Topic 2: The "Why" of Revelation

All men and women possess a natural desire to gain full knowledge of God, although we cannot attain this knowledge without God’s help. Through the history of salvation recounted in the Bible, God has revealed himself as a personal being and a Trinity of persons. By this revelation, God seeks to offer us the possibility of living in communion with Him, so that we can share in his gifts and in his own life, and thus attain complete happiness.

10/01/2022

1. The “why” of Revelation

Each person has a natural desire to reach a full knowledge of God. Such knowledge, however, cannot be attained by human effort alone. This is because God is not a material creature or a sensible reality that we can experience. We can arrive at some certainties about God from created beings and from knowledge of our own being. But these ways of knowing give a rather limited knowledge of God and his inner life. Moreover, we confront considerable difficulties in attaining this certainty. Therefore, if God did not emerge from the mystery of his own life and reveal Himself to us, our situation would be similar to what Saint Augustine once experienced,

according to a story told by some medieval authors.

One day Saint Augustine was walking along the seashore, trying to comprehend what the Church teaches about God and the mystery of the Trinity. At a certain moment, he looked up and saw a little boy playing in the sand. The child would run to the sea, fill a small container with water, and return and empty the water into a hole. After observing this for some time, the saint became curious and asked, “Hi there, what are you doing?” The young boy replied, “I’m taking all the water out of the sea and putting it into this hole.” “But that’s impossible,” he told the boy, who quickly replied: “It is more impossible to do what you are trying to do: to understand the mystery of God in the smallness of your mind.”

But God hasn't left us in this situation. He chose to reveal Himself, that is, to manifest Himself, to emerge from his own mystery and remove the veil that prevents us from knowing who He is and what He is like. God did not do this for the sake of satisfying our curiosity, or by simply communicating a message about Himself. Rather, He revealed himself by coming to meet mankind – especially by sending his Son into the world and by the gift of the Holy Spirit – and by inviting us to enter into a loving relationship with Him. God has wanted to unveil his own inner life, and to enable us to approach Him as his friends and as beloved children, so as to make us fully happy with his infinite love.

The "longings for fulfilment" and the "longings for salvation" inscribed in our human condition cannot be satisfied by something earthly. However, the revelation of God, the

gift of Himself in giving us his infinite Love, has the capacity to satisfy—in a superabundant manner—the human heart, filling it with a happiness far greater than what we can desire or even imagine. As Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him* (*1 Cor* 2:9). Revelation "is the fulfilment of our deepest aspirations, of that longing for the infinite and for fullness, which dwells in the depths of the human being and opens him or her to a happiness that is not fleeting or limited but eternal."[1]

2. Revelation in the history of salvation

According to the Second Vatican Council, Revelation responds to a plan, to an initiative that develops through God's action in human history. God takes the initiative and

intervenes in history through certain events: the call of Abraham to faith, the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt, etc. In his providence, God arranges these events so that they express the salvation He wishes to give to mankind. God himself communicates the profound meaning of these events, their salvific significance, to men chosen by Him, whom He makes witnesses to his divine action. For example, Moses and Aaron were witnesses to the miracles God performed to force the Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go, and thereby free them from slavery. In doing so, God unveiled and carried out a stage of his plan. He opened up paths foreseen in his eternal wisdom, so that people would know that to be with God signifies freedom and salvation. This stage in God's plan was followed by other stages and other saving events, which is why we speak of a "history

of salvation” in God’s interaction with mankind.

This history is narrated in the Old Testament, and more specifically in the first books (mainly in Genesis and Exodus) and in the historical books of the Old Testament (these comprise sixteen books, including the book of Joshua, the two books of Samuel and the books of Kings). The history of salvation culminates in an astounding event, the Incarnation of the Son of God, which takes place at a specific moment in human history and marks the fullness of God’s plan.

The Incarnation is a unique event. God does not intervene in history as before, through deeds and words passed on by chosen people. Rather, God himself enters into human history. He becomes man and also the protagonist within human history in order to guide it and lead it back to the Father from within. He

does so with his preaching and miracles, with his Passion, Death and Resurrection, and finally with the sending of the promised Holy Spirit to his disciples.

In the history of salvation (which culminates in the life of Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit), besides revealing the mystery of his own life God also reveals his plan for us. This great and beautiful plan reveals that we were chosen by God, even before the creation of the world, in the Son, Jesus Christ. We are not the result of chance, but of a plan born of God's eternal love. Our relationship with God is not only due to the fact that He created us, nor is the meaning of our life simply to exist in the world as part of history. We are not merely God's creatures. From the moment God thought of creating us He looked at us with the eyes of a Father and destined us to be his adopted children, brothers and

sisters of Jesus Christ, his only Son. Hence the ultimate source of our identity is hidden in the mystery of God, and only the knowledge of this mystery, which is a mystery of love, enables us to perceive the ultimate reason for our existence.

The *Compendium of the Catechism* (no. 6) summarises these ideas for us: "God in his goodness and wisdom reveals himself. With deeds and words, he reveals himself and his plan of loving goodness which he decreed from all eternity in Christ. According to this plan, all people by the grace of the Holy Spirit are to share in the divine life as adopted 'sons' in the only begotten Son of God."

3. The Personal God and the Triune God

The books of the Old Testament prepare for the deeper and more

decisive revelation about God that takes place in the New Testament. This preparation presents God primarily as the God of the Covenant, that is, the God who takes the initiative to choose a people – Israel – in order to establish with them a covenant of friendship and salvation. God does not expect any benefit for himself from this relationship. He does not need anything because He is a transcendent being, that is, infinite, eternal, all-powerful and completely transcendent to the world. Nevertheless, He offers his covenant out of pure benevolence, because it is good for the happiness of Israel and that of the whole world. Therefore, the God presented to us in the Old Testament is fully superior and transcendent, and at the same time intimately connected to the world, to mankind and to human history. In his own majesty He remains inaccessible, but his love makes Him incredibly close to mankind. He is

completely free and sovereign in his decisions, while also being entirely committed to them.

All of this gives God a strongly personal character, since only a person can make decisions, choose, love, and manifest oneself to others. We human beings show our personality and character in what we say and do. Through these words and deeds, others get to know us, and we reveal our way of being. And God does the same. In the Old Testament God reveals himself, in the first place, through his words. We often find expressions in which God refers to himself in the first person. For example: *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery* (Ex 20:2). At other times, a prophet communicates the words God has spoken to him: *Thus says the Lord: I remember the devotion of your youth* (Jer 2:2). And accompanying the

words are deeds: *God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb* (Gen 30:22). *On that day the Lord God of hosts, called for weeping and mourning* (Is 22:12). These words and deeds mutually illuminate each other; they reveal God's will and guide the Chosen People towards the true source of life that is God himself.

The New Testament contains, in comparison with the Old Testament, a surprising newness. The Gospels show us that Jesus calls God "my Father" in an exclusive and non-transferable way. There is a unique and very special relationship between the Father and Jesus, which cannot be expressed in words alone. Jesus' words and deeds also indicate that He is not just a man. Although Jesus never claimed to be God, He made his divine nature absolutely clear by what He said and did. Therefore the apostles proclaimed in

their writings that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, who became man for us and for our salvation. Moreover, Jesus not only revealed his close relationship to the Father, but also the Holy Spirit's relationship with the Father and with Himself. The Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of the Father" (cf. Jn 15:26), the "Spirit of the Son" (cf. Gal 4:6), the "Spirit of Christ" (cf. Rom 8:11), or simply the "Spirit of our God" (cf. 1 Cor 6:11). Thus the personal character of God that was manifested in the Old Testament is presented in the New Testament with a surprising new dimension: God exists as Father, Son and Spirit.

This obviously does not mean that there are three gods, but rather three distinct persons in the unity of the one God. This is better understood by considering the names of the persons, for they speak of the relationship between them as one of deepest intimacy. Among men it is

natural that the father-son relationship should be one of love and trust. On the divine plane, this love and trust are so total that the Father is in the deepest intimacy with the Son and, vice versa, the Son with the Father. Similarly, the relationship between each of these persons and his own Spirit is one of the closest intimacy. Often we human beings encounter ourselves in the depths of our own being; we scrutinise our thoughts and probe our feelings, and thus come to know ourselves interiorly. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit is God who knows the heart of God; the Spirit himself is the mystery of the mutual intimacy of the Father and the Son. All of this leads us to one conclusion: God is a mystery of Love. Not of love towards the outside, towards creatures, but of love within, between the divine persons. This divine love is so strong that the three persons are one reality, one God. A twelfth-century

theologian, Richard of Saint Victor, when reflecting on the Trinity, wrote that “in order to exist, love needs two persons; in order to be perfect it must be open to a third” (*De Trinitate*, III.13). The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have the same dignity and nature: all three are one God, one single mystery of love.

4. The call to communion and faith

A document of the Second Vatican Council summarises the purpose of Revelation: “The invisible God,” it states, “out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (cf. Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15) and lives among them (cf. Bar 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself” (*Dei Verbum*, 2). The aim of Revelation is to offer men and women the possibility of living in communion with God, so that they can share in the goods of salvation

and in God's own life. Revelation concerns the happiness and life of every man and woman.

Here we might ask how this revelation of God reaches each person, what instruments God uses, what means He employs so that we might come to know that we have been called to a communion of love and life with our Creator.

On one hand, it is necessary to point out that Christ founded the Church to continue his mission in the world. The Church has an essential evangelising dimension. Her task is to bring the Good News of the Gospel to all nations and to every historical period, so that, through her preaching, people may come to know God's revelation and his saving plan. But the Church does not carry out this mission alone. Christ, her Lord and Founder, is in fact the one who continues to direct the Church from

his place in heaven at the Father's side. The Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ, guides and vivifies the Church so that she may bring his message to all mankind. In this way, the evangelising work of the Church is enlivened by the action of the Trinity.

On the other hand, it is also true that historical circumstances do not always allow the Church to carry out this task of evangelisation effectively. Many obstacles exist that can impede the spread of the Gospel. As a result, in every age there are people – sometimes many – who do not in fact come to receive the Good News of the call to communion with God and to salvation. They do not come to know the faith in a meaningful way, because they do not receive the saving proclamation. In any case, this reality does not mean that such persons have no contact with Christian revelation, since the action

of the Holy Spirit is not limited by human circumstances. The Spirit, being God, can invite each person to particular ways of communion with Him. These ways become present within each person's conscience, and plant a seed of Revelation in the person's heart. Hence no one fails to receive from God the help and light needed to attain communion with Him. But in these cases, in which a person does not encounter the preaching of the Church or the witness of an authentic Christian life, the relationship with God is usually confused and fragmentary. One's relationship with God is only clarified and perfected when a person comes to recognize the message of salvation and receives baptism.

Up to this point, we have usually spoken of Revelation as God's invitation to communion with Him and salvation. But what is our role?

How do we accept the salvation that God offers when He calls men and women to be children of God in Christ? The answer is given in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 142): “The adequate response to this invitation is faith.” But what is faith and how can it be obtained?

Faith is not mere human trust in God, nor is it a more or less convinced opinion about something. Sometimes we use the verb “to believe” in the sense of “to think or have an opinion about something.” For example, “I believe that it is going to rain today,” or “I believe that what is happening to him is temporary.” In these examples we have reason to think that something is true, but we cannot be sure that things really are this way. When we speak of faith in God, we mean something quite different.

Faith is an inner light that comes from God and touches our heart,

leading us to recognise God's presence and action. When, for example, someone in a mission territory comes into contact with Christianity through the work of a missionary, it can happen that he or she becomes interested and fascinated by what they hear. God enlightens them and helps them perceive how beautiful all this is, how it truly gives meaning to life, a meaning which perhaps they had been searching for without success until then. But they have not only heard a message that seems to make sense. They have also received a light that brings them happiness and joy, because a new meaning for their life has opened up that they might not have thought possible. Hence they joyfully embrace the message they have heard and recognize the meaning of their life. They come to know God and his great love, and are certain that this message is the key to their existence. This light is a gift, a

grace from God, and bears fruit in the soul's response, which is faith.

Faith is therefore something both divine and human. It is the action of God in the soul and the human person's openness to this divine action: an act of adhesion to the God who reveals Himself. The Second Vatican Council sums up this process in these words: "to make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind and giving 'joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it'" (*Dei Verbum*, 5).

Because of its human dimension, faith is the act of a person. It is a free act. In fact, it can happen that the same preaching of the missionary moves some people to make an act of faith and not others. God, who knows

the depths of each heart, enlightens each one according to their dispositions. And we are always free to accept or reject God's loving invitation, to accept Jesus as Lord of our life or to reject Him. The latter decision, however, puts one in danger of losing one's earthly and eternal happiness.

Faith is also an act of trust, because we accept the guidance offered by God. We accept that Christ is the Lord, who shows by his grace the path to freedom and true life. To believe is to give oneself joyfully to God's providential plan for each one of us, which leads us to live as good children of God in Christ Jesus. Faith leads us to trust in God, as Abraham trusted, and as our Lady trusted.

Basic Bibliography

Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 50-*73*.

Pope Francis, Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, 29 June 2013

Pope Benedict XVI, “The Year of Faith: What is faith?”, Audience, 24 October 2012.

Pope Benedict XVI, “The Year of Faith. The Stages of Revelation”, Audience, 5 December 2012.

Recommended Reading

Fernando Ocáriz and Arturo Blanco, *Fundamental Theology* (Woodridge, IL: Midwest Theological Forum, 2009), especially chapters 4 and 7.

[1] Pope Benedict XVI, Audience, 5 December 2012.

Antonio Ducay

pdf | document generated automatically from https://opusdei.org/en-in/article/topic-2-the-why-of-revelation/ (12/10/2025)