

of John 6 stands or falls by the validity of the positions previously adopted. It is true, moreover, that completely apodictic arguments are not forthcoming to establish the validity of these positions. In such a situation it might well be thought desirable to deal with the problems first. But all too frequently the contribution of the biblical theologian seems negative. We ought, I think, always to try as best we can to expound in a positive way the doctrinal content of the Scriptures which alone matters in the end, even though we cannot always do this with certainty.

On the other hand, the difficulties and uncertainties must not be glossed over, at the risk of facile, subjective and unsound doctrinal syntheses. It will therefore be necessary to indicate the underlying conclusions and the reasons why they were adopted.

(to be concluded)

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## REVELATION IN THE BIBLE

### II THE MANNER OF REVELATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In a previous article<sup>1</sup> we examined the use of the words 'reveal,' and 'revelation' in the New Testament, and glanced briefly at the synonyms 'manifest,' and 'manifestation'; and we found that they signify a kind of happening that is proper to the New Testament and to the last times, and *not* the kind of happenings that are told of in the Old Testament. For these words are not only dramatic, they are climactic; applicable therefore only to the climax of the drama; and that (in this particular divine comedy) is the manifestation of the fullness of God's saving will in Christ, both in his first advent and in his second. Revelation is thus something that has happened and also something that is going to happen.

We found a very similar pattern emerge from a look at St John's use of the word 'speak' in his gospel. The mere fact of Jesus' speaking is invested by the evangelist with emphatic meaning; he speaks because he is the Word of the Father, who has been sent. Speaking the mysteries of God is a function of having been sent; the Son speaks because the Father sent him; the Holy Ghost will speak because the Father and the Son will send him; the apostles and the Church will speak because the Word incarnate will send them. But there had been

<sup>1</sup> cf. *Scripture*, 1963, pp. 1-6

no such divine sending in the Old Testament, and therefore there had been no such divine speaking.

But though the New Testament writers were very conscious of the *newness* of the divine revelation in Christ, and hence of its otherness from what had preceded it, they were also aware of it as the fulfilment of the divine condescension towards man that had preceded it in the Old Testament. In Heb. 1:1 the word 'speak' is used, in contrast to St John's use of it, to signify the common denominator of Old and New Testaments. God spoke then in the prophets, and has spoken now in these last times, in the Son. Later theological usage has applied the word 'revelation' to signify this common denominator of God communicating with man. Within the comprehension of this common denominator we now go on to inquire about the manner of the specifically neo-testamentary revelation.

What happened, then, when God revealed His saving mysteries? How did He establish contact, how did the recipients receive His revelation? The New Testament gives evidence of several means of revelation, and the interesting thing about many of them is that they indicate a sort of outbreak of Old Testament phenomena, even of the more primitive, quasi-magical, Old Testament phenomena. Now if we take revelation seriously as real divine communication with man, we must pay some attention to phenomena; the question asked in a certain manual of apologetics may seem rather naïve, but it is a genuine question: *Quomodo locutio tribui potest Deo, qui est spiritus purus et os non habet?* That *quomodo* can be treated as a philosophical, formal 'how,' or as an empirical, historical, material 'how,' and it is to this second sort of question 'how' that I will be looking for the New Testament answer. The Bible takes the answer to the first sort of question for granted—it has grown out of the mental stage of asking it.

The first means of New Testament revelation is Scripture—that is to say the Old Testament. The doxology at the end of Romans is a good text to start with: 'To him that is able to confirm you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of a mystery which has been kept quiet from eternity, but was just now manifested and through prophetic scriptures was made known to all the gentiles for them to obey in faith according to the eternal God's decree, to the only wise God through Jesus Christ be glory for ever and ever, Amen' (16:25-7). The Apostle is talking purely and simply about New Testament revelation, which he calls successively 'my gospel,' 'the proclamation of Jesus Christ,' and 'the revelation of a mystery'; and this mystery has only lately been manifested. How has this been done? By making the mystery known to

the Gentiles *through* the scriptures, which are of course the old Testament scriptures. God's New Testament revelation is achieved by means of Old Testament scriptures ; rather a curious paradox. And what does it mean ?

To elucidate it let us look at two Petrine texts ; both exceedingly obscure. To begin with, 2 Pet. 1:19ff. : ' And we have more firm the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a murky place, until the day dawns and the morning-star rises in your hearts ; realising this first of all, that no prophecy of scripture is of private solution ; for not by man's will was prophecy ever brought, but men spoke from God being carried by the Holy Ghost.' If we assume, as is commonly done and as seems natural at first reading, that ' the prophetic word ' in the first part of the sentence, ' no prophecy of scripture ' in the second, and ' prophecy ' in the third all signify the scriptures (i.e. of course the Old Testament), then we merely have an exhortation to devout bible reading. But if the passage is read in this way, the train of thought in the last two sections becomes incoherent and hard to follow ; it can be made sense of, but only with reference, I think, to later controversies and issues. The writer was not, after all, faced with the Protestant Reformation.

If however we take ' prophecy ' in the last two instances and perhaps ' prophetic word ' also in the first to signify the New Testament charism of prophecy, then the passage may be easier to explain : ' No prophecy of scripture is of private solution ' ; i.e. no utterance of a Christian prophet about the meaning of scripture is to be treated as a purely personal opinion, because it is an utterance proceeding from the Holy Ghost. ' The prophetic word ' of the first part of the text could mean the same thing, or at least could mean scripture as penetrated and interpreted by the Christian prophet. And this word is the current and contemporary revelation to which we must attend until the final Day of total enlightenment.

Secondly, 1 Pet. 1:10 : ' About this salvation (i.e. the ultimate salvation to be achieved in the revelation of Jesus Christ at his second coming which we await) prophets who prophesied about the grace given you have minutely searched and examined, searching to what sort of moment the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing, which was testifying beforehand to the Christward sufferings and the glories after them ; to whom it was revealed that not for themselves but for you were they ministering the things which were lately announced to you by those who evangelised you in the Holy Ghost . . . things at which angels long to peep.' Here again the reference may be to the Old Testament prophets, but I think myself it makes better sense of the passage if we take the prophets mentioned as being Christian prophets,

prophesying on a particular occasion which concerned the apostle's correspondents. Then what the prophets 'searched and examined' would be in fact the scriptures. *Erauno*, 'search' is the word used for the activity of searching the scriptures.

Thus I suggest, on admittedly obscure evidence, that the inspired searching of the inspired scriptures was the chief function of the New Testament charism of prophecy; the object being to bring the message of the scriptures into focus on Christ and on this last age which he has inaugurated. So we have 'the mystery made known through prophetic scriptures' as in the text from Rom. 16, i.e. through the scriptures scrutinised by Christian prophets. I think we may be sure that this charism of prophecy was more than pious fortune-telling—as indeed was Old Testament prophecy. St Paul calls it one of the more excellent gifts: 'Pursue charity, be zealous for spirit gifts, but especially to prophesy' (1 Cor. 14:1). We could define it, perhaps, as a revelational utterance disclosing some aspect of the fullness of life in Christ, chiefly through reflection on scripture. We can associate it with such a text as this from Luke: 'Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures' (24:45).

We should, though, allow some room for the 'pious fortune-telling' aspect of prophecy, in so far as the charism would seem always to have operated with reference to particular concrete situations facing particular people or communities. There is a certain analogy between God's revelation and case law; each is developed, in the main, not by systematic deduction from general principles but by a more intuitive presentation and apprehension of principles in particular instances. The prophet's function is to manifest God's will or His word of grace and consolation or of warning with reference to the here and now, and in so doing He kindles lamps that will illuminate other situations too.

The charism of prophecy is expressly associated with revelation in several texts: 'If something is revealed to another sitting down, let the first be silent' (1 Cor. 14:13); and in more general terms: '. . . the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to other generations . . . as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit' (Eph. 3:5). This prophetic searching and interpretation of the Scriptures as an instrument of revelation may be assimilated to the midrashic technique which is exemplified in many of the later writings of the Old Testament. The final masterpiece of prophetic midrash is *the* book of revelation, the Apocalypse.

We come next to lesser charismatic modes of revelation: visions and ecstasies. There is Peter's vision at Joppa, the revelation of a point

absolutely vital for the Church (Ac. 10:9ff.). There is Paul's conversion, including the vision seen by Ananias (Ac. 9), and the vision he saw as he was praying in the temple (Ac. 22:18), and his experience of being rapt into Paradise (2 Cor. 12:1ff.); though since in this case he heard 'words that it is not lawful to man to utter,' perhaps we can scarcely call this a means of revelation to the Church, except insofar as it must have strongly qualified his apprehension of the gospel he preached. There was the gift of tongues and of interpretation (1 Cor. 12:10 and 14:2ff.), a continuation of the Pentecostal gift, the value of which was more symbolic than effectively revelational. There was the word of wisdom and knowledge in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8) perhaps included under the grace of teaching (1 Cor. 12:28). In what way these latter were seen as distinct from the grace of prophecy we have not enough information to say. One might see it perhaps as analogous to the difference discernible in the Old Testament between the prophetic and the sapiential writings. The occurrence of visions, ecstasies, and other paranormal phenomena in the Old Testament needs no pointing out.

Even more interesting, though less important, are one or two minor modes, which can almost be called techniques, of revelation, which have their affinities with some of the more archaic elements in the Old Testament. There is an instance of revelation by the taking of an omen, i.e. by hearing a divine communication in something said casually and with quite a different intention: 'Do you people know nothing at all?' said the high priest to the sanhedrin; 'Don't you figure it would suit you if one man died for the people, instead of the whole nation being destroyed?' Sheer *realpolitik*; but the evangelist sees an omen in it: 'This however he did not say as from himself, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation . . .' (Jn. 11:51). There are two Old Testament instances of this omen-taking procedure; both Gideon and Jonathan take omens from the words of their enemies (Jg. 7:9-15 and 1 Sam. 14:6-13).

There is prophecy by symbolic action, Agabus binding himself with Paul's girdle (Ac. 21:10). One remembers Ezekiel's strange symbolic behaviour (Ez. 4 and 5), or Jeremiah putting a yoke on his neck in sign of the imminent captivity of Judah and the neighbouring peoples (Jer. 27), or buying a new loin-cloth, wearing it, and then going and burying it by the Euphrates, and later digging it up to find it spoiled (Jer. 13:1-11). It has to be admitted that Agabus' symbolic miming was nothing like so laborious as that of his august predecessors; but the same prophetic technique is being employed.

There is the technique of seeking God's will by casting lots for a new apostle to take Judas' place (Ac. 1:24), which recalls the ancient use of the oracle of the Urim and Thummim (cf. 1 Sam. 14:38-42). To conclude our list with a question mark, there are a number of times when we are told of a divine communication, without being told how it was made, just as we are not usually told in the Old Testament by what means the Lord spoke to Abraham, or Moses or Elias, but simply that he did so. Likewise in the Acts we are told that 'the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul' (13:2); and 'the Holy Ghost bears witness in every city, telling me that bonds and tribulations await me' (20:23).

This rapid and clearly inadequate survey of the revelation phenomena of the New Testament, which shows this curious recrudescence of even the most archaic of Old Testament phenomena, gives us a picture of the apostolic Church as very conscious that it was not only the bearer and guardian, but also the receiver of divine revelation, the receiver in all its various abundance of manifestation of that revealing Spirit of the Lord that had worked in the patriarchs, prophets and scribes of the Old Testament. But what had been there a successive and progressive revelation, in its manner as well as its content, beginning with methods of divination that strike one at first as mere superstition and ending with the sublimest utterances of the prophets—all this is recapitulated here in the New Testament in a sort of *anakephalaïōsis* of the Spirit, who in fulfilment of the prophecy from Joel which St Peter quotes at Pentecost (Ac. 2:14ff.) is poured out, so to say, all at once, giving the Church a real foretaste of the *tota simul* of eternity.

All this communication of the Spirit in varied modes to the Church of the New Testament issued in an effect like the one produced by similar communications to the People of the Old—sacred writings; but now in less than a century, whereas then it had taken the best part of a thousand years. The activity of inspired writing can also, I consider, be regarded as a means of revelation, and the charism of scriptural inspiration as a mode of the prophetic gift.

But all these more or less important, more or less strange means of divine communication in the Spirit are subordinate to, and founded upon, and comprehended by the one arch-instrument of New Testament revelation that has no parallel whatever in the Old Testament this side of the original creation—'in these last days he spoke to us in the Son' (Heb. 1:2). Here we rejoin the conclusion of the previous article, that revelation in its New Testament sense is an exclusively New Testament reality. God's saving mystery is revealed precisely by being realised; and it is realised by the mission of the Son to live and die

in the flesh and to rise again in glory, and then by the mission of the Holy Ghost. Just as the latter presupposes the former, so the various manifestations or modes of revelation of the latter presuppose the mode of revelation of the former. And the Son of God was manifested to the world by being seen and heard by his apostles. And the grace of apostleship, the fundamental charism of revelation which was granted exclusively to the apostles as foundation members of the Church, was in fact the least spectacular charism of them all ; the charism of seeing and hearing, with their ordinary eyes and ears, the Word incarnate, and of testifying to his resurrection from the dead. 'What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands touched . . . , what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also' (I Jn. 1:1), says St John. St Peter also, both in his speech at the election of a successor to Judas (Ac. 1:21-2) and in his address to Cornelius' household (Ac. 10:40-2) states the prime apostolic function of being eye-witnesses to the Lord's resurrection.

But it was not only seeing and hearing Jesus Christ the Word incarnate that formed the apostolic qualification ; many saw and heard him who did not even believe in him. The apostle must also in a sense be one who had seen and heard the Father. Our Lord says to Philip, 'He that has seen me has seen the Father' (Jn. 14:9). But perhaps it was a combination of seeing the Lord and hearing the Father in faith that constituted the precise grace of apostleship. It is a revelation of the Father in heaven that makes Peter blessed and qualifies him for his office (Mt. 16:17). St Paul too, who saw the risen Lord as one born out of due time (I Cor. 15:8), seems also to ascribe his special office of apostle to the Gentiles to a revelation from the Father : 'When it pleased him . . . to reveal his Son in me that I might evangelise him among the gentiles' (Gal. 1:16).

The Father's voice is only heard in faith, and conversely wherever there is faith, there is the Father's voice heard, there is revelation. God reveals Himself directly in faith to all believers. 'Everyone who has heard from the Father and learned comes to me' (Jn. 6:45). 'My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me' (Jn. 10:27). Those who hear and believe, but have not seen the Lord cannot be apostles, foundations of the Church ; but they have their own special blessing. 'Because you have seen me, Thomas, [and thus qualify to be an apostle] you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed' (Jn. 20:29).

*(to be concluded)*

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