

SUNDAY CATECHISM / 7

## Supernatural Revelation

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## Sunday Catechism



Today's Sunday catechism examines the second part of the subject Revelation, by focusing on the **Revelatio Fidei**. The first aspect to take into consideration, given the series of objections raised in the modern era, is the fact that **SUPERNATURAL REVELATION does exist**. In the Dogmatic Constitution **Dei Filius**, of Vatican Council I, which is a very important text to comprehend the subject in question, the fact that

Revelation is a supernatural intervention is underlined.

"The same Holy Mother Church holds and teaches that God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certitude by the natural light of human reason from created things;" (Denz. 3004).

Here we speak of the *Revelatio Naturae* citing the text of St. Paul, Letter to the Romans, chapter one, verse 20: "for the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made".

La ***Dei Filius*** continues:

*"Nevertheless, it has pleased His wisdom and goodness to reveal Himself and the eternal decrees of His will to the human race in another and supernatural way, ..."*

And here we have a quote from the Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 1, verse 1: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all, in these days hath spoken to us by His Son."

*" Indeed, it must be attributed to this divine revelation that those things, which in divine things are not impenetrable to human reason by itself, can, even in this present condition of the human race, be known readily by all with firm certitude and with no admixture of error. Nevertheless, it is not for this reason that revelation is said to be absolutely necessary, but because God in His infinite goodness has ordained man for a supernatural end, to participation, namely, in the divine goods which altogether surpass the understanding of the human mind," (Denz. 3005).*

**A very important truth emerges in this passage from *Dei Filius*:** Supernatural revelation, allows mankind to know with absolute certainty even those things that with his own reason he is capable of knowing; therefore, not only is supernatural revelation not in contrast with natural revelation, but in some way it supports it, considering the human condition is fallen by nature.

**It is not only for this reason, however,** that mankind has been given supernatural revelation; it is not only to repair in some way the obfuscation of our natural intelligence, but also and above all because by the will of God mankind is elevated, is called to communion with Him, and therefore to a supernatural vocation.

**There are two main errors of modernity:**

#### 1. **RATIONALISM.**

Rationalism denies a priori that there can be truths that surpass mankind's natural capacities. This rationalism which unfolds in the philosophical field has also greatly

influenced Catholic theology, attempting to reduce as much as possible the aspects, the truths, the supernatural elements to natural realities, expressed however in a mythical way. From this idea arises the whole process of demythologising dogma and the Scriptures ... that is, removing those supernatural elements that would belong to the "myth" and that in terms of content would be explained as simply natural things.

Here is an example. The Annunciation would not be considered as the Madonna being really visited by an Angel, but as the Most Holy Virgin's personal intuition, which is then expressed according to this given literary form.

## **2. MODERNISM.**

Why does modernism dismantle the idea that supernatural revelation exists? It's because it reduces Revelation to an awareness that mankind progressively acquires through his relationship with God; it becomes therefore a psychological phenomenon, a path of consciousness not only of the individual, but also of humanity. In this sense, a God that intervenes concretely in history or that intervenes to enlighten the mind and heart of a prophet or sends an Angel, or extends his hand and parts the Red Sea etc., aspects that depend exclusively on God's intervention and not on mankind's awareness, are left devoid of their supernatural and historical characteristic.

### **Another important aspect of Revelation is HISTORICITY.**

It is certain that Revelation unfolds in history. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, from number 54 to number 65, describes the stages of historical revelation, as is found in the books of the Holy Scriptures. It is therefore indubitable that history is, in its way, the theatre of divine revelation which progresses to its culmination, in Jesus Christ.

**The historical character of Revelation means** that God encounters mankind, reveals Himself, makes His will known, communicates His decrees to mankind and mankind consumes his life in history. It does not mean, on the other hand, to affirm a subjectivistic vision, that is, relative only to a particular historical context; for example to argue that the Old Testament is only valid for the Jewish context, or that the truths found in the Gospel are valid only for that particular historical, cultural and geographical context. This would inappropriately relativise of Revelation.

In the Declaration *Dominus Iesus* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the year 2000, it's written (n. 6):

*"The words, deeds, and entire historical event of Jesus, though limited as human realities, have nevertheless the divine Person of the Incarnate Word, "true God and true man" as their subject. For this reason, they possess in themselves the definitiveness and completeness of the revelation of God's salvific ways".*

As Revelation comes from God, it is God who works, intervenes, speaks and ensures that the historical context is transcended.

**When we speak of historical Revelation**, we mean that all the historical development of Revelation (Old and New Testament) is such, that is, it is Revelation and the Word of God. This was made clear in the first centuries, when the Church not only had to oppose a certain Jewish world which evidently did not accept the Revelation of Christ, in Christ and the New Testament, but also in Christian circles, when the Old Testament was rejected as the true and proper Revelation.

Think of the heresy of Marcion, who believed that the Old Testament texts and also a good part of those of the New Testament, were vitiated by a mentality not adequate to Christ and the New Testament, to the Gospel of charity and love. The Church reacted by excommunicating Marcion, condemning his theses, and firmly maintaining that both the Old and the New Testaments are inspired books and therefore transmit God's Revelation.

**It is therefore impossible to separate the two Testaments** because the New without the Old remains somewhat impoverished and the Old Testament without the New remains substantially incomprehensible.

Another important mode of Revelation is the **ANTHROPOLOGICAL** aspect. There are two poles in Revelation: God who reveals Himself and mankind who welcomes Revelation.

**Mankind is able to grasp God's self-realisation and has the ability to receive God's Revelation.** Why is this so? It's because mankind is created in the image and likeness of God, therefore he is capable of welcoming, receiving and responding to Revelation prompted by Grace and through his intellect, his will and his whole person.

The Church has always spoken of God's Revelation as **COMPLETE** and with the claim of absoluteness. **Why does it make this claim of ABSOLUTELY?**

It is the very nature of Revelation that demands it, insofar as God reveals Himself fully in Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity incarnate. God who incarnates fully reveals God, God's will, God's decrees, God's works. This idea of the absoluteness of Christianity

is not something that must be understood as an attitude adopted by a Christian person, but descends from the very nature of Revelation and from the very person of Jesus Christ. To hold that Christian revelation is not absolute and definitive means to hold that Jesus is not God, that God has not revealed Himself fully in the Person of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. The Church is missionary precisely because she is aware of the supernatural nature of Revelation, that it's an immeasurable gift that she must preserve and transmit.