

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Revelation and Scripture, Session 1, Historical Introduction, Jensen, Revelation of God, The Enlightenment, and Christian Response

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on Revelation and Holy Scripture. This is session 1, Historical Introduction, Jensen, The Revelation of God, The Enlightenment, and Christian Response.

We invite you to our lectures on the Doctrines of God and of Holy Scripture.

Please join me in opening prayer. Gracious Father, we thank you that you have opened your holy mouth and spoken forth your word. Encourage us during these lectures; we pray to learn of you, to rejoice in your revelation, both general and special, and especially to renew our commitment to you and your holy word. Bless us, we pray, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I have both a biblical and a historical introduction to these lectures on the doctrines of God's revealing himself, making himself known, which will culminate in his especially making himself known in his written word.

The historical introduction comes from Peter Jensen, a well-known Australian church leader and theologian of an evangelical variety. He wrote the *Contours of Christian Theology* book on the revelation of God. He says I have beside me a book which, as far as I can remember, was the first critical work I ever read.

It is Joseph McCabe's selection and translation of works by the great French rationalist of the 18th century, Voltaire. What chiefly impressed me was the brilliance of Voltaire's attack on the Bible and Christianity. I had been brought up with a conventional respect for both, and it barely survived Voltaire's contempt.

A quote within a quote, quoting Voltaire, may the great God who hears me, a God who certainly could not be born of a girl, nor die on a gibbet, nor be eaten in a morsel of paste, nor have inspired this book with its contradictions, follies, and horrors. May this God, creator of all worlds, have pity on the sect of the Christians who blaspheme him. Whew, close quote.

Voltaire was not content with excoriating Christian doctrine for its stupidity. With equal severity, he also flayed the scriptures, attacking not only their morality but also their credibility. "I'm not sufficiently versed in chemistry, he observed, to deal

happily with the golden calf, which Exodus says was made in a day and which Moses reduced to ashes. Are they two miracles or two possibilities of human art?"

Encountering the Enlightenment. Although I did not know it at the time, Jensen says, I was being inducted into the wisdom of one of the great intellectual movements of modern history, the Enlightenment.

At the hands of a literary master like Voltaire, I experienced the power of a critique that interrogates belief in a hostile way for over 200 years. Despite the many differences of opinion that characterized Christian doctrine by the time of Voltaire, there was fundamental agreement among Christians that the Bible was a special revelation from the one true God and is rightly called the Word of God. It was also agreed that there exists a general revelation of God through the created world, though opinions differed about the extent to which it is true.

In fact, the Bible is a religious work, and it could be apprehended by sinful human beings. In any case, however, Christianity was thought to possess a singularly authoritative and saving capacity to bring sinners into a relationship with God. For his part, Voltaire was no atheist.

When he offered proof of the existence of God, his reasoning was based not on revelation but on a sort of natural theology. We speak here a strictly philosophical language. Quoting Voltaire, we speak a strictly philosophical language here.

It is not our part even to glance at those who use the language of revelation. Close quote. The questions posed by the Enlightenment were these.

Does Christianity possess a special revelation from God? Would it not be best to keep religion within the human reason? What can we learn about God using human reason alone? Can we believe that the miracles of the Bible and of church history are authentic in the light of critical history? Can we give credence to the claim that the Bible is inspired when it contains so many improbable stories and immoral teachings? The critical arguments of thinkers such as Voltaire have massively eroded the credibility of Christian teaching. Ironically, although we still call any authoritative textbook a Bible, this usage merely reflects the vestigial remains of its former overwhelming popularity. When it comes to the actual Bible, Voltaire's opinion has largely triumphed.

When later I turned to the study of theology, Peter Jensen writes, I was introduced to a powerful set of objections to the use of natural theology itself. David Hume, 1711 to 1776, assailed both natural and revealed theology. He refused to allow the argument for God from the world, the argument for God from the world, that it had any persuasive power.

Far from leading to the conclusion that there was one sovereign creator of heaven and earth, it was more justifiable to conclude that polytheism is true or that God's power is limited by infirmity. The world, he argued, may be understood as being, and here we quote the skeptic, the Scottish skeptic David Hume, "The world is understood as being very faulty and imperfect compared to a superior standard, and was only the first rude essay of some infant deity, who afterward abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance. It's the work only of some dependent inferior deity and is the object of derision to his superiors. It's a production of old age and dotage in some supernatural deity, super annual deity, and ever since his death, has run on at adventures from the first impulse and active force which it received from him."

Wow. Hume was even less satisfied with the claims of a revelation than Voltaire.

He focused his assault on miracles since they were an integral part of both the content of and the justification for revealed religion. So prevalent are the miracles in the Bible, and so frequent was the Christian appeal to miracles as a means of validating religion, that the choice of miracles for searching philosophical examination was especially telling. From Hume's point of view, miracles were fundamentally impossible because they broke the consistent laws of nature.

He argued, therefore, that there could never be enough evidence via human testimony for a historian to believe a miracle. He concluded his discourse on miracles by advising Christians to stick to the notion that their religion was founded on faith, not reason, and he appealed to reason to expose religion to a test too hard for it to endure. With sharp irony, he ends with these words, once again quoting Hume: the Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even to this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one.

Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity, and whoever is moved by faith to assent to it is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience, close quote. Wow, do I have your attention? The triumph of the Enlightenment, the reason for commencing this discussion of Revelation in such a personal way, Peter Jensen writes, is that my experience illustrates in microcosm one of the major consequences of the Enlightenment and demonstrates its ongoing significance despite the many other cultural movements that have succeeded it. When Voltaire's writings came into my hands, and later when I encountered Hume's thoughts, they were profoundly challenging.

Voltaire made the Christian faith seem so ludicrous and constricting that it hardly seemed worth continuing any allegiance to it. It is no accident that both Voltaire and Hume were especially well-known in their own day as historians. A new mood of

anti-supernaturalism was entering the study of history, and together with the critical investigations being undertaken into the origin and nature of the Bible, the old orthodoxy was being challenged at its very foundation.

The Enlightenment arguments were sharpened further by the perennially attractive message that man was the measure of all things. Human reason was the canon of judgment, human freedom was the chief virtue, and human progress against superstition and unfounded authority was the program. Modernity presupposes the truth of these assertions, and few contemporary Western persons are entirely free from their fascinating coils.

The Enlightenment thinkers were involved in an intellectual struggle against church and state over the issue of human autonomy. Since both church and state appealed to the Bible to justify their own authority, it is not surprising that the Bible should have become a contested ground. In the end, the whole movement, of which Voltaire and Hume are but two exponents, has achieved, among other things, a stunning victory over the Christian faith.

Christianity lost its intellectual, social, and spiritual authority, especially in Protestant Europe. In Bernard Rahm's judgment, quote, the mortal wound, Bernard Rahm was an evangelical theologian, the mortal wound indicted, inflicted by the Enlightenment on Protestant orthodoxy was a staggering one, and one from which there has never been a full recovery, close quote. Colin Gunton, another evangelical thinker, observes that "salient aspects of modern culture are predicated on the denial of the Christian gospel."

The writings of Voltaire and Hume were two of the roots of radical thought in the 18th century, which reached me in the late 20th century. They were, of course, part of a much wider history that included such great and diverse thinkers as Locke, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel. Even in the 17th century, philosophers and theologians had begun to take positions that would radically alter the place according to the Bible in the church and the culture.

Also, the 19th century saw an encounter; some called it a war between revelation and science, which was to have significant repercussions for the authority of religion and revelation. Darwinism appeared to have dealt fatal blows to the biblical creation stories and to any concept of order in the creation, that is, to both special and general revelation. At the same time, the complexity and variety of the human world were being manifested in ways that immediately prompted questions about any system that claimed to be absolute or unique.

In the end, such ideas as biblical revelation, general revelation, and natural theology were confronted with hostility, not just from philosophy but from the disciplined study of history, anthropology, religion, and science as well. We need only think of

such names as Marx, Darwin, and Freud to recognize the extent of the cultural disenchantment with revelation. Christian responses to the crisis of the Enlightenment, I'll bet you were waiting for this: the assault on its claims to possess a unique revelation of God challenged the Christian faith at a most sensitive point.

The usual response, among Western intellectuals at least, has been to agree with the criticisms leading to unbelief. The loss of the intellectual status of Christianity is a striking feature of the modern period. It is true that during the last 200 years, one of the greatest missionary expansions of the Church has occurred.

The translation, publication, and dissemination of the Bible alone constitute an extraordinary historical phenomenon. So, too, is the continuing intense academic study of its pages. Far from the Bible being completely discredited, it is the most frequently printed book in the world.

Nevertheless, it must be said that the pressure brought to bear on the intellectual assertions of Christianity by secularism has been intense. It is not surprising that they have contributed both to the loss of membership and to significant tensions and strains within the Christian community itself. The divisions between denominations have become less significant than the divisions between those who have adopted different strategies for dealing with the challenge of modernity.

A central issue has been the theological estimate of the Bible. Some have continued to argue for the traditional view that the Bible is inspired by God and, hence, is God's direct self-revelation. As we have seen, Bernard Rams speaks of a wound inflicted on Protestant orthodoxy, quote, from which there has never been a full recovery, close quote.

But he also makes the point that as though by a miracle quote, it did manage to survive, close quote. The most notable, but not the only exponent of this position, has been the North American theologian Carl F. H. Henry, whose magisterial six-volume work on Revelation has continued to attract serious attention. He is one of the first evangelical Christians to earn a PhD in philosophy at a respected public unbelieving University, Boston College, and then had a tremendous impact in founding Christianity Today, the Evangelical Theological Society, and in general, demonstrating that a person could be a thinking evangelical Christian and also a scholar, and not hide from intellectual attacks and so forth, and furthermore do it with a gracious Christian manner, which is to Carl Henry's credit as well.

Such conservative Christians have not regarded themselves as bound to reproduce the exact thoughts of their predecessors. There's been a development in the doctrine of Scripture and in the understanding of its teaching. They've shown a willingness to incorporate the wealth of information made available from the ancient world, its

languages, and its customs, which may be regarded as one of the positive fruits of the Enlightenment.

In addition, such expositions of Revelation have always defended a concept of general revelation. It usually follows the lines laid down by John Calvin, namely that there is a revelation by God in nature and in the heart, but it is suppressed, rendering the recipient both ignorant and guilty. Most of those Protestants who have thought at a serious level about Revelation have, however, chosen a different course.

Naturally, they retain a deep respect for Scripture, especially the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ. Without such respect, it is difficult for a religious system to remain Christian in any but the most nominal sense. However, there has been an overwhelming decision to move the chief locus of Revelation away from the Bible.

Emil Brunner, for example, refers to “the fatal equation of Revelation with the inspiration of the Scriptures.” Inspiration is now typically understood either in an attenuated way or as the illumination of the receiving agent. The fundamental purpose of these reinterpretations is twofold: to save the revelation of God and to save the witness of the Scriptures.

If the Bible contains the moral and historical defects exposed by writers such as Voltaire, it cannot be too directly identified as a revelation from God. It should not be called the inspired Word of God. It would be wrong, however, to regard this reinterpretation as merely defensive.

To its many proponents, it has also given the opportunity to cut away what they regard as unfortunate elements of the traditional theory and replace them with features that do more justice to the nature of the human and divine persons involved. Thus, they frequently reject propositional revelation as being intellectualist and emphasize the experience of divine-human encounters. They often favor a dynamic revelation focusing on God's historical deeds rather than on a static set of words.

In addition, they regard the older theories as doing less than full justice to the multi-form nature of Scripture. Likewise, they have considerable sympathy for the view that revelation is by no means confined to religion. They also have more sympathy than their predecessors for some time past, with the positive possibilities for Christians of general revelation and natural theology.

Naturally, there are significant differences between the types of revelation theology proposed. Broadly speaking, the 19th century may be said to have been dominated by Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of liberalism, and the 20th by Karl Barth, the father of neo-orthodox theology. Some following Schleiermacher's lead will find the

locus of revelation in the human experience of God, which is certainly where Schleiermacher put it.

Others, like Barth, will react against this allegedly human-centered approach and speak of Jesus Christ as the one word of God to whom scriptures bear witness. But there are notable alternatives, exemplified by scholars such as Wolfhard Pannenberg, who speaks of revelation in and through history and eschatology. The Roman Catholic theologian Avery Dulles has suggested a taxonomy of no fewer than five models of revelation used in contemporary theology.

He speaks of revelation as doctrine, in which he includes Carl Henry and other Protestant and Catholic writers, revelation as history, revelation as inner experience, revelation as dialectical presence, neo-orthodoxy, and as new awareness. Despite the variety, he suggests a definition that, quote, would probably be acceptable to many adherents of each model. This is the Roman Catholic scholar Avery Dulles.

His suggestion runs as follows. Revelation is God's free action, whereby he communicates saving truth to created minds, especially through Jesus Christ, as accepted by the Apostolic Church and attested by the Bible and by the continuing community of believers, close quote. His proposal successfully reflects a number of the emphases found in most treatments of revelation today.

Not surprisingly, given that Dulles writes as a Catholic, the accent falls on the church more than it would in a corresponding Protestant account. In Protestant systematic theology, especially that touched by the neo-orthodox movement of the 20th century, there seem to be three emphases that remain fairly constant as thinkers have labored to justify and explain revelation. Some but not all of these are to be found in Dulles' summary.

Each element has been forged in the conviction that we can no longer appeal to the Bible as such to be revelation itself, and hence reflect some of the reaction to that way of approach. And for the next few minutes of this lecture, I'm going to relate Peter Jensen's summary of these three features of neo-orthodox theology. Revelation as event, revelation as self-giving, and especially revelation as Jesus Christ.

Revelation as an event. First, in a conscious break with older views that identified revelation with the words of the Bible, many modern theologians assert that revelation is an act of God, an event, an episode. Dulles seeks to capture this element by using the phrase free action in his definition of revelation.

In adopting this view of revelation, theologians are, first of all, protecting the freedom of God. Daniel L. Migliore speaks of the biblical episodes and adds, "while God is truly disclosed in these events, the divine freedom or hiddenness is never

dissolved. Quoting him, God does not cease to be a mystery in the event of revelation.”

Against a tendency of 19th-century theology to treat God as imminent, as present in his world, the later theologians have stressed his transcendence and so his freedom to be God. In this, they follow Karl Barth and neo-orthodoxy.

Revelation must be regarded as a gift arising from the free initiative of God and thus consistent both with his grace and with human need. Revelation is in his hands, not ours. We cannot control it, demand it, or organize it.

If we identify a book, even the Bible, as revelation, we assert our authority over God and adopt a pharisaic approach, valuing the letter but not the spirit, capital S. By treating revelation as an event, we think about God in the Bible in a way that is more true to the Bible itself. Far from being a handbook of timeless truths, the Bible is preeminently a narrative of the mighty deeds of God, through which he saved his people and identified himself to them. Thinking of revelation as an event is said to have other advantages.

It also fits the way the concept often occurs in the Bible, whether in Greek or Hebrew form. The term is not used in the Bible as a book, for example, but rather in the encounter between God and human beings by which God makes himself known to them. It frequently has an eschatological component in which Christ's appearance at the end of the age is called a revelation.

It's also used to describe what God is doing in the world, whether the natural world or the world of human affairs. The individual may receive a revelation, or it may be something that all should possess. Furthermore, the idea that revelation is an event suits the need to think of it on a wider front than that found in the Bible.

It raises the subject of the experience of revelation, for example, the sense of the presence of God felt by many people, both Christian and non-Christian, and enables us to explore the reports of revelation in other religions. It also allows for an emphasis on the present illuminating and inspiring work of God's Spirit that earlier theories of revelation obscured. So, the first emphasis of modern, especially neo-Orthodox views of revelation, is that it is an event and not to be identified with the words of the Bible.

Second, it is self-giving. In contemporary theology, much is also made of the truth that our knowledge of God is relational. At this point, Douglass' concept that God, quote, communicates saving truth to created minds, close quote, would be regarded as unhelpful because it reverts to what may be called a proposition or intellectualist view of revelation, in which faith is regarded as accepting of certain truths on the

authority of somebody else, and the revelation itself is preeminently thought of as a body of revealed truths.

As far as modern Protestant theology is concerned, this is to misunderstand the true heart of the Christian faith. In essence, Christianity is concerned with relationships, and especially the encounter between God and human beings. The intellectualist account leaves men at arm's length, so to speak.

What we need is not so much communication of truths as communication of persons. It's no accident, indeed, that the central point of revelation is a person, Jesus Christ. The essence of Christianity is our relationship with him, not fundamentally with a set of words about him.

As Emil Brunner has written and quoted, we are free; we are here, no longer concerned with a relationship in words but with a personal relationship. We are no longer content to believe it, but our concern is to come to him, to trust him, to be united to him, and to surrender to him. Revelation and faith now mean a personal encounter, personal communication, close quote.

Revelation is an event; revelation is God's self-offering, self-giving revelation as Jesus Christ. The person of Jesus has now taken the place of the Bible as the content of Christian revelation. In the words of Robert Morgan quote, from Barth's threefold form of the Word of God, only the Word incarnate can properly be called divine revelation.

His threefold form of the Word of God is Christ is the Word; derivatively, the Bible and the preaching of the Word are also called the Word. When revelation was thought to be a set of infallible truths in the Bible, there was a constant tendency to turn into a textbook on all sorts of subjects. In particular, the Bible was a source of moral information.

In lists such as the Decalogue and the Beatitudes, it provided handy guides for living the good life. The Bible was also regarded as containing excellent science and history, and advances in either sphere were tested by its teaching. Likewise, the Bible was ransacked for detailed information about the future.

The devastation wrought by the Enlightenment was, in part, the legacy of this kind of abuse of the Bible. A wrong estimate of its nature led to abusing its words and neglecting its real significance. If there's one thing clear to modern mainstream Protestant theologians, it is that there is nowhere; boy, if there's one thing that's clear to modern Protestant theologians, it is that there is no way back to the reinstatement of the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God in a primary sense.

Do I need to say to my hearers and watchers that I do believe the Bible is an infallible revelation of God, inspired in the very words of God, which are also human words, which leads us to understand the Bible as a manifestation of God's grace, but that's for later. But I do believe it. I do find, however, this historical introduction worthwhile to stimulate us to think, helpful in us considering the mindset of our neighbors and others as we approach them, and overall just humbling, putting us in our place, which we'll explore more fully when we get to the biblical introduction to the doctrines of God and Holy Scripture.

This conclusion, however, enables the real nature of revelation to become plain. It consists of what the Bible is, in fact, all about, namely Jesus Christ. He's a revelation of God.

Some wished to argue that he alone is a revelation of God and that every other purported revelation of him takes its meaning, positively or negatively, solely from him. Others, as in Dulles' proposal, prefer to speak especially of Jesus Christ as the locus of revelation. Thus, Keith Ward also describes the incarnation of God in Jesus as the central revelatory act of God.

There's God as act, God as self-giving, and God as Jesus. Revelation is all those three things. In any case, it's clear that the epistemological weight once borne by the Bible, nature, and the traditions of the church as sources of revelation is, in many accounts of revelation, now borne by Jesus Christ.

He is the message, the Word of God, the very title accorded him by John 1, 1 to 3, by which all other words are to be tested. There are several advantages to this focus. First, it has the benefit of being consistent with what the Bible itself says and is about.

The message of the first Christian preachers and of the New Testament can justifiably be summed up as Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it makes Christ himself the mediator, as he must be if he is in truth the one mediator between God and men, 1 Timothy 2:5. He is not some subsidiary messenger, a mere prophet, but is himself both God and human being, the Word of God, who is the very point at which we may behold God and live. Secondly, it defends the Christian revelation by the best possible method.

It puts it out of reach. If it is, in fact, true, it comes from God, who cannot himself be tested or tried. It must be self-authenticating, not dependent upon some lesser aid for its verification.

In defending the Scriptures, for example, we at once betray our fear that they do not come from God. With regard to Jesus Christ, he may be preached and the Declaration itself will persuade, becoming the event of revelation, if the Spirit so enables. One of the chief advantages perceived in locating revelation primarily or

even exclusively in Jesus Christ is that it enables us to find the right way of talking about other claimants to revelation.

Everything can be measured by our estimate of him. In particular, it enables us to be warmly positive about the Bible while at the same time doing justice to its real nature. Dallas is right in suggesting that the role of the Bible is to attest to the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Bible is now most often thought of as a witness to the Word of God. This means that although it is still possible to call the Bible the Word of God and to honor the indispensable part it plays in leading us to Jesus Christ, we're not in peril of identifying it with God that it is bound to take on the very character of God himself. Later on, I'm going to show in Psalm 119 that the Lord uses the very same adjectives to describe himself and the Word of God.

Interesting. It is judged that we thus avoid both bibliolatry and untoward veneration of the Bible and the danger that what is regarded as the Bible's antiquated history and science may prove an unnecessary stumbling block to faith. Assessment.

Okay, we've stirred the waters. We've shivered more than a few timbers, I guess, starting with Voltaire and other, frankly, heretics: David Hume, my goodness, the greatest skeptic.

Assessment. We must first say the account of Revelation sketched in part above is a significant intellectual and theological achievement. There have been times when it seemed that the Christian faith itself as an intellectual construct would disappear.

There appeared to be no way that the Bible, subject to the criticisms that it has undergone, could maintain any sort of authority at all, and any semblance of orthodoxy in relation to Christianity or the Trinity seemed also to have gone. By asserting the centrality of Christ as testified to by the Bible, proponents of the views given above have been able to bring the doctrine of the Trinity back to the very center of the Christian faith. And we can say amen to that.

When we see and receive Christian Revelation, we know it is the work of God himself, that Jesus Christ is the Word of God, and that the act of Revelation is especially the work of the Spirit of God. This means that when we're caught up in Revelation, we are necessarily involved with the triune God. Here, indeed, is a version of the Christian faith that may be preached.

It is not about ourselves but about God and the good news of who he is and what he has done. It honors God for who he is and attempts to grapple with the criticisms of a Feuerbach that Christianity is simply anthropology writ large. The philosopher

Feuerbach said that our ideas about God are projections of our own thoughts, especially about ourselves, onto this supposed deity.

And yet, even if Revelation has been rehabilitated thus, is it entirely successful in doing justice to the knowledge of God? I think not, Peter Jensen says. His evangelical stripes are showing. There's a symptomatic vagueness at crucial points that leaves us without the sort of knowledge that the Bible leads us to expect.

Theological thinkers have succeeded in bringing back into the center of God, succeeded in bringing God back into the center of things, but they have not done so in a way that reflects the nature of our relationship with God as found in the Bible. A Christian faith that is unable to accomplish a relationship with God on the same terms that we can see in the experience of the writers of Scripture must have questionable validity. We may test the reality of the modern reconstruction of God by asking, for example, whether it puts God into the same position of authority over the lives of believers that we see assumed and taught in the New Testament.

Does the revelation spoken of in modern theology do that? Unless it satisfies this important test, it can hardly be said to give a knowledge of God that stands in clear continuity with the knowledge of God referred to in Scripture. Is it not the case, however, that, like all modern thought, theology itself reflects the notion of human autonomy vis-a-vis God? Does the faith of modern theology correspond to the faith of the New Testament? The modern account of revelation has so much in it that is true, particularly the stress of Jesus Christ, that to some extent, this question may be answered in the affirmative. But there's also a fundamental lack in the account, which leads to a different conclusion.

The first believers did not regard Scripture as a witness to the Word of God, rather than as being the Word of God. And hence, faith itself must inevitably take on a form different from theirs. They used the word witness, but it was one of the qualifications of an apostle.

When we speak of apostles, we use a different and more authoritative category. To use some scholars make of John the Baptist as the model witness is interesting. He was not an apostle.

In each of the three main elements of the reconstruction of Revelation, an unwillingness to make Scripture the Word of God is of key importance. This is the watershed. This shapes the nature of the conclusions reached.

Let me illustrate. Revelation, we are told, is an act of God, an event. So, it is.

But there's no need to limit the events in question by declaring a priori that the giving of speech does not constitute an event that has lasting consequences. The

mighty deeds of God in all the accounts from which we discover those acts to have been performed included mighty deeds of speech, as at Mount Sinai. Furthermore, it has often been pointed out that God's deeds are unintelligible without the interpretive word that accompanies them.

Even more fundamentally, there's no need to limit an event by deciding that its episodic nature can find its revelatory impact on the time at which it occurs. On the contrary, even if a particular revelation is a specific event, and we have not broached the possibility here that revelation may not be so much episodic as standing, as are the sun, moon, and stars, it may well continue to have an ongoing life through the words that describe it. A mystery once revealed remains a mystery revealed.

In fact, Christianity is essentially promissory in nature. Then the idea that we have in revelation the elusive episodic speech acts of God intended, though it is to preserve God's freedom of God, manages to compromise his faithfulness in speech. One more time, Christianity is essentially promissory in nature, if that is true, which Gertien argues that it is.

Then, the idea that we have in revelation the elusive episodic speech acts of God intended, though it is to preserve God's freedom as God, manages to compromise his faithfulness in speech. Secondly, the account of revelation I have described favors the idea of self-giving. No one can deny that the concept attempts to capture an important truth, namely the relational nature of the Christian faith, and that, at times, the faith has suffered from over-formalization and intellectualization.

But the aim of this language is explicitly to distance revelation from its reliance on inspired language, to make faith in a person take precedence over faith in words. Even in human relationships, however, trustworthy language is the essential route along which faith comes. We need to trust one another's words, and we draw no real distinction between trusting a person and trusting that person's words.

A relationship without words is impoverished. How much more must this be so of a relationship with the invisible God? Is this not a case of overly realized eschatology? In this life, we walk by faith rather than by sight or experience, and the alleged self-giving of God speaks of an immediacy of relationship that is not yet ours. I suggest it amounts to a hope that we can replace the inscripturated Word of God with something that will do justice to our relationship with God, but which in fact is insubstantial.

Are we not also living on theological and religious capital gathered from earlier generations who had a different approach to the language of the Bible? For example, can we really arrive at the doctrine of the Trinity, analyzing Revelation as suggested above, or does it, in fact, arise from the exact language of Scripture? Thirdly, this account of Revelation focuses on Jesus Christ. As I've already observed, a theology

that does not have such a focus can hardly be Christian at all. In attempting to preserve the Revelation from critical attack, however, a fundamental distinction is made between Christ and the words that witness to him.

As Keith Ward writes, "Scripture, at least in Christian faith, consists of a set of human witnesses to divine revelation rather than constituting the content of Revelation itself." But the Christ in whom we put our trust must be the scriptural Jesus and no other. There's a special quality in our verbal access to him that is indispensable in origin and significance.

The option that places the final revelatory burden on Jesus Christ but gives access to him through something other than inspired words leaves us once again in the darkness where we can rightly expect light. This is all the more the case if we are committed to the view that Revelation is an event. Is faith satisfied merely by the witness to this event? Has the quite proper, quite biblical, and proper language of word and witness taken an unwarranted priority over the more fundamental language of gospel and apostle? I've chosen to comment on only three of the themes of recent Protestant theology.

A survey of this and other material leads to a twofold conclusion. First, the problems posed for the Christian faith by the Enlightenment and its aftermath await resolution. Each element of this doctrine of Revelation has within it an unfortunate and unsubstantial division born largely out of repudiating the idea that the words of Scripture can be in any direct and revelatory sense, the Word of God.

As I've indicated already, the task of rehabilitating that position in a post-Enlightenment world is truly formidable, but the alternative has not succeeded. Secondly, some progress has been made, not least in challenging those who brought the challenge in the first place. Marx, Freud, Voltaire, Hume, and even Kant no longer look as daunting as they once were.

It's true that the various fissures in the church, most notably the divide between those whose strategy is liberal and those whose strategy is conservative, remain. But responsible writing on Revelation has drawn back from the more radical death-of-God solutions of the 1960s. Some of the themes dispensed with by an earlier generation, such as propositional Revelation, have begun to receive serious attention at last, and there's recognition that the underlying principles of an Enlightenment culture are both deeply unchristian and profoundly inhuman.

In our next lecture, we will wrap up Peter Jensen's historical introduction and launch into a biblical introduction of the doctrines of Revelation and Scripture.

This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on Revelation and Holy Scripture. This is session 1, Historical Introduction, Jensen, The Revelation of God, The Enlightenment,

and Christian Response.