

UDK 272-22:2Lafon, G.
Received: 27. 4. 2020
Accepted: 14. 11. 2020
Original paper

REVELATION AS A MANIFESTATION WITHIN HUMAN CULTURE

Mari Jože OSREDKAR

Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana
Poljanska cesta 4, Ljubljana,
marijoze.osredkar@teof.uni-lj.si

Abstract

In the article, the author introduces the concept of Revelation as it is recognized in the theology of French thinker Guy Lafon. The Word of God did not fall from heaven, but the prophet recognizes it in human communication and announces it to people. His proclamation must be a testimony of faith, hope and love. A relationship consists of two dimensions: presence and absence. It changes all the time, because the rapport between presence and absence constantly changes. That is why one must search for a partner in the Relationship all the time. Since faith is a relationship, the believer must always seek God's will, but in the Church. The Revelation of God is not possible without or outside human communication.

Key words: God's Revelation, Guy Lafon, relationship, human communication, Church.

Introduction

The Second Vatican Council stresses that culture is primarily what man »expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires, that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family...«¹ Man first expresses himself with the word. Even when we talk about non-verbal expression, we have a kind of word in mind. It is therefore appropriate for us to focus our thinking on the word when we speak about the connection between culture and Revelation.

¹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Lumen gentium* (21. XI. 1964), no. 53, 2.

In fact, we are people who talk; we utter words. We verbally or non-verbally communicate with one another. We express our feelings, desires; in short, what we think we can also tell others. The purpose of a conversation, however, is not just to exchange information, it can be said that the ability to communicate has created a person and constantly keeps him alive. The more this ability develops, the more human we are. What is more, we can say that this ability makes us similar to God. The words in the first pages of the Bible say that God created man in His own image: »God created humans to be like himself.« (Gen 1: 27). This should not be understood in terms of bodily likeness. The true image of God is described in the first lines of the Gospel of John: »In the beginning was One who is called the Word. The Word was with God and was truly God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. And with this Word, God created all things. Nothing was made without the Word. Everything that was created received its life from Him, and his life gave light to everyone.« (Jn 1:1-4). God is the Word. We will not say that God is communication, but we find Him in a relationship. That is why it is precisely in communication that we become God-like and therefore we can find God in every human relationship. This is what Christ tells us when he says: »Whenever you did for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me.« (Mt 25:40). This Gospel passage confirms that we can recognize God in the face of every human being. However, lest anyone understand the last sentence in a polytheistic sense, we will put it another way; in relation to every human being, we can recognize the relation to God. Apparently, it has been said that the Soviet astronauts confirmed after their first return from space that they had not seen God there. Of course not! In the same way as Christ tells us in the Gospel of Matthew (25), the theologian among the evangelists, he also explains to us: »No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is truly God and is closest to the Father, has shown us what God is like.« (Jn 1:18). He repeats in his first letter: »No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is truly in our hearts« (Jn 4:12). Therefore, a man can love a God he does not see, only by loving a fellow human being in a relationship.

It seems perfectly understandable that man cannot meet God in the material sense. However, the relationship with Him can come to life in relation to any human being. In a similar way we can understand that the Word of God does not fall from heaven! From John's naming of God with the »Word«, we can derive the thought that the Word of God has become a human word so

that people can understand and live it². How? French theologian Guy Lafon explains in a particular way how to understand the fact that God speaks to man. He explains how it is possible for a human person to understand God's will. The purpose of our paper is to introduce Lafon's answer to the question of how communication between God and man is possible. The thought of the French theologian will be evaluated by the document *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Church Council.

1. Two authors of Revelation in *Dei Verbum*

The Second Vatican Council's document *Dei Verbum* tells us that the biblical text, such as we can read it today, is written with the help of two authors. The first author is God who inspires man; the second author is the man who recognizes the divine inspiration and »incarnates« it into human words: »Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For Holy Mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles (see John 20:31; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-20, 3:15-16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted«³. It is quite clear that, above all, it depends upon man, the second, the true author, as to how he will write down the divine Revelation, which was not expressed to him by God in words.⁴ Recognition of God's will, however, is conditioned by the culture and by the time in which the person, chosen by God, lives. It is also quite clear that the abilities of the human person depend upon the culture in which he lives. The chosen men will communicate to the people God's will, as they recognized it by their abilities and only such God's Revelation as they could have recognized it with their conditioned and limited abilities.

As it is stated in the Introduction, man cannot meet God in the material sense, but his relationship with Him can come to life in relation to any human

² SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Dei Verbum*. (18. XI. 1965), no.13. (Hereinafter: DV).

³ DV no. 11.

⁴ Guy LAFON, *Essai sur la Signification du Salut*, Paris, 1964, 24.

being. We see now that God's Word can also be recognized by man in human word, and only in human word can man recognize God's word. Let us confirm that Revelation is happening within human culture. God, who overcomes all, enters space and time and speaks to men through witnesses. When the prophet writes, »Thus says the Almighty Lord ...«, we must not think that God sent to him a message from heaven through a mobile phone or an email through the internet. The prophet recognizes the Word of God in human language.⁵ At this moment, it is important to emphasize that Revelation is the word whose origin the believer has recognized as God's. Further in this article we will explain how the prophet recognizes these words as originating with God and how it is possible to recognize God's will today too. Finally, we can claim that the key to understanding God's Revelation can therefore be attributed to the term »recognize«.

In order to be able to understand Lafon's interpretation of the recognition of Revelation in human culture, we will first introduce the texts where he speaks about Revelation, then we will look at how a French theologian understands human relations and faith.

2. Revelation in Guy Lafon's thought

French theologian and Catholic priest Guy Lafon, born in 1930 in Paris, France, was a student at *École normale supérieure de la rue d'Ulm* and professor at *Institut Catholique de Paris*. Infected with Coronavirus, Lafon became ill with Covid-19 and died on 16 April 2020 in Paris. His manner of thinking is based upon the fact that man, already by being a person, finds himself in a relationship (Guy Lafon uses the term *l'entretien* to which he gives a rather special meaning) with others. In this relationship, we start to live, and the relationship helps us to continue and to delve deeper into life. More than that, the relationship, as the first experience of the transcendence, is the place where man can meet and have an experience of God. In Lafon's thought, there is the Copernican reversal of a thinking-reality: the relationship is not created by subjects, but subjects are born into the relationship.⁶ The new logic of thinking is defined by the fact that a relationship is composed of two dimensions: presence and absence, which help us to understand our faith in a different way. To be Christian means that one builds a community. Thus, to live with everyone means to live with God

⁵ Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, 1982, 117.

⁶ Mari Jože OSREDKAR, *Un retournement dans la pensée du salut : l'oeuvre du Guy Lafon*, in : *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 63 (2003) 2, 193-216.

in faith. In this way, faith gives us life by inviting us to live together, and in the relationship, we can find the beginning and the end of our existence. The relationship is also the beginning and the end of our faith.

The first texts devoted to Revelation can be found in the journal *Lumen vitae*. The article *Christianisme et Révélation*⁷ appears in the second issue of this journal in 1980 and, the following year in *Communication et Révélation*⁸. We find these two articles again in the book *Croire, espérer, aimer*⁹, published in 1983. The fifth and sixth chapters of this book are also titled like the two articles of *Lumen vitae*, except that their order is reversed. Lafon speaks firstly of Communication and Revelation and only then of Christianity and Revelation. As if he foresaw that human communication is necessary for the Christian Revelation. In fact, this is the idea of Guy Lafon. Without human communication, God's Revelation is not possible. However, it should be added that this second publication of the two articles took place in *Le Dieu commun*¹⁰. This book presents the central thought of Guy Lafon. As a result, the two articles on Revelation in the book *Croire, espérer, aimer* present themselves in another light.

We can say that *Le Dieu commun* is indeed the most important work of our theologian. The relationships between men and the experience of communication with God, who reveals Himself as God »between us«, are presented in the chapter which focuses on religion. The author ends the book by proposing a path to the intelligence of Revelation. In addition to the above-mentioned works, practically all of Lafon's texts contain developments on Revelation. In our article, we will mainly take up ideas from the *Essai sur la Signification du Salut*¹¹ and *L'autre Roi*¹².

3. A relationship is an ongoing outreach

Firstly, we must define life itself. Materialist philosophy defines life as the growth and death of body cells, while the Theology of Relationship argues that to live means to be in a relationship. This theology asserts that there is no life outside relationships. A man enters into the material world by a union of two cells. He starts to live as a material being. Then, a man starts to live as a person

⁷ Guy LAFON, *Christianisme et révélation*, in: *Lumen Vitae*, 35 (1980) 2, 147-155.

⁸ Guy LAFON, *Communication et révélation*, in: *Lumen Vitae*, 36 (1981) 2, 135-147.

⁹ Guy LAFON, *Croire, espérer, aimer*, Paris, 1983.

¹⁰ Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, 1982.

¹¹ Guy LAFON, *Essai sur la Signification du Salut*, Paris, 1964.

¹² Guy LAFON, *L'autre Roi*, Paris, 1987.

when someone, a mother, addresses him as »you«, in verbal or non-verbal ways. Called »you«, a human being is born as »I«, as a person. This personal identity, his existence, can only be maintained when »I«, the person, continues to look for »you«, that is, »I« interacts with the »you«. To call another »you« is an ongoing search for »you«. »You« become my responsibility, and »I« in turn, begin to give up myself. Responsibility and sacrifice are key to understanding a relationship. This interpersonal relationship is the first human experience of transcendence¹³; therefore, it is possible that a person in this relationship with another man at the same time seeks God and finds himself simultaneously linked to Him through faith. We might say that in relationships with other humans, we can and do experience a yearning for a relationship that goes beyond us.

A relationship consists of two dimensions: presence and absence. Two people are near and far at the same time. Their rapport changes all the time, because the relationship between presence and absence in their rapport constantly changes. These two dimensions work simultaneously in a relationship between two individuals. With the help of geometry, let us imagine a meter-long line. We can split this line into two parts infinitely. We find an infinite number of possible rapports between the two segments of the line: 50:50, 40:60, 80:20 or 99:1... The simultaneous operation of presence and absence between two subjects forms a relationship and the subjects find themselves within it. The subjects do not enter the relationship but find themselves in it. As life happens, we do not enter it, neither do we enter relationships, but we find ourselves within them. Relationships are given to us. Anyone who wants to stay in a relationship must accept this variance.

If presence eliminates absence, two subjects would be but one and the same to each other; but if absence overcomes presence, subjects would not know each other and would not be able to communicate. The essence of a relationship is the diversity of subjects, who find themselves linked through a dynamic rapport. At one point, presence dominates, later absence may prevail over presence. Constant change is the overarching constitutional element of a relationship. Because of the constant changes of the rapport between presence and absence, a relationship is always new. We can say that a relationship produces at each moment new subjects within itself. Thus, »partners« in a relationship always experience each other in a new light, always different. A husband may recognize his wife each day in a new light. His wife could be

¹³ Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, 1982, 43.

pleasant to him today, tomorrow she will change completely, and they will be at odds with each other. In a family, members always recognize others as changed or new persons. To remain together, they must accept their absence in the sense that they acknowledge the new differences of others as necessary and renounce their own desires of presence, that is, their desires that a spouse, would revert to her life of before.¹⁴

4. Faith is the ongoing research for God's Will

Life happens and faith happens too. The same rules of human relations apply to man's relationship with God. At some point, a human person finds himself in faith, in connection with God. This is when man feels that God addresses him as »you«. In response to this address, a believer also says »you« to God. Simply put, a believer begins to pray. At that moment, one becomes a believer. He finds himself in faith. We wrote above that a relationship is by nature changing. This is why »partners« in a relationship always experience each other in a new light, always different; and also, faith or God's relationship with us is always evolving. Even in faith, the relationship between presence and absence constantly changes. It can be said that faith is the recognition of God's presence in his absence. Faith is the ability to recognize the Word of God in the human word. When we read the Bible, we find human words there, but Christians recognize the word of God in them. Reading the Bible, Christians say: »This is the Word of the Lord!« That means of God.

Because a relationship is constantly changing and being in a relationship means constantly researching, recognizing a partner, and in our faith, the partner is God: we come to recognize God's Revelation in continual evolution. We seek new and clearer expressions of the will of God. A believer is not a person who has already found God, but the one who always seeks God. Whoever stops in this pursuit and wants a permanent image of God, is no more a believer but an idolater. A believer recognizes »Dei Verbum« more and more fully. The purpose of faith is to maintain, while renewing the relationship with God. »God does not present Himself as a complete, finished story, but as a dynamic, continuously happening story«¹⁵.

¹⁴ Mari Jože OSREDKAR, Forgiveness as the Summation of the Gospel Ethics of God, in: *Bogoslovni vestnik* 78 (2018) 2, 318-319.

¹⁵ Robert PETKOVŠEK, Beseda Bog v jeziku metafizike in v jeziku evangelija, in: *Bogoslovni vestnik* 76 (2016) 1, 18.

The word God therefore means this »in the name of what men ally themselves to a secure, unbreakable alliance, and their aim is, by using this name, to accept collectively a way to identify the inexplicable, for an absence considered irremediable, unsurpassable, indefinitely pushed to the limit«¹⁶. Thus, Lafon immediately presents theological rapport as a relationship to absence. But God is not only absent, infinitely different from us. We are in a relationship with Him. We can therefore qualify our interpretation of the relation to absence. We go beyond the opposition of presence and absence. To say God is »to admit that we belong to an indefinite game of absence and presence and that this belonging is the only reason for our coexistence with each other«¹⁷. In the question of God, therefore, we cannot remain either in the affirmation of His absence or in the affirmation of His presence. The question of God, and faith in Him, is born in us when we live by overcoming this opposition. Thus, »the question of God appears as a social, ethical and religious question at the same time. Social, because it is posed according to the situation of society, and according to the maintenance, this is the condition of all possible human experience. Ethical, because it is a position with regard to the situation of society: it is a form of acquiescence to this situation. Finally, religious, if we agree to name religion overcoming the opposition between presence and absence«¹⁸.

5. Revelation is communication

Under the term »Revelation«, one usually implies an intervention of God, as well as all the knowledge that He transmits, on Himself and on man. On the other hand, the image we have of Revelation is often misleading. Guy Lafon, from his first book, already affirms that the divine doctrine is not a truth fallen from the sky. He says, »Often we picture the truth that comes from God as falling from a strange sky. We believe that the greatness of God will only be saved at this price. But, in this case, if God Himself dwells in an entirely unknowable elsewhere, then He really has nothing to do with us, we do not see what He could still tell us definitively about our distress.«¹⁹ The theologian then proposes to look at things differently: »Yes, that God is God and that we are not to confuse Him with anything else in the world. But if it is necessary

¹⁶ Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, 1982, 79.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 93.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 104.

¹⁹ Guy LAFON, *Essai sur la Signification du Salut*, Paris, 1964, 24.

to imagine the position He occupies, if it is necessary to imagine His action, it is better perhaps to see Him inside us, rising in us, towards us, speaking to us from the inside of ourselves: then we will understand better that He can talk to us about what we are«. ²⁰

Revelation takes different forms. What is to be considered is that there is always communication. For better understanding, we can ask the question: Could we speak of Revelation if we had not already admitted that, in religion for example, a relationship can be established between God and us? This question can also help us in this reflection and we can give a negative answer: Certainly not! In this regard, we repeat the definition that Bergson, in *Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion* gives of God: »He is a Being who can enter into relationship with us«. ²¹ This rapport seems mysterious, of a particular type, unique, incomparable to any other. Indeed, when we talk about relationships between men, almost everything is understandable. The meeting of God and man is quite different. However, the communication between God and man derives from the fact that communication between men already works. If we imagine God within us, speaking to us from within ourselves, we can better understand that Revelation, understood in the religious sense of this term, is of the order of communication: it is a manifestation of Him within human culture. How to justify this position?

On the one hand, we affirm that God speaks as we speak, on the other that he has his own way of being heard. This apparent contradiction is explained by the fact that God is not in a transcendence which would cut us off from Him. As He makes himself known to man, God is with us, but at the same time He remains All Other. As the incarnate God who became our Brother, but at the same time he remains our Father. Because He makes His existence known, that is to say, because He finds himself in relation to humanity in a manner compatible with man, He is, therefore, linked to our world. And since His Word is understandable to man, it is through Word that He is linked to humanity. The Word, however, is spoken and heard. Revelation is therefore a way of speaking. It is not a question of »speaking of God«. God is not a topic or a topic of conversation. He is the Word itself brought to its highest intensity, the communication in its fullness and, as such, He can be present in the simplest of talks between us, if this really happens in the selflessness of the love.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Henri BERGSON, *Œuvres*, Paris, 1959, 1180.

Lafon repeats in the book *Le Dieu commun* what he wrote in the article *Communication et Révélation*, regarding the embarrassment that we encounter when we say: »The Revelation tells us that ...«²² Who pronounces the word to say what Revelation tells us, that is to say, what God is telling us? »It is the men of religion who speak of Revelation.«²³ When theologians or priests say the word »God«, they are thinking firstly of a supreme being, transcending man, that is to say, of an »object«. According to Bergson's thought, we can define God, as we have seen, as a Being who can come into a relationship with us. God is therefore not yet treated other than as a being. As for His qualities, theologians evoke them to present Him in a way that is understandable to all. However, in this way, they still make God an object. We can imagine many things about Him, but in the end the question always arises: »Will God correspond to our affirmations?« Nevertheless, staying with this line of thinking, we will only come to declare with some certainty that God is quite different from what we can imagine of Him.

The theologian thus risks making judgments, even formulating criticisms, about the objects treated, even when it is a question of God. However, there are other ways to access God's question. Lafon hence engages in a new epistemology. He does not take into consideration God alone, as one would take into consideration an object and its attributes; Lafon's epistemology does not raise the question of the existence of God. It is the relationship with God that is important. God remains an »object«, but Lafon is not interested in this object separate from the relationship which binds Him to man and man to Him. The main thing is what happens »between God and us«. By this we mean that man has the capacity to understand that he is already in touch with God.

Language, it should be remembered, has two functions: to establish communication and to send a message, a message that man can receive from the other to whom his predecessors transmitted it. It is not the same with God, since He is not another among the others. It is always the other who reveals God to me and it is the other man who tells me what God wants to communicate to us. We have heard the announcement of prophets, apostles, in short, men of religion. More concretely stated, those men of the Church. The others tell me about the Other.

²² Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, 1982, 117.

²³ *Ibid.*

6. God is already among us

Why can we speak of God? Because we have heard about Him, from others. Thus, it is impossible to pronounce His name if one has not previously found himself in contact with the other. It is therefore this relationship that is the condition of the relationship we have with God. It is therefore conversation with others that brings us closer to God, which is the basis of our relationship with God. As such, this gesture is ethical. Looking a little closer at these two paths to God, this is what we can see in the history of human societies, we have always spoken and we always speak of God. Therefore, God is already among us; we have already established a dialogue with Him, since we are talking about Him²⁴. Certainly, there are people who assert this existence and others who deny it. However, both speak of God; and there is no difference between these two positions. Both negation and affirmation are the responsibility of the dialogue. Consequently, in both cases it is the speaking about God. However, just talking about God does not include joining Him. It only shows that there is conversation between God and the one who speaks, or between God and the one who has heard of Him.

Thus, the discourse on God is a social fact which appears in a relationship. Nevertheless, those who engage in the discourse on God still must decide personally about the theological existence, to accept it, or to refuse it. For it is not enough to say: »God« to be engaged with Him. How then will this commitment be established? Lafon replies: »When the faithful of a religion adopt what they have received from those who, before them, belonged to the same religion, they recite these historical data as parts of their origins. But they cannot be religious by simply adopting these words of others. They must renew, in relation to these original statements, their own attestation in which the relationship with absence is established for them. In other words, the faithful of a religion give themselves, often without choosing them, inferences evoking God«.²⁵ The most important thing is that the one who received this cultural discourse accepts it as his own and that he accepts the conversation that was created between him and the ones who transmitted it to him. From this perspective, the utterance will consist of a real transformation of the one who utters the utterance. It is as if the thinking of our ancestors, instead of being a sentence that unfolds before our eyes, becomes a force that enters us and changes us.

²⁴ Robert PETKOVIŠEK, Beseda Bog v jeziku metafizike in v jeziku evangelija, in: *Bogoslovni vestnik* 76 (2016) 1, 7-24.

²⁵ Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, 1982, 85.

Once he finds himself in a relationship with God, man »decides« what to do with this relationship. It is up to him to »invent religion«. Man can make a decision to associate with those who transmitted the statement to him, that is to say, with others who join in the same communication with God. In this case, it is possible to speak of religion, or of religious community. Man will not give up pursuing that of the community which made him aware of the discourse on God and in which he himself transmits it to others. Far from trying to escape from it, he will always get more involved. Why? Because this social conversation, in which he is with others, is also the place where he relates theologically to the Other. As soon as a commitment between »believers« is established, everyone speaks of »us« and »our« relationship to God. A religion, whatever it is, is a community work: the commitment concluded by God is not only with such and such, but with all the faithful – which creates a link between them. Guy Lafon concludes that, in a religion, the main thing is to maintain the union among the faithful.

The faithful will accept all statements and will confide in all the practices by which social discourse on God is articulated. Although they will confide in it without stopping. Because they never forget that all this social discourse on God exists only to allow a relationship beyond the opposition between presence and absence. In short, the faithful will go beyond any idolatry of social discourse. The faithful, having thus engaged in the theological relationship, will therefore live it first in connection with the whole social body constituted by the community where they have heard of God, where they themselves speak of God. They will live theologically with others, of their religious community and in it. However, the faithful will not be able to lock themselves in this religious community. Otherwise, they would forget their relationship to the Other that underpins a relationship to all the others.

Thus, we can say that religion is not knowledge of God, but rather a community for the faithful to interact together, constituted by their relationship to God. More precisely, religion is an association of those who are in conversation with God. More than »knowing« God, we seek in religion how to »shape« the relationship with Him. It is about engaging in the gestures of believing, hoping and loving. Now Lafon says that one can only ask the question of God in terms which always also concern the bond of men between them. The theological relationship is structured upon these three »gestures«. To believe, to hope, to love are these gestures, which lie at the heart of the question of God. These are at the same time the structure of a social relationship.

7. The content of Revelation²⁶

»Revelation« is the name given to the fact that God makes himself known. Communication between God and man is unique, and not comparable with that which can exist between men, it is therefore necessary to distinguish them. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, we can notice that we also speak of Revelation when man talks about God with others like himself. Communication is always achieved through syntax, logic, language. As we have seen, it is theologians, priests, and faithful who say the words: »The Revelation tells us that...« These men are part of humanity. It is only for this reason that they can express themselves in this way.

There is an important remark to add. When men of religion invoke Revelation, they do not suppress the theological relationship to absence; they also manifest their own situation, while maintaining their theological relationship to absence. First, they are themselves »required« by Revelation. Men of religion live Revelation as witnesses to faith, hope and love. It is only then that they transmit it to others through words, so that others, in turn, become involved in it. From this point of view, »Revelation« can therefore be the name assigned to a special form of human communication. If we accept this interpretation of the Revelation, we will say that it, by binding men with God, also unites them with one another. In this case, God himself takes his place between those who believe, hope and love. The confession of His Revelation binds the witnesses of God and all those before to whom they testify of Him.

By saying this, we mean that Revelation, along with a knowledge of God, is a knowledge of the history of the people who believe, hope and love. The Bible does not speak of the nature of God. It presents the history of the chosen people, it presents the Revelation in its history, in its way of life, its way of fighting (cf. Ex 3). These people evoke their sins but their faith, their hope, their love for God as well. The Bible is essentially the account of the relationship between God and his people. Consequently we cannot know the Revelation without the Church which »is only the field in which such faith is formed and transmitted by tradition«. ²⁷

Christians believe in God who revealed himself through Jesus Christ whom they know, through the testimony of the apostles and the Church. This

²⁶ This chapter is a summary of the article *La Révélation de Dieu dans l'entretien d'humanité*, written by Mari Osredkar, published in the book VARIOUS AUTHORS, *Chemins de liberté*, Paris, 2011.

²⁷ Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, 1982, 129.

is why the Christian faith is first of all listening to God. However this listening is not direct, it is always transmitted by someone, since we hear it in words and we are, ourselves, led to transmit it to others, in our turn, by words. The discourse on knowledge in the Christian Revelation has no meaning in itself. Christianity presents the ethical version of the Incarnation. Lafon is therefore convinced that the truth is nothing more than a way to converse. »If there is truth in the verbal exchange, and there is, it is neither what the other said to me nor what I said to him, even though we said one to the other what we said and that we heard it, as we do. The truth is neither this nor that. One does not have it any more than the other. It is not even what we found together. Below and beyond our findings, it is in our debate itself.«²⁸

It is in the exchange that the truth is presented as what men share with each other, and this both brings them together and distances them. Truth, in the present context, loses its classical meaning. According to a widely held opinion, truth means the adequacy between the thing and the intelligence: »Adequatio rei et intellectus«²⁹. In the philosophy of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, the truth was in the line of logic, of knowledge. Lafon, meanwhile, considers the truth in another way: devolving from communication. He puts it in the line of ethics, since the truth is always in genesis between us. It is therefore not a thing, but it is based on an encounter that circulates and which, through the game of closeness and distance, makes it alive. Dialogue is a bond that ensures the union. At the same time, it is discord which distresses. This is the game of maintenance. Because of it, the truth is alive and makes those who seek it »move«.

Why is this definition important? Because it helps us to understand the meaning of »knowledge« in the Christian Revelation. Dogmas are developed to give content to the notion of God. On the other hand, Christianity does not allow itself to be dominated by knowledge, because it carries something more important within it. Jesus said, »If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples, you will know the truth and the truth will make you free men« (Jn 8, 31b-32). This means that it is not dogma and knowledge that save the faithful, but that the truth is of another order, that of theological faith and ethics. To be in the truth means to be in shared discourse that leads to love.

The Revelation of God is not just content. Like faith, it is above all the recognition of a bond and belonging, an alliance. When I believe, I recognize

²⁸ Guy LAFON, *L'autre Roi*, Paris, 1987, 34.

²⁹ Thomas AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, pars I, q. 16, a 2, ad 2.

others, and they recognize me. In belief it is a question, on the one hand, of knowledge and, on the other, of the relationship between men. It is true that God, as the object of faith, as the content of belief, could freeze research and the movement of maintenance if He were fully known in depth. Fortunately, the objects of faith are not stable, completely fixed. If we know God, »Creator of the earth and the sky«, we can never know Him enough and we always seek Him. We never stop in the quest for God. Hence, we can say that in belief, the image and the meanings attached to it are less content than containers.

Let us specify in our turn: image and meaning suppose the content which always attracts, but never lets itself be completely grasped. We never manage to get the exact idea of the content of which we know the container, which suggests that, in the quest for God, the important thing is what exists between God and man: faith, hope and love. Because we do not yet see God, we believe in Him. This is why it is more appropriate to consider faith both as a movement and as belonging to the community of all who believe. On the one hand, the Revelation of God, faith, saves us from the fear of the Unknown, and on the other hand it unites us with those who believe. Moreover, ignorance of the nature of God, or his insufficient knowledge, prompts permanent research.

Conclusion

If we compare the »content« of Revelation to the »object« of faith, the work can be considered as the product of the maintenance of Revelation. The deed, when it comes from religion, is still a manifestation of a relationship in which a believer finds himself. By linking the theological and ethical, a believer produces, in fact, deeds which testify to his belonging to both sides of the relationship. The deed of Christianity is, for example, all that Christians, in the very maintenance of their religious faith, have produced in history: monuments, poetry, literature, culture, music etc. All these deeds open to those who observe them as the path of faith of their authors. It is in this sense that the deeds of Christianity open up horizons for man. The Bible, churches as objects of Christian art, lead to reflection on the transcendence of God. As for the example of Christians who give their lives for their neighbour, Lafon suggests that life does not end with death. Those who die offer up their lives, and they are themselves Christian deeds. And they show themselves without violence. The deed therefore does not obstruct; it opens the way. It testifies, does not force anyone, it inspires. What novelty is it creating? Belief opens the way of faith

and Salvation to all those who are touched by its testimony. But of what, or better of whom, does it bear witness? Lafon, it seems, answers this question by resorting to the term »reason of ethics«: he makes clear what Christian deeds attest to.³⁰

Therefore, what do we do when we receive from others, and then when we ourselves form a discourse on God? We then establish the conditions that allow us to overcome the opposition of presence and absence. Indeed, God is, in human language, the »signifier« that men give themselves to live this overcoming, by existing theologically in faith, hope and love. However, it should be stressed that we only then establish the conditions for such higher order thinking beyond the quotidian. The name of God, spoken and heard, is not enough to institute someone in a theological existence. And conversely, the absence of the name of God can coincide with an existence according to faith, hope and love. Finally, we can say that the Revelation, which is more than a content, an event, is formed in us, between us and through us.

Sažetak

OBJAVA KAO MANIFESTACIJA UNUTAR LJUDSKE KULTURE

Mari Jože OSREDKAR

Teološki fakultet, Sveučilište u Ljubljani
Poljanska cesta 4, Ljubljana,
marijoze.osredkar@teof.uni-lj.si

U ovom članku autor predstavlja koncept objave kako je prepoznata u teologiji francuskog mislioca Guya Lafona. Riječ Božja nije pala s neba, nego ju prorok prepoznaje u ljudskom odnosu i naviješta ju ljudima. Njegov navještaj mora biti svjedočanstvo vjere, nade i ljubavi. Međusobni se odnos sastoji od dvije dimenzije: prisutnosti i odsutnosti. On se cijelo vrijeme mijenja, jer se i odnos između prisutnosti i odsutnosti konstantno mijenja. To je razlog zbog čega osoba mora stalno tražiti partnera u odnosu. Budući da je vjera odnos, vjernik mora uvijek tražiti Božju volju unutar Crkve. Objava Boga nije moguća bez ili izvan ljudske komunikacije.

Ključne riječi: Božja objava, Guy Lafon, međusobni odnos, ljudska komunikacija, Crkva.

³⁰ Cf. Guy LAFON, *L'autre Roi*, Paris, 1987, 78.