placed in the theological line of *neo-scholasticism* (between 1850 and 1950), which has often been considered revelation in its supernatural essence, God's speech to men, an authoritative testimony of God, as Word of God (Vatican I), divine secrets, illumination, the light of faith, etc[46].

Latourelle would be one of the very good children of the *neo-scholastic*. He certainly does not distinguish between natural and supernatural revelation, as has often been done by neo-scholastic authors. But he still made a distinction between the human word and divine Word, human testimony and the divine one. His reflection on Christian revelation, therefore, is still very heavily characterized by neo-scholastic dualism[47].

Internal consistency

As a "son" of *neo-scholasticism*, one could generally say that Latorurelle's theory on the triple form of revelation would not lack internal coherence. The whole theory follows with a certain inevitability, creates a unit of measure of productivity, not only theoretical but also practical. It provides solid doctrinal criteria for any theological discernment of revelation. Three analogical forms of revelation point to the same divine reality, the same mysterious and illuminating action of God to make a human being capable of rightly understanding his divine secrets[48].

The practical fruitfulness of the internal life of the Church

According to Avery Dulles, a more consistent advantage of the propositional model is its practical fruitfulness for the unity and growth of the Church. Latourelle's theory would encourage and fruitfully increase the fidelity of Christian (Catholic) believers to biblical doctrines, magisterial teachings and the founding traditions of the Church. This theory would offer believers a clear sense of identity, which would promote a sense of solidarity. A good position to maintain orthodoxy, would exclude dissidents, would promote a lively sense of mission,

[46] Cf. Avery Dulles, *Modelli della Rivelazione,* 108, 110-115.

[47] Cf. Avery Dulles, *Modelli della Rivelazione,* 109.

[48] Cf. Avery Dulles, *Modelli della Rivelazione,* 117.

emphasizes what is unique and distinctive in Christianity, and would not leave believers in doubt about how much they have to announce[49].

Lack of plausibility

Latoruelle's theological reflection does not go beyond a concept of the Bible as a collection of infallible divine proposition or assertion.

However, the Bible, according to Avery Dulles, does not seem to claim such propositional infallibility for itself. Furthermore, says Dulles, the Fathers of the Church and their medieval followers, on the whole, were open to a great variety of allegorical and spiritual interpretations that went far beyond the literal meaning of the propositions. The thesis according to which the Bible is firmly expressed as the expression of revealed truth, in the age of critical thought, is perceived as lacking in plausibility[50].

Critical study of the Bible has found that there are various literary forms in Scripture: saga, drama, historical fiction. Also, there is a close relationship between the Gospels and the preaching of the primitive Church. The passages that claim to be historical in Scripture are impregnated with poetic, legendary and mythical elements. Even among biblical authors, there are different religious views[51].

It has been clear that it is impossible to use the Bible as an authoritative source of historical and scientific information. The same impossibility also is in connection with the theological-magisterial traditions of Christianity. It is true that theologians and popes, like biblical authors, acted and thought under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, they too have never escaped the limits of the horizon of their time[52].

Inadequacy concerning experience

The Bible is sacred and authoritative as the Word of God theologically not because it contains true and absolute scientific information on the innermost secret of divine life, but because it is a historical actuation of the acting and thinking of humanity and a very serious, existential and

[49] Cf. Avery Dulles, *Modelli della Rivelazione,* 119.

[50] Cf. Avery Dulles, *Modelli della Rivelazione,* 120.

[51] Cf. Avery Dulles, *Modelli della Rivelazione,* 120

[52] Cf. Avery Dulles, *Modelli della Rivelazione,* 121-122.

significant human religious experience[53]. It is a fundamental expression or historical testimony of humanity's existential and religious openness to the mysterious reality of God, to accept His revelation, to respond to His existential call to the communion in the concrete-daily life of every human being in every place and time[54].

Religious-existential experience as the fundamental aspect of the Christian revelation is neither seen nor forgotten in Latourelle's theological reflection. Given this situation, his reflection on revelation is more suitable to be categorized as a reflection in and for the field of dogmatics than it is for fundamental theology. Fundamental theology not only approaches revelation as a basis for theological reflection but also considers it as a theological basis rooted in the religious-existential experience of human being.

Biblical or historical revelation never exhausts the abyss of the ineffable mystery of God. With the biblical or historical revelation, a transcendental relationship of human being with God is given. That relationship is certainly elevated, a supernatural experience elevated by grace[55].

Dulles is right when he evaluates the doctrinal model as inadequate concerning the experience. Because, taking Edward Schillebeeckx's thought, Dulles affirms that there can be no revelation without experience. The same evaluation is also valid for Latourelle's theological reflection, which seems to ignore even deny the aspect of human experience in the event of divine revelation. In light of Dulles' thought, in this type of theological approach, little recourse is made to the evocative power of biblical images and symbols; little motivation is given to look for signs of God's presence in one's life and experience[56].

Not in favor of dialogue

Latourelle's theological reflection on revelation, like the character of all thoughts of a doctrinal model, has not shown itself in favor of dialogue with other Churches and religions.

[53] Cf. Karl Rahner, «Annotazione sul concetto di rivelazione», in Karl Rahner-Joseph Ratzinger, *Rivelazione e Tradizione,* 18.

[54] Edward Schillebeeckx, "Experiences of revelation: in the secular and religious sense", in his book *Church, The Human Story of God,* Crossroad: New York, 1990, 15-28.

[55] Cf. Karl Rahner, «Annotazione sul concetto di rivelazione», in Karl Rahner-Joseph Ratzinger, *Rivelazione e Tradizione,* 112-115.

[56] Cf. Avery Dulles, *Modelli della Rivelazione,* 124-125, 183.

It is a fruitful reflection but limited and closed in itself. A good example of the exclusivist model, and so it is difficult to enter into a constructive and respectful dialogue with other religious faiths. The effect of this way of thinking would be a separation or division between "us" and "the others", between having and not having faith, between full or devoid of revelation[57].

A kind of dialogue that is possible from this model of reflection is a theological discourse as commonly practiced among theological intellectual elites, which generally is nothing more than an apology and even a show of one's religious piety in front of others.

This model is of little help and can even complicate the lives of Christians themselves in today's world which is highly secularized both by modernism or postmodernism and by religious beliefs that do not recognize the concept of revelation as in Buddhism. Buddhism and various religious beliefs that do not recognize the concept of revelation are very much set aside in Latourelle's reflection. This contradicts the three analogies of revelation, all of which are closely related to the world of communication among human beings.

Conclusion

Revelation is a word that contains a concept describing the human experience of the mystery of its existence in this world. In other words, an experience of revelation can reveal the mystery of God but never becomes the totality of revelation itself. With the existential experience, the mystery of God was not completely exhausted.

Any analogy or image of revelation is a symbolic interpretation of human religious experience that is conditioned or illuminated by the grace of the mystery itself. Revelation is the word of religious experiences in which and through which the human being connects and binds him/herself to the deepest sense of his being in this world, which is called God in religions.

Three analogies of revelation in René Latourelle's reflection: word, witness, and encounter are nothing more than an interpretative-symbolic (significant) explanation of the apostles' religious experience, the experience lived with Jesus Christ who is the true God-man the only revelatory Word that is interpretative and rightly interpreted in the eyes of the apostles' religious experience, conditioned and oriented by the grace of the ineffable God.

[57] Cf. Avery Dulles, *Modelli della Rivelazione,* 126.

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