

SUNDAY CATECHISM / 6

## Objective Faith: Divine Revelation

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# Sunday Catechism



Today, we begin the second part of our Sunday Catechism on the so-called "objective faith". As we have already said, the act of faith is composed of a **subjective part** which concerns the subject, and an **objective part**, which regards the object, the One in whom we believe and what we believe.

This involves considering:

- **Revelation.**

- **Sources of Revelation: Sacred Scriptures and Sacred Tradition.**

- **The Magisterium of the Church: or the interpretation of the aforementioned sources.**

For the first point on Revelation reference is made to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 50 - 73.

### **WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK ABOUT REVELATION?**

The word Revelation comes from the Latin *revelatio*, the prefix = *re*; and the noun = *velatio*. There are two meanings:

#### **1- To remove the veil**

Imagine a precious object covered with a veil and the veil being removed so this precious object is manifested. Before it was perceived by intuition, but now that it can be seen, it becomes accessible to knowledge.

#### **2- To replace the veil**

This second meaning enables us to understand that when God reveals Himself, He does indeed make Himself known, but on the other hand He re-veils Himself, that is, a veil remains that covers, protects, guards the Mystery of God.

**Revelation is indeed the manifestation which permits mankind** to penetrate the mystery of God, to know the mystery of God and of salvation, which otherwise could not take place. Yet, this does not mean, that such knowledge is purely human and therefore exhaustive. Indeed it would be a foolish thought, as God, in as much as He reveals Himself, remains profoundly inaccessible because He is infinitely great, He is Himself the supreme Being, therefore immeasurably superior to the cognitive capacity of human beings and the Angels. In this way, the two polarities can be kept together: on the one hand, revelation is the access to the Mystery of God and to the truths that God reveals; but we cannot accept an absolute apophatic position, where nothing can be said about God, the Mysteries and His Salvation, that an absolute inaccessibility exists. On the other hand, we cannot even say that the knowledge we do have of God and of the truths of faith is perfectly adequate. We must always be open to the development of dogma, that is, of our understanding of the truths of faith.

- **How can we define Revelation?**

We can say that Revelation **is the gratuitous act with which God manifests Himself and His will, His decrees and His works to mankind, with the aim of uniting them to Himself.** This definition allows us to understand some fundamental aspects that need to be kept together. Polarizing one of these aspects and separating it from the others necessarily gives rise to heresies which lead to an erroneous idea of revelation and faith.

### **1- FREE ACT OF GOD**

Revelation assumes that there is a free will of God, that God wants to reveal Himself; otherwise God would remain inaccessible. It is God who makes Himself available, allows and makes self-knowledge accessible to a certain measure.

### **2- THE OBJECT OF THE REVELATION.**

- a- God reveals Himself.
- b- God reveals His Will.
- c- God reveals Himself through His works.

It is critical to keep all three of these elements together.

There are schools of thought that have reduced Revelation to God's self-revelation, convinced that too much emphasis was given previously to the idea that revelation was the mere communication of a dogmatic truth or moral laws; hence the aspect of God's self-revelation was made absolute, revealing Himself fully in the person of Jesus Christ. This resulted in the dismissal of the fact that there is also the revelation of God's will, of the moral law, etc.

There are also schools of thought that by focusing on the fact that Revelation occurs through the works of God, which is absolutely true, use this emphasis to put it in contrast with the fact that revelation contains truths of faith.

Whereas, the idea of Revelation that emerges from the Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church informs us that all these three aspects are in relationship to each other.

### **For what purpose does God reveal Himself?**

God reveals Himself with the aim of calling everyone to be in communion with Himself, to unite mankind to Himself. Revelation does not have a merely informative purpose; this cognitive communication is given to all people and their intellect, so that all people may be in communion with God, to union with God, to Caritas. From this point of view, the Faith is "finalised" as charity; in fact it is said that if the Faith does not have charity underdeveloped, that is, it lacks its true form, whereas a mature Faith works through

charity. Charity is not above all what we do, but it is the life of God, the very charity of God that lives in us.

**Given this definition, let's consider how to avoid falling into some of the deviations that have occurred over the centuries.**

There are those who support the relativisation of dogma or of the moral law, on the grounds that God reveals Himself, but does not communicate either dogmatic truths or moral laws. Others justify this by saying that this approach would be based on the so-called "spirit of the Second Vatican Council", in particular according to the new reading that the dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* gives. In truth, in number 2 and number 6 of *Dei Verbum* no such opposition exists between God's self-revelation and the revelation of truths and moral law, as if they were two poles that exclude and reject each other.

"Through divine revelation, God chose to show forth and communicate Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of men. That is to say, He chose to share with them those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind. (*Dei Verbum*, number 6).

*Dei Verbum* takes up the traditional idea of God who reveals the eternal decrees of His will regarding the salvation of mankind and on the other hand recovers the idea of the self-revelation of God; it holds these two aspects together.

"The deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them." (*Dei Verbum*, number 2)

God works and God reveals doctrines: doctrines and works illuminate each other.

Revelation, in the broad sense, is presented in a threefold form.

**1- THE NATURAL REVELATION.** Revelatio Naturae from which the Theologia naturalis is derived. What does it mean? It means that God, in creating, reveals Himself and makes something of Himself known, the *vestigia Dei*, or the traces that God leaves in His creation even to His own image, which is human beings. Therefore, in a certain sense, Creation is also considered a Revelatio.

**2- SUPERNATURAL REVELATION,** this would be inaccessible to the natural faculties of human beings, if God did not intervene with His action. In turn it is divided into:

**a- REVELATIO FIDEI,** this is the revelation which is given by the light of faith and to

which one adheres through the act of faith. To this corresponds the Theologia viatorum that refers to us, those who are on their way from this life to the eternal one.

**b- REVELATIO GLORIAE**, the revelation of God to the blessed souls, that is to the souls who pass from this life to eternal life, who contemplate God face to face. To this corresponds the so-called Theologia beatorum or the knowledge that the blessed have of God who is no longer in the light of Faith, but in the light of Glory, which in any case fails to exhaust the mystery of God.